CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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JUNE 23, 2026
Start: 1:09 p.m.
Recess: 3:15 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor - Hearing Room 2

B E F O R E: Chairperson Stevens

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Althea Stevens, Chair
Council Member Brewer
Council Member Joseph
Council Member Riley
Speaker Deputy Williams

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

Wanda Ascherl - Representing NYC DYCD
Theresa Harris - Representing DYCD
Pedro Paz - Center for Family Life
David Garcia - Representing Center for Family Life
Kristie Mansell - Center for Family Life
Kate Connolly - Representing United Neighborhood Houses
Annie Nelson - Representing Children's Aid
Assembly Member Landon Diaz
Vinny Dong
Vincent Price - Representing Fathers Speak Up
Leonard Richards - Representing Fathers Speak Up
Chris Pena - Representing Fathers Speak Up
Oli Kotyk - Representing Allara Civic Platform
Diane Fendal

SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone test for the Committee on Children and Youth. Today's date is June 23rd, 2026, in HR2, recorded by Taisha Sherman.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon, welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for the Committee on Children and Youth. At this time, please silence all phones and electronic devices. If you wish to speak in today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with one of the sergeants. Moving forward, no one is to approach the dais. Chair, you may begin.

CHAIR STEVENS: Good afternoon. And welcome to today's hearing on Children and Youth – on the Children and Youth Committee. I'm Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair of the Committee. Thank you for joining us here today. We're – um, what this committee will be evaluating, DYCDs, Beacons and Cornerstones program. In addition to the oversight topic, we'll be also hearing the following resolutions: Reso 32, sponsored by COUNCIL MEMBER Banks, setting aside a portion of state revenue from state betting to support youth, um, sports programs, um, upgrade community sport infrastructure, and

expand access to recreational activities for young people. Reso 142, sponsored by Council Member Riley, calling for the establishment of the Center for Fatherhood Initiative, under the Office of Children and Family Services. Reso 161, um, Deputy Speaker Williams, calling for the establishment of Baby Bond Pilot Program for foster youth. Reso 217, sponsored by COUNCIL MEMBER Hudson, calling for the regulation of false or misleading advertisement related to food products to be protected— to protect children. Reso 276, sponsored by Deputy Williams, Speaker, which will create a targeted meaningful test guarantee income program for low-income individuals, young adults, and foster youth. Reso 277, by Deputy, um, Speaker Williams, calling for the creation of a federally funded savings account for every child. And Reso 278, also sponsored by Deputy, um, Speaker Williams, calling for the management of funds in eligible child care bank accounts by the State Comptroller. Those are all the resos we're hearing. So now we'll actually get to what we're really here for. For decades, Beacon and Cornerstone Centers have served as trusted neighborhood institutions. They provided young people and adults with safe

spaces to learn, build relationships, develop skills, access support services, and engage with their communities. Could I have some tissue? Thank you. Um, today there are 92 beacon programs and 100 cornerstones programs operating throughout the city that serves tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year. This number reflects a significant demand for accessible community-based programming and critical roles that those centers play- I'm sorry, um, uh- thank you— critical role that those centers play. Those programs are particularly— thank you— important at a time when many young people continue to reflect significant challenges. As young people experiencing extraordinarily high rates of loneliness, anxiety, and social isolation, research consistently demonstrates that participation in structural community-based programs, improve educational outcomes, strengthen social connections, support mental health, and promotes positive youth development. At the same time, today's hearing provides an opportunity to assess whether our investments have kept the pace with the expectations we place on these programs. The last comprehensive Beacon, um, procurement was issued in 2017. And the

last Cornerstone procurement was issued in 2015. Since then, providers have continued to deliver services through contract renewals and extension. But providers have consistently raised concerns regarding funding levels, staffing challenges, security costs, and conditions of the facilities.

Many providers report that they are absorbing substantial costs beyond their contract awards to continue operating these vital programs. As we look at the future, it is important that we evaluate whether providers have the resource necessary to meet the needs of the communities they serve. We look forward to discussing DYCD's plan for future procurement, potential programming, expansion, and opportunities, to strengthen community-based programs citywide. The testimony— and testimony from community members will help inform how the city can continue to support these critical community institutions. Before we begin, I would like to thank committee staff, including Senior Pol and— Senior Policy Analyst Elizabeth Arzt, our Senior Committee Counsel, um, Rio— how do you say that last name-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Ogasawara (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: –Ogasawara. I feel they are hard working in preparing for this hearing, as well as my wonderful staff back at District 16. I will now turn it over to Commit, um, Committee Counsel to swear in the administration.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Did you want to read the–

CHAIR STEVENS: Oh. I have another statement I have to read. It's very long. This is from, um, Dr. Nantasha Williams, Councilwoman doc, doc, Dr. Nantasha Williams. Committee on Children and Youth Hearing, um, statement on Reso 161, 276, 277, 278. Wealthy inequalities have often been described as one of the defining process– issues of our time. However, while the wealth gap in our country– in our city, has reached alarming levels, we know those disproportionate are the result of deep-rooted historical and systematic discrimination against some of the most marginalized communities, particularly Black and Brown New Yorkers. Still today, the median household net worths for Black families is 14 times lower than that of white families in New York. This reality again is underscored by state— city, state,

and federal, government have long known, and at a time failed, failed aquata- at a time has failed to adequately address those who have been historically disadvantaged have also been systematically denied meaningful opportunities to build financial security for themselves and future generations. Despite longstanding barriers that continue to particularly, um, circle the cycle of poverty, lawmakers are every— at every level of government introduce legislation aimed to narrowing the wealth gap. One proposal that has gained significant attention is this creation of a so-called baby bond program. Those programs establish government-funded and managed savings accounts for newborns, helping create long-term financial assets that can be assessed in adulthood— accessed in adulthood. Reso 161 will call the New York State Legislature to pass Assembly Bill A7415, sponsored by Assembly Member Khalil Anderson, which would establish a baby bond pilot program for foster youth who disproportionately face financial instability in adulthood. Reso 277 will call on Congress to pass S441/H.R.1041, also known as the American Opportunity Account Act, sponsored by Senator Cory Booker and Congresswoman Pressley. Reso

278 will call on New York State to pass, um, Senate Bill S4564 and Assembly Bill A6059, introduced by Senator Jamal Bailey and Assembly Member Mike, Michael Benedetto. These bills will require the state to deposit $1,000 allocation into accounts managed by the controller. Additionally, Resolution 278 will call on Congress to pass legislation creating a meaningful tees- tested guaranteed income program for low-income individuals, young adults, and foster care use. Research also shows that even small amounts of savings could have meaningful long-term impacts, including reducing the future state loan debt, lowering chronic financial stress, and increasing household wealth, with particularly, um, significant gains for Black and Latino families. Those findings make it clear that even modest investments in financial security can create meaningful generational changes. We must continue to, um, advance serious conversation and bold policies that help close the wealth gap and expand and opportunities for our young people. Thank you. I would like to acknowledge Council Member Felder and Council Member Brewer. Oh, thank you for being here, COUNCIL MEMBER Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Only the OGs are here.

CHAIR STEVENS: I know, I know. We're so blessed. And let me tell you guys, you guys need to get ready, because Council Member Brewer is serious about these community centers. So-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: We will now hear testimony from the administration. Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand. Uh, I will read the affirmation once, then call on each of you individually to respond. Uh, do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I do.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. You may begin.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Hello? Okay. That's close. Let me know if you, you- oh, I can hear myself. Uh, good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members- I think it's just this one- good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Bring it closer.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Bring it closer? I don’t know what it’s- let me know if it's too loud. Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee. I am Wanda Ashrow, Associate Commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by my- By Theresia Harris, Assistant, Assistant Commissioner for Community Centers. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss, um, DYCD's Beacon Cornerstone Community Centers. DYCD's community centers include 92 beacon programs located in public schools across New York City and 100 cornerstone programs operating in New York City Housing Authority developments. They operate year-round in non-school hours, during non-school hours, on weekdays, weekends, and in the summer. Each center transforms its host location into a resource for the whole community by offering an integrated range of programming tailored to local needs. For all participants, especially youth, community centers offer a safe place to engage in recreational activities, discover new interests, acquire skills, and find opportunities to contribute to the

community, guided and supported by program staff. Centers provide activities and services for school-age youth, families, and adults ages 22 years and older, including seniors. In keeping with the original concept, programs make special efforts to engage hard-to-recruit youth and young adults for whom participation in activities that foster positive youth development, social emotional learning, SEL, and leadership skills are especially beneficial. DYCD community centers have a broad reach. In fiscal year '25, beacon programs served more than 62,000 youth and 17,000 adults. Cornerstone programs range in size from smaller centers to large multipurpose community spaces. In fiscal year '25, cornerstone community centers served over 21,000 young people and 6,700 adults. DYCD monitors program performance and provides technical assistance to help programs reach their contract and community goals. DYCD program managers make periodic on-site visits to programs to ensure that sites are welcoming, properly staffed, engaging the community, and operating at full capacity. DYCD program managers also monitor whether enrollment and attendance are consistent with contracted levels and program goals. DYCD's

evaluation and monitoring system and DYCD Connect documents detailed program evaluations in four key sections, program practice, program compliance, administration, and outcomes and outputs. If a program does not meet the established standards, DYCD may issue a strategic action plan or a corrective action plan and provides on-site coaching and capacity building resources if there are issues or indicators that need serious and formal, um, correction. This includes but is not limited to contract compliance, program quality, um, and outcomes and safety violations. Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers host specialized activities and participate in various citywide initiatives to support and enhance offerings to the community. These include Saturday Night Lights, um, which is a sports program, um, that enhan— that has enhanced community center programming by offering young people year-round free sports and enrichment activities on Saturday evenings. The SNL program provides basketball, soccer, dance, and other sports and arts services, in the community centers, and schools, uh, most of which are colocated in Beek- with beacon and cornerstone programs. There are 141

SNL programs throughout the city, of which 46 are located in Beacon and 50 are located in Cornerstone community centers. In fiscal year '25, SNL programs served 4,000 4,424 participants. We also offer mental health support services. DYCD participated in a pilot initiative in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health to introduce new skills for program staff on mental health coping strategies they can use to work with young people. In partnership with the New School Center for Global Mental Health, DYCD facilitated the first adaptation and implementation of early adolescent skills for emotions- refer to EASE- in the United States. The intervention was specifically developed to provide a scalable, culturally adaptable, and prevented— and preventive model, of care for youth experiencing symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression, and other forms of psychological distress. The EASE initiative focused on Beacon and Cornerstone community centers by training center staff to support children in identifying and understanding their emotions, building on their strengths, and practicing a host of social and emotional learning skills. EASE also supported caregivers in practicing active listening,

positive discipline, spending quality time with their children, and practicing self-care. My New York Story is an intergenerational storytelling initiative developed in partnership with the New York City Department of Aging that brings together older adults and young people to build meaningful relationships through shared experiences, dialogue, and creative expression. Over the course of a six-week program, participants engaged in guided storytelling workshops that encouraged them to explore themes of identity, resilience, community, and belonging, while learning from one another's lived experiences. The program culminated in a citywide celebration, where young people and older adults showcased their stories and reflected on the connections they formed across generations. In 2026, the program paired, uh, four DYCD Cornerstone sites with neighboring older adult centers, including East Chester Community Center, Cypress Hills, Pink, um, Community Center, and Grand Street Settlement Roosevelt Community Center. Through weekly workshops, participants strengthened intergenerational understanding, developed communication and leadership, and created a shared space where personal histories could be preserved and

celebrated. The culminating event highlighted the power of these connections and demonstrated how intergenerational programming can foster empathy, civic engagement, and foster communities across New York City. Step It Up. Our annual Step It Up program was a huge success. Step It Up, um, NYC is DYC's premier youth programming arts and social impact initiative, empowering young people to use dance, storytelling, and creative expression, as tools for advocacy and community change. More than— more than a competition, Step It Up NYC challenges youth teams to develop original performances and accompanying, uh, social impact campaigns that address issues, uh, affecting their communities. On June 4th, 2026, 10 finalist teams, uh, representing the, DYCD-funded Beacon, Cornerstone, and Compass programs, across New York City, took stage at the historic United Palace before a crowd of 1,100 attendees, to raise awareness about critical topics, including teen violence, domestic violence, incarceration, peer pressure, discrimination, and cyberbullying. Through months of preparation, participants strengthened leadership, teamwork, public speaking, and civic engagement skills, while

amplifying youth voices on issues that matter most to them. The twenty-twenty-tih- 2026 Step It Up Championship was awarded to two Beacon and two Cornerstone community centers. DYCD and community center providers are preparing busily for summer programming, which will include summer camp, Summer Rising, and expanded summer programming hours and current- and Cornerstone community centers. Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss, uh, DYCD's community centers and my favorite topic. We look forward to answering your questions.

CHAIR STEVENS: Well, it's not only my favorite topic, it's— they have a special place in my heart.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Me too.

CHAIR STEVENS: Because if you've come to the many hearings that I've had I've always talked about, I spent a lot of time running community centers. And I just feel like we did all the work. But, you know, I thought that was the best place. But, um, let's jump into some of these questions. Um, DYCD hasn't had a new, um, Beacon RFP since 2017. What is the agency's timeline for releasing a new concept paper and RFP for Beacon, um, community

centers, and what factors contributed to the delay? And I also want to put out there, we're still in the middle of the after-school RFP. So I get it if you like (sic), girl, I don't want to hear RFP. But I got to ask the questions, because this is important, because that is a long timeline. And I think that, like part of the, the issue and confusion around this RFP is because they've had them so long, people are like, wait, I don't want change. And so us have— not having RFPs doesn't work either. So I really would love to hear, like, what's— is there a plan, are there talks, is that in the work, and trying to figure out where we're at with that? Because Beacons is one of the things I actually love, because when you think about, we can't build— we don't have that many community centers. So this allows us to activate the schools in our community to now be community centers. So I think that, um, in spaces that don't have community centers, we should be looking at using more schools. And I remember the last mayor we had talked about that. But that never came to fruition. But- whatever.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I appreciate the question. And Beacons are dear to my heart. I've

been working with Beacons for over 20 years, um, so definitely dear to my heart. Uh, Beacon community centers are incredibly important to the neighborhoods they serve. They operate, you know, as you know, as a true community hub–

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –um, serving young people, um, and families. And if, you know, you've seen the increase in young people engagement in the PMMR and the MMR and, and adult engagement, that's, that's a testament to the need of, of these services in these– in this community. And so, you know, our commissioner— and she's testified before— but we are committed to releasing a concept paper at some point, um, to, to really, um, you know, realign, um, the model. And so we want to be intentional about what the services are current– you know, the model itself. Um, and we're going to take deeper dives on that. We're real– gonna' really look at the funding, um, and be intentional about what is the funding, what is it– what is the true cost of operating a robust, um, holistic community center that not just only serves young people, but we're serving adults, and we're serving seniors, and we're serving the larger

community. And so we really want to look at what does it take to operate, what, what, what, what are the staffing needs, um, what is that structure. And we are looking across all of our, um, our entire footprint of DYCD, fatherhood, um, workforce. We're looking at all of those different pieces and really looking at the funding and figuring out what is it— what does that look like in a community center?

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, I think a lot of the work that's being done needs to be connected. Um, in your testimony, you spoke about one of the programs that I don't like as much, which is Saturday Night Lights programs, which is SNL. I've, I've never been shy to explain my banks with (sic) that. And you explained that, uh, that SNL has been in both the Beacons and in the Cornerstones. And one of the reasons why I don't like it is because it's a standalone program, and it doesn't make sense. And so my question is to you, you guys, are you guys looking to roll that just into the model moving forward? And why hasn't— why wasn't that done originally to not just have that become part of the program model when you did one of these contract

extensions or something like that? It's on. The green means it's on, so turn it back- yeah.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Okay, great. Thank you. Um, ah- you- I-I, I-I, I can't speak to that, how the timing and how it all rolled out with the SNL. But what I can say is this, is that we, we, we're not planning, um, to have an RFP for the SNL. But we are looking at ways to realign it and think about whether or not, to your point, it makes the most sense to integrate it into an- a future concept paper and an RFP. So those are the- that's the exercise that we are, um, are, uh, are doing internally to, to discuss, like how does this, um, live within the fabric of our community centers.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah. I mean, again, like it's- the program in itself, like it makes sense. But it does not make sense to me as a standalone. I think that it should be a part of the program. Right? And I think some of the- you know, it started out as a separate program. And it-wha- what happens is people hear things when it's good, then everybody wants it. And so I think that it was one of those moments we should have stepped back and been, like, wait a minute, is this something we could

just expand throughout all of the portfolio, opposed to having the touchpoints in the way we do? So I'm happy to hear that that's something that's being, that's being considered, um, as we're thinking about moving into concept paper. In 2017, DYCD issued two Beacon RFPs. The first RFP was for 76 Beacon, um, standalone programs at DOE. And second was for 15 with ACS programs, which provided community-based prevention programs, families with, um, youth at risk of foster care placement. Those RFP (sic) were set to expire in 2020, with the option for renewal for additional three years. Given that this is now six year (sic) past the initial end date, can you please give me an update on whether those 76 Beacon standalone programs and 15 Beacons with ACS programs are still available, what's the level of funding available for them, and whether, um, there have been adjustments that have already made, um, to those programs?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So when we ish-,issued the RFP for Beacon back in 2017, yes, we did have an ACS, um, preventive, um, component. Um, since then, uh, Chair Stevens, we no longer have the ACS preventive piece attached to a Cornerstone.

We've since, um, um, um, uh, moved those services, that's, uh- those services supervision under ACS.

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, not ACS- Yeah, ACS.

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, and so they are solely funding and uh, monitoring those programs directly.

CHAIR STEVENS: And so are they still— did you, dih- was the ACS piece just pulled out, and the Beacons were left, or— okay?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes, that-

CHAIR STEVENS: Just the danger (sic)?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes, that is the case.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay. Well, I, I was looking so shocked because my brother in government, Landon, ASSEMBLY MEMBER Landon Diaz, just walked in the room. So look at that, look at that, the state visiting the city; love that. Um, since 2017 procurement, how have Beacon's contracts budget changed from accounting for inflation wages and raising, um, operation costs?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So we have– um, over the years, we've, we've worked with the ICE I-um (sic). And direct costs been, um– way, wages and indirect expenses have been allocated to the budgets. Um, for nonfederally funded, um, ICR rates, DYCD has honored, um, the city's approved ICR rate, um, for any of, of the contracts. And then for federally, um, uh, funded programs, we've complied with the regulations and negotiated indirect cost rates–

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –um, if they exist. And so we've been able to do– you know, um, um, um, address those pieces in that, in that way. Um, but I, I– again, we are looking— it is a 10-year-, um, old contract and budget. And so we are intentionally looking at the funding allocations and the true cost of operating a program. And so we hope to continue those conversations and have stakeholder en, en, engagement, work with our oversight, um, organizations, OMB, um, City Hall, Council, um, to help inform what, what the, what the allocation should look like.

CHAIR STEVENS: Because Beacon programs operate within the public school, strong coordination

with school leadership is essential. What challenges DYCD ha-has identified in maintaining partnerships between Beacon providers and host schools, and what supports (sic) does those agencies provide when conflict arise regarding space scheduling and program operation? I mean, I think especially, with the Beacons, they've been around for so long, a lot of those partnerships are, like 20 years in at this point. Um, so I think it looks a lot different. But I guess can you talk a little bit about what those challenges still might be–

COMMISSIONER AHROW: Uh-hm.

CHAIR STEVENS: –um, that, that you're having? 'Cause I. I remember when I was in a school and there was a Beacon, there used to just be a lot of issues around the opening of the building, and who's gonna' be there, and all the things.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, I, I, I will say that beacons are part of the fabric of the school and, and the community, and they serve as a critical hub. And so, um, making resources available to the families is, is in— and making sure that it's quality services is important. Um, we work very closely with, um, the, the Department of Education, both at

the central level, but also at the ground level. And so my team- there's two tiers, right? Um, on the ground level, our CBO partners work very closely with the principals to, um, have access to space. The schools allocate space. The Beacons have access to office, um, um, location. And then we work closely with the Department of Education, um, where we cover the expenses for extended use, including evening, um, uh, use of the space. And we work with our CBOs on ensuring that they have a standing meeting with their principals to go over school safety. I think that at the end of the day, we want to make sure that young people and the, and the participants and the, and the staff are safe. And so they are required to work closely with the school on safety, um, and, and, and putting systems in place.

CHAIR STEVENS: Providers have raised concerns that the school administration restricts community access to DOE buildings outside of school hours. How does DYCD ensure that Beacon sites remain accessible to community members outside of school hours? Has the agency received complaints regarding restricted access to the DOE facility?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: It's a dance. It's a, it's a, it's a dance. I think that, um, principals and school administrators, and, um, New York City Public School in general, know the value and the importance of community engagement. And I think that one of the things that they've highlighted and- before is that our Beacon programs, um, are really good at engaging families and engaging the larger communities. And so the principals are now figuring out, how do I leverage that, that resource and that opportunity to expand, um, my reach- their reach of families and community members? And so we are seeing an uptick in more collaborative- collaboration, and engagement, and dialogue, to ensure that the, the families outside of the school are being served. And so we, we support the schools, we support the CBOs in, in making sure that those things are in place.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, I mean, I think it's always a dance. But again, I know just because Beacons have been around for so long, they have, like a, a very different relationship, um, as well. Um, the RFP requires that each Beacon program— um, to maintain at least three community partnerships and

operate a, uh, Advisory Council, how does the DYCD evaluate the quality and effectiveness of those partnerships? And are providers receiving significant resources to support that community work and engagement?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So, our- all of our provider- in the contract, um, yes, they have partners, but they also have colocators. Um, and so the idea is, uh, is to be able to leverage those resources so that it's not an additional cost to them. So if, if there's a colocator providing- able to provide dance, and they are unable to do so, that colocator can expand their services and their reach to the participants of the Beacon, as well as clients that they're bringing into, to the school. And so the idea is to ensure that our CBOs, um, you know, reach out to their, to their local, um, organizations and communities to bring in those, those reeses (sic). And how we support them is that, you know, sometimes, we send them resources. Sometimes, we'll have somebody reach out to us directly. And oftentimes, we'll say, hey, we have a potential partner that provides services in your community, can you meet with them? And it's usually a win-win

conversation. And the prov-eye- and the incoming smaller organization is then able to use the space at no cost to them. Um, and so we, we, we, we do it in that way where they can kind of partner on the ground.

CHAIR STEVENS: Um, the RFP in 2017, um, required Beacons to conduct targeted outreach to, um, reach, uh, a chronically absent youth and encourage providers to employ dedicated outreach coordinators. What feedback has DYCD collected on the effectiveness of those outreach requirements?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: We, we've received positive feedback as far as, um, having dedicated, uh, personnel to do, um, outreach. Um, it allows the program to, um, um, have that individual meet with local NDAs, work— meet with local potential partners, the co-locators, um, so that it'll alleviate the, the, the, the work of a director and/or assistant director. And so this dedicated person is able to bring in and make connections, um, to, uh, to hard-to-reach young people.

CHAIR STEVENS: And so how do you guys use that work? I guess to me, also thinking about to educate not only just speaking programs but across

the spectrum, right? 'Cause, you know, there are so many programs that are working with young people.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, we, we've over the years— well, that's one thing that we definitely want to take a deeper dive, because that was part of the 2017. So we're— as we're looking and unpacking all the different components of the current model, that is gonna' be one area that we're gonna' take a deeper dive on and see, um, what's been working, what has not been working, and the effectiveness to your point. However, we have been able to strategically, um, target those outreach coordinators to provide them with, uh, technical assistance for themselves, um, how do you do outreach, how do you engage a young person, how do you engage families? And so we've hosted meetings specifically for the outreach coordinators. And we've also made intentional connections on the ground with, um, our, our, our local, uh, Cornerstone programs and also our, um, cure violence groups in, in the neighborhood.

CHAIR STEVENS: The 2017 Beacon RFP significantly expanded, um, expectations for providers by requiring them to function as youth

development programs, family support centers, community hubs, referral networks, outreach organizations. Nearly a decade later, what aspects of those models has the DYCD kens— uh, concluded are working well, and what aspects would the agencies redesign if they were issuing a new RFP today?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Again, that's one, one of the things that we're planning to, to look at more closely, um, to determine kind of, like the effectiveness and figuring out, like what makes most sense for the program moving forward.

CHAIR STEVENS: So there's no place— none of these are— it's, like, mm, we should be moving on from, or you're still told to say you're still evaluating it? So I'm just making sure, 'cause I'm a- can't be the answer to every question, right? What were the total enrollment numbers for Beacon sites in 2025? Can you break this down by youth and adults? Were there any sites that struggled to meet enrollment, um, targets? If so, what factors contributed to those challenges?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Hold on. In fiscal year '25- okay. So- and I'll, I'll, I'll pass it to you to break it down, um, elementary, middle

(indiscernible). So we- and Beacons in, in fiscal year '25, um, we served 62,000 youth, um, and 17,000 adults. How that breaks down— okay. And so in fiscal year- do you want it broken up at each grade, um, grade level, elementary, middle, and high, or just—

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, you could do that, and then you can- when we follow up, you can send down a greater breakdown.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Perfect.

CHAIR STEVENS: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So for fiscal year '25, element for Beacons, we served 17— over 17,000- I'm rounding up, but I'm gonna' round up- um, close to 18,000, 18,000, um, young people. Middle school, 17,000— 17- 17,000- yeah, 17,000, high school, 11,000, and, um, our adult population over 17,000. They had- community events is always, um, uh, a, a large number, and it's over 126,000, um, community members have attended, um, activities or services offered. For- oh, that was it. And did (sic)-

CHAIR STEVENS: Oh. Okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –did you want something for the yih– it was the name for the (sic) ones for the Beacons, right, specific to the Beacons?

CHAIR STEVENS: Those were just specifically–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah (sic). Perfect.

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh, I'm gonna' netsakuh– couldn't– I'm gonna' get into Cornerstones now.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

CHAIR STEVENS: Um, I just want to say, before, um, uh– while we're transitioning into Cornerstones, one of the things– we were going to invite NYCHA to have a conversation about it. But then I felt like if we invited NYCHA, then this whole whole hearing would be about the repairs–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Mm (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: –because that is such a real thing. Um, and that is probably the biggest issue, and the thing that when I was in the community, it just drove me the craziest. Right? Like I had one center that had a roof that leaked, had another center, every time it rained, it rained in this community center. And all those issues are

prevalent in a lot of community centers. Um, and, and, and then we've been hearing even issues around, like, you know, developments that turn rad-pack (sic), how- what's going on there. And there's a lot. So we did not bring them in, because we didn't want the whole hearing to be about that. But we are looking to plan on having a deeper conversation with the NYCHA chair and ourselves to see if we can have a more comprehensive hearing, because I do think we're at the point of, like there is not a lot of clarity about moving forward. So I say all that to say, there are obviously gonna' be some questions about it. And I know what you're gonna' say, is, when you going to let (sic)- but that's a question you'll have to ask NYCHA. So I'm just preempting your response to the questions that we're gonna' ask. So, um, I guess the first question I'm gonna' ask, Cornerstone provide, um, providers have repeatedly raised concerns regarding facility maintenance, security issues, access to community center space within NYCHA developments. Can DYCD describe the coordination with NYCHA to address those issues? When providers report maintenance or safety concerns, what is the process for resolving them? And how does

DYCD ensure, like, the communication between providers and NYCHA is timely and effective? I will say that this, since I have left, which was four years ago- wait, I've been here five years- oh- but since I've not been in NYCHA, um, in NYCHA facilities, I've heard that it's a little bit better. I did hear that. It was a little bit— I heard it's a little bit better, not a lot but a little bit.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I'll take it. I'll take that little bit (chuckles). Um, I will say this, we have a really good— over the years, when we started back in 2010, um, you know, there was obviously, you know, growing pains, right? Um, but I think since then, 15 years- we just celebrated 15 years- 15 years later, we do have a really good, um, working relationship with, with NYCHA. We have standing meetings, monthly meetings, weekly meetings. To speak specifically about facilities-related items, um, we have a team on our end, um, our youth services operations team. And they- within that team, they have folks that are dedicated for, um, addressing any facilideh- facility-related items. We also have been very proactive in developing a centralized system that allows our CBOs to enter, um, tickets into the

system. And then, um, we work towards resolving that.

CHAIR STEVENS: And you guys are also tracking the tickets now?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah. We-

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -have a- yeah, that-

CHAIR STEVENS: That's what I heard that you guys were tracking the tickets-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yep (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: -you all were not doing that before?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No. Right, yes.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes. So, um, we are tracking that. And we also have- uh, we've been able to, um, procure, um, like, I think we have, like three vendors, um, that are dedicated for triaging anything that comes through for us. Um, and so they dispatch them out, and then the work can, can get addressed. There are— whenever there's a structural-related to your point, like I have leaks, um, I had a room with leaks and I had a building upstairs, and it

could have been somebody washing— I don't know, doing— putting on their dishwasher, right? Um, and so in those instances, we work really closely with NYCHA. Um, and so those weekly meetings are really critical in addressing those facility-related, um, issues that our vendors, um, nor DYCD can, can address. And so we work in tandem with, with NYCHA on those things.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah. I mean one of my, my challenges had always been, even when I was in the community center, like there's residents who are also waiting to get their apartment who live there. And then it's, like I'm knowing about the community center. And so it's, it, it's also a challenge of, like, how do, how do they prioritize, and what does that look like? Um, so my next question is, DYCD has issued, um, new— has not issued new Cornerstone RFP since 2015. What is the agency's timeline for releasing a new, um, concept paper RFP, um, for Cornerstone centers? And would that be something you would- you guys would do in conjunction with beacons, or would that be separate, or what's the thinking?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I love that question. Um, our goal is to release, as I mentioned

earlier, a concept paper. Um, and our commissioner really wants to be intentional about what is that right timeline to release, um, that, that- those RFPs. Um, we are, as I mentioned earlier, examining the cost, the funding needs, um, stakeholder feedback, and then just the overall structure needed to support strong programming moving forward. Um, we want to allow that time, um, to also be, um, intentional about engaging the council and engaging all of our other partners as we, we develop that. But to answer, um, your question, right now, we are exploring the idea of a, uh, of a community center, um, RFP, so that it would be inclusive of Beacon and, and, and Cornerstones. But we also want to- as we're digging into that, we want to be- we want to see what- if whether or not that makes sense to do, so, um, to release a, uh, uh- like two solicitations within one RFP. And so those are the things that we're still kind of digging in a little bit more on, as far as, like what that RFP could potentially be.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay. According to the 2022 testimony before the Committee, Cornerstone providers, um, reported losing money on their contracts. They reported that funding often only

covers little more than their staffing and insufficient supports for OTPS expenses for activities, trips, and partnerships. What considerations has DYCD given to redesign the Cornerstone funding formula?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So we, we're in that process right now looking at the, the— how do we stabilize, um, the, the needs of, of these bee- of these programs, both Beacon interchanging Beacons and Cornerstones, 'cause they've just, um, um- they were issued a long time ago. Um, but we, we are looking at what, what is the funding need and what is the realistic cost, to determine, um, where there is an opportunity to stabilize- to do any stabilizations. And so we are in conversations with OMB and City Hall to determine what that is, while we wait for a potential concept paper and ultimately a, an RFP.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah. I mean, ultimately- with Cornerstone specifically, I, I think I'm most frustrated at the staffing model and how, um, there's typically one full-time director, and everyone someone else is kinda' part-time. And, and anybody who knows that running a program, you need, you need multiple people there for, for different

times. And then, like when you're thinking about, like the expectation around, um, how often they're open- 'cause I think sometimes we forget Cornerstones are open all the time, like all the time, 'cause they are co- they're tip- if you're a good Cornerstone, you're being responsive to the community. And only having one, one full-time person becomes very difficult. And then because the budget is already tight, If anyone comes in, they then have to use ours. And it just never works out. And it just does not make sense. So as we are thinking about the concept paper and thinking about how do we move forward, that is one of the things I definitely will be checking out and looking for, um, because I just never understood that model. It was stupid. Cornerstone programs are, um, intended to serve as community hubs within NYCHA development. And given that NYCHA reports— reported more than 600,000 open work orders and average repair complaint- um, completion is a— dang, it's 444 days. What assessments has the USCD conducted, um, for the physical conditions of Cornerstone facilities? Do you guys, like, do evaluations of, like, all the

Cornerstones and, and have, like, stock of all the repairs?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So we— because we just have the centraligh- we just, you know, um, it's been a year or so old- um, we just developed that centralized system. We are planning to do that, and so to look at that, to see what are the trends, um, the timeliness for addressing those, those, um, facility-related issues. Uhm, you know, and so we, we are looking at that currently, uh, just to see what, what, what it- what are, what are the trends and what are the, the things that we are seeing, um, is coming up for programs on site.

CHAIR STEVENS: I just have a couple more questions. And then I'll pass it off to my colleagues. So- (indiscernible) has questions?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: (Muffled)

CHAIR STEVENS: Council members, if you have questions, let me know, so we can, uh, put you on list. Hmm. You leaving? Council Member Joseph has joined us. She not (sic) going nowhere. So- um, NYCHA, DYCD, and OMB, has previously discussed establishing a formal division of responsibilities that would allow Cornerstone providers to address

basic maintenance and repair needs rather than relying on NYCHA's, um, unt, un, um, untatangible (sic), um, wait times. Providers have asked that DYCD ratify this division of responsibility and modify their budgets to ensure that they are not forced to secure resources from other pro— from programming to cover basic maintenance. What is the current status of this discussion?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, I hate to say— to repeat that question. Um, keh-

CHAIR STEVENS: If you need me to repeat that-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes-

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -can you please? I'm sorry.

CHAIR STEVENS: NYCHA, DYCD, and OMB, have previously discussed in establishing a formal division of responsibility that would allow Cornerstone providers to address basic maintenance and repair needs rather than relying on NYCHA's, um, long wait times.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

CHAIR STEVENS: And so I guess it's what you were talking about, the database that you're— that you guys are using and, and trying to assess it, where are you guys at with that, of, like trying to have folks being able to get their stuff fixed without going through NYCHA?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, we, we have— so we— our team, we have program managers, we have deputy directors. And so our pro, our providers are, like- have us on speed dial. And so they do reach out to us regularly if there's something that, um, needs to be addressed or it's impacting program. And we try to be intentional and strategic about, um, if necessary, like- and, and Theresa, if I, if I miss anything, please, please chime in- but, um, we try to be intentional and strategic. If there is, um, uh, a facility, uh, repair, uh, or issue that is affecting programming, we quickly activate and work with our other partners, our New York City public schools, to secure, um, a neighboring- uh, the school across in, in the area that the family families can relocate to, and to minimize disruption of services, depending on the severity. But our CBOs, um, regularly communicate with us. We have our— we have, uh,

monthly director meetings. And so we use those spaces for them to have a space, um, to share, um, any feedback. And we've also, um, we've also, um, implemented, like, uh- I don't want to say customer service satisfaction, sorry- but surveys, um, to kind of, like assess kind of, like what, what we're hearing from programs. Um, Ms. Harris, is there anything?

MS. HARRIS: That's a lot of it.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Okay. All right.

MS. HARRIS: I haven't tested the request button (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah-

MS. HARRIS: Okay.

CHAIR STEVENS: -it's on.

MS. HARRIS: No.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, nothing?

CHAIR STEVENS: Oh, none.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Okay.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay. You should turn your mic off then.

MS. HARRIS: Okay.

CHAIR STEVENS: 'Cause then you'll have a hot mic.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Chuckles)

MS. HARRIS: I'm sorry.

CHAIR STEVENS: All right. I'm gonna', um, pause, pause and pass it over to my colleagues, to Council Member Felder. Council Member Felder, you have questions? You pass? Okay. Well, he passed. Well, there you go. Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, um, for all your good questions. My question is on Beacons. I was Richard Murphy's best friend.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Ah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And so I am very supportive, was there when they started.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So in my situation, on the Upper West Side with Goddard, there's a waiting list. And it's, it's been a whole year. So I, I must have 20 friends who have kids who go to work with the them after school, literally, because they can't get into the Beacon. So I complained to the chair. And that doesn't do any good. So I don't understand why— what's the purpose? Murphy would fix this. You got to fix it. You can't have these kids, you know, going with their parents

after school- I literally have 20 friends who would like to go to that Beacon. So we have to wait for, like, years for an RFP? How does this work? I mean, it's, it's just beyond frustrating. They don't have the money for the Y. They don't- you know, they want to go to the Beacon. We— people love the Beacon. But they can't get in.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I will say that Goddard is- definitely has a long wait. It- you know, it's very, very high— there's a high demand. Um-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I know-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -and so-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -all the people on the waitlist.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes. And-and, and the team at Goddard reaches out to us. Um, and we try to, and we try to, um, um, problem-solve and kind of come- be, be, uh, creative in kind of, like, how do we, how do we reach, um- how do we expand our, our reach for these families? And so that is definitely, um- there are some pockets of, of all of our centers where there's a huge and high demand. And as we are looking and look— doing a geographical assessment,

um, to determine whether or not- where there, where there is need, to see where we can expand potentially. And so that's part of our, um, our deeper dive in doing an assessment of communities.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm not very patient. So I have a question.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm. Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is this more money, is it more space; what-what is the holdup? I understand if you have to do an RFP, and you've been talking about; I got that. But in the interim, is it more money? How, how— 'cause there must be others that have high demand too.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Right. I, I don't want to necessarily say here's the dollar amount that we would need, because we have to do that. I think we want to make sure that we look at what, what is the funding need, what do we need in order to properly fund these programs and potentially expand? And so that's the deeper dive that we need to do now, so-so that when we do determine whether or not additional dollars are needed or there's an actual need, um, in this community, it's intentional. We have data-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You have some–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –that supports that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –sense of how many have this kind of waitlist; is it, you know, like half, or a third, or something like that, or–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: We would have to get back to you on that one.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. But I, but I know this could be years, what you're saying. I mean I'm just saying, years–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No, we–

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –RFP–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –our commissioner– no– our commissioner, um, is–

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know she's on it. But meanwhile, literally 20 friends— I'm not kidding when I say 20—

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –are taking their kids after school to work with them, because there's no other place for them to go.

CHAIR STEVENS: I just have a question too. Because even to Councilman Brewer's question, often I know that there's times where even when there's contracts out and that there is an RFP, if they see that it's a long waitlist, DYCD has come in to add slots to, uh, to programs and places. And so my question, why, especially if, if you're even saying, like you know you're getting calls and you know the need, why haven't there been a consideration to add additional slots? Is it a capacity thing? Like I'm trying to get, uh, understanding, 'cause I don't feel like the question that COUNCIL MEMBER Brewster is asking is being answered.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No. And, and I apologize if, if it hasn't been answered. We want to make sure that it's equitable across the board. And so we do need to do an assessment to determine where are these pockets and determine where, where we do need to add more, more dollars. Um, we, we, we want to make sure that it's stabilized, a stabiliz- um, a stabilized, uh, funding, um, stream, and it's equitable across the board. And so we want to be intentional. And so that is, that is the primary reason why we wouldn't necessarily, um, say, okay, so

this location's gonna' get additional dollars, 'cause then we'll be in (cross-talk).

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, no, I know that. But, like, so- in, in the last 20 years, and when we're doing the evaluation, has there been evaluations to kinda' see where there might be some programs that have less seats, uh, or who aren't meeting their enrollment and things like that? 'Cause there has been shifting contracts. Like-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

CHAIR STEVENS: -I- like 'cause I know you're saying, like, oh, we're doing this evaluation. I have ran these programs. There has been times where it was, like, okay, we're shifting seats. And so especially with these RFPs being so long, why hasn't that been done? And, and again, like, you know, COUNCIL MEMBER Brewer actually has spoken to me about this for the last four years.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Endlessly. Uh-hm.

CHAIR STEVENS: And so I'm just trying to get a understanding of, like how, how- and how are we evaluating even when we are still in the middle of a contract?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, I think that these are really good questions. And I will definitely bring it back. And we can have internal conversations and obviously engayh, engage, um, the Council.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm gonna' bring Murphy down from heaven. My, my- literally. My, my, my question though is where— this is what I'm concerned about- these 20 kids, maybe they'll be okay, uh, you know. But they'll be a lot better if they were at Beacon. So then I wonder about all the other kids that are on waitlist that would be better off if they were at Beacon. And I'm just thinking, you know, youth development, it's not great. So while we're doing the RFP and figuring out what's next, they're sitting not in a great situation.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No.

CHAIR STEVENS: I'm worried about them. So I would love to see some interim, if that's what it takes, of the sites that are overcrowded or have a waitlist.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I, I don't— it doesn't make sense to me, not- we're all focused on

youth development, right? This is— I mean I know the Chair is. I am.

CHAIR STEVENS: (Muffled)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And- yeah, you and I— I am, you are. I'm definitely focu- the middle of this. But I'm just saying it doesn't make sense not to have some interim plan for this list. So-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, right (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -will, will- can you really look at it?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 'Cause thih— has been going on for a couple years. This is not a new thing.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Cross-talk)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And it's not like it's a new waitlist.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No, we'll definitely take that under advisement, um, especially as we are, um, doing this assessment, um, to determine where, where—

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm not good-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -the- all those packets (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -on assessments. I just want to make it happen. So if it's more-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I hear you (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -funding, if- I don't even think it's a space issue. I think it is a funding issue. Um, I even go over there and say, excuse me, is that waitlist moving? I go over there and say, hello, can you— Ray, can you move the waitlist? Because these parents are, like upset. So anyway, I don't want— I just want it- how are you— also, my other question quickly is, how are you dealing with, like benchmarks for the future? Are there different benchmarks about what is the right mixture of academics, and fun, and so on? What— how are you measuring those sorts of things? And is it changing for the future; I don't know.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, well, the unique thing, as you know, about Beacon Community Centers is that we've designed the, the previous RFP in 2017 so that the CBOs could, uh, um, be flexible in their, in their services. 'Cause every community is different, and every need is different. And so we

are intentional about that. And so we, we want to, we want to look at all the different, um, like, what are the common, uh, activities that are being offered, where do we see a high demand across the board, so that we can- when we're starting to think and engage our stakeholders and our partners, um, we can, we can have data that says we're seeing a high demand of, um, workforce. And so we can then think about strategically infusing language in the RFP that that speaks specifically to workforce. 'Cause there's data that shows across the, the system, um, that workforce is, is one area of, of need. And so we, we are taking that time now to look at all of the services. But every activity is different. Right? And every, um, provider, um, provides different types of services, but we are looking at, at those pieces currently.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, thank you, Madam Chair. So I really— will you get back to the chair about interim possibilities for those that are overcrowded. I'm sure there are others. I don't think we're the only one.

CHAIR STEVENS: I was gonna' ask-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So I'd love to see– I-I really am– we, we can't wait another year. I'm just saying they cannot be in people's offices for another year. I would really like to see some interim measure.

CHAIR STEVENS: I was gonna' say, if we can work with you guys, maybe, um, we can get a list of all the sites across the city that have a waitlist and try that so we can start to look at that, because also that also some funding–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And–

CHAIR STEVENS: –questions too.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –just for clarity, Beacon–

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –and Cornerstone–

CHAIR STEVENS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –or just– okay. Sorry (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: Yes, both. COUNCIL MEMBER Joseph?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. Um, beyond, um, Participation Countdown, how do DYCD measure whether, um, Beacon

and Cornerstone program are achieving their goals, improving academic outcomes, workforce readiness, civic engagement, and community well-being?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh- thank you for the question.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You're welcome.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, we— give me one moment.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: What measures do you have in place?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm. Give me just a moment. Just give me a moment. I just want to make sure that I have the right information for you. So currently, what we do is— so we have a team of folks, um, on the ground that conduct site visits. And so we have a comprehensive monitoring tool that allows us to determine program quality, outcomes and outputs. We also look at administrative practices. And I'm missing one more, I'm sure. Um, but we, we go out there. We have a rubrics. We have indicators, um, specific indicators attached to that, that, um, comprehensive evaluation tool to determine outcomes and to determine, um, progress. We also have our system where the providers enter their

attendance. And we are able to generate reports on on, you know, rate of participation, um, and, um, and, and overall engagement in programming.

COUNCILMAN JOSEPH: Um, let's talk about academic outcomes. When a young person comes to you, how do you measure if they've reached their goals in academic? Is there tutoring, is there support, is there homework help, are they doing better? When they came to you, they were reading on a J level; have you moved their reading level? Those-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So-

COUNCILMAN JOSEPH: -those are the things that I would like to hear.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Thank you for that clarity. Um, we don't necessarily look academic improvement per se. But each provider on the ground may have their own, um, assessment to determine whether there's been some form of improvement. But we don't necessarily look at whether their math scores have improved or their academic reading. The providers can tell whether or not, um, a young person is no longer— from a youth development perspective- is not a person who's shy, is now more outspoken, um, is able to do public speaking. And so that's kind

of, like where it is. But we don't necessarily measure academic improvement per se.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And, and, and how come you don't? Because I, I think you provide an academic arm to this program; right?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: We provide- right, we provide homework help.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: We provide, um, STEM activities.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And so- but we don't necessarily measure a young person's improvement. But we do offer those pieces; we do offer academic enrichment in our services.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: All right. Um, what about workforce readiness, how do you measure that workforce readiness? Have you placed young people in work or people who come to the program; how, how have you done that?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So our providers on the ground that offer— and every program is different, not all of them provide workforce- but with the ones that do offer, they do have a system on

site. So every provider may have, um, data on, um, you know, a, a young person was employed now, they're now able to- you know, they have their résumé building. So they're able to do some of that; and they measure it on their own.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And, and your civic engagement, what does that look like, how many folks you register to vote, how many folks you get to the poll, how, how does that work?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So again, I hate to repeat myself, but yes, it— each provider- we offer those opportunities of civic engagement.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And we offer exposure for our providers to take advantage of these things. But the providers on their own are the ones that actually implement it. And they invite us in those places. I don't know if I'm missing-

MS HARRIS: No, you're good. You can go to Board of Elections.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Board of Elections is another—

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You have to put on your mic so I can hear you.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So, uh, Cornerstone's, there is also access (sic)-provided by partnering with Board of Elections and making sure that our polling sites are available–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –to residents, seniors, and also young people, outside of their regular schools. So that's another way that we infuse it, or through themes, and just coaching our providers to make civic engagement part of, like, youth council advisory board, that kind of thing.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. Um, how do— how does DYCD evaluate the effectiveness of the old— your adult programming, including GED preparation, ESL classes, parenting workshops, and workforce development activities?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: The programs that offer GED, um, services have communicated to us that, um, their, their, um, their adults have, you know, graduated or received their GED. We've— I've even had the pleasure of visiting some of our programs, HANIC and, and, and–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How many have you graduated already?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Oh, I, I, I, I would need to— I would need to–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You could get back to us another day (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, I would need to definitely do an assessment across all of our providers for that (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, 'cause then you, 'cause then you, you've just– that's also part of the economic mobility, right?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You've just given somebody their GED, and they can now apply for college, they can go to a trade school, they can move on to the next career. Those are, those are wins you can celebrate as well, right? But if you don't have no (sic) data, that doesn't drive your policy, that doesn't drive your policy, that's okay. Um, it doesn't help drive your policy and even your funding, 'cause you may need more funding, 'cause you may need more GED seats, you may need more ESL seats. Um, and

parenting workshops, can you talk to me a little bit about that?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Our providers, um– what family— adult and family engagement–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –is, is a, is a core piece of, of the community centers. And so our programs provide, um, you know, workshops for families. They do kind of, like Mommy and Me, um–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –workshops sometimes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: They've done, uh, uh– I don't call it Sip and Paint, but, like, um, you know–

CHAIR STEVENS: Community (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know you give our apple cider; right?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, apple cider.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Give people drinks (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Thank you so much (sic). Um, and painting. Um, so we've seen some of

that. We've also, um, offered, uh, to some of our programs opportunities for them to receive, like, um, additional resources, like a colocator, to come in and do, like a family engagement, um, component. And, and then— and I know— and I'm gonna' pass it on over to my colleague Ms. Harris–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Hi, Ms. Harris (sic).

COMMISSION ASHROW: –um, can share, um, some more insight.

MS. HARRIS: Well, also, we, we partner with– in the kuh– in the Cornerstones at least, NYCHA REES, um, family engagement programs, to bring the community baby showers, to bring some of the morning services. Although we open in the afternoon, you may see a few where needed, uh, parenting, uh, workshops in the mornings. And, um, Beacons on Saturdays also engage families in that way.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is there any component of it where there's a literacy aspect to it, where parents are engaged, um, encouraged to read with their children?

MS. HARRIS: I'm not going to say it's a requirement, but we've seen it.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You've seen it (sic).

MS. HARRIS: The reading programs, libraries will come in. Um, there is that partnership with New York Public Library, to get your library card-

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

MS. HARRIS: -or to do some of the bringing in characters and-

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

MS. HARRIS: - doing that kind of family engagement.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Oh, yeah, with, uh, NYCHA, we have also done, uh, BRE, Book Rich Environments. And there's thousands of books given across the NYCHA development. Um, we also partner with Cornerstones and Compass programs to make sure young people have that. There's an author, um, event where the author is literally signing books. And young people are coming in with their parents or without. And they leave with books. So literacy has been infused in different ways through different partners.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay.

MS. HARRIS: (Indiscernible) knock myself out? Okay, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Um, how do you– what performance metric are you using now to, uh, measure the providers? How often are providers reviewed for contract compliance and program quality?

MS. HARRIS: Um, so at a minimum, three times a year–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uh-hm.

MS. HARRIS: –scored, um, evaluation. Summer, we look at, uh, the fall, the spring. And then we do other assessments in between. If a provider needs additional coaching or support, that's where we step in. But we're measuring their contractual requirements in terms of stats and numbers, but also in terms of just the quality of moving from one place to the other, the number of families they're engaging, that kind of thing. So they are assessed. I couldn't give you a stat right now, but–

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right-right.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And I, and I want to ah– just to add to that, in addition to, um, those

various touch points, there's also frequent kind of, like on-site coaching.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, we also- uh, we- depending on this- depending on also what's happening on the ground, right, there's some providers that, you know, could use some improvement. And so we, we, we may implement a strategic action plan or corrective action plan. And then we are really intentional about, um, looking at that plan and following it in a way to, to see progress.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And so we're, we're really detailed in that way. And then we also have our capacity—

MS. HARRIS: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -our capacity building division, who, um, has numerous vendors that can do either onsite one-on-one consultation, either at a— at the site level or at the agency level. And that's in addition to, like, whatever, um, workshops are being availa- uh, made available for anyone to, to attend-

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: To support-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –any group leader (sic). Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: –to support the not-for-profit as a provider.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I have one last question for you. So what specific milestones should provider and council expect over the next 12 months regarding the future procurement of Beacon and Cornerstone community centers?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER ASHROW: What should we expect?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So what you should expect is, um, definitely more intentionality about really looking at, like, what is a realistic timeline to release an RFP. We're just in a– still– we're still wrapping up, um, our compass– and so, um, really looking at our– uh, an intentional timeline to release an RFP. We want to be really intentional about, um, stakeholder engagement. Um, we, you know, one of the lessons that we've, we've learned in, in current processes, is, like the importance of family, um, engagement and, um, uhm, and schools, and our

aides, and stuff like that. And so, um, it's a huge footprint. But we want to make sure that, um, that, that we allow that time and that grace to kind of, like, look at, look at what, what are the trends, what are people saying, and how do we infuse— and we're not gonna' be— we-we, we may not may, make everybody happy, right? But, at least we could be intentional about having data, making sure that we engaged all of our partners, and then being able to be transparent with, um, kind of like what we're, we're planning to put out there. And then that'll be the concept paper and hah- and ultimately, uh, an RFP.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Ms. Harris, you wanted to say something- oh, you're good?

MS. HARRIS: No (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you so much, Chair.

CHAIR STEVENS: Thank you. Um, well, I'm happy to hear that some of the lessons that you learned, because I was about to ask, what were some lessons that you guys are learning from, uh, this current RFP that we're still in the middle of- but it's not over yet (sic)- um, that we're still in the

middle of. And, and I'm happy to hear that, that parent engagement piece, how it was kind of lacking and thinking about, like moving forward, how do we make sure that we have more of a holistic view around what does that process look like?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah.

CHAIR STEVENS: Um, and so that's my next question that, um, I have. Um, how will DYCD incur- um, engage, um, NYCHA residents? And this is mostly for the Cornerstones School, um, NYCHA residents, school stakeholders, and other large communities, in the, in the evaluation process and the procurement process moving forward?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, we need to— it- yeah, it's, it's something that I'm even, um, like trying to figure out, because what does that- what would that look like?

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So that, you know, there's so many people that may want to kinda-

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -have a say. I know that- what I can say is this, that last time we issued an RFP our cornerstone, um, we did have

intentional RA engagement. And so what did that look like? That looked like they were readers. Um, we asked them to be part of the, the selection process. And so, um, you know, that we have— I think we had 100 at the time, or maybe less than that; I don't think we had 100 yet.

MS. HARRIS: 75.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: 75? Um, and so out of the 75 potential RAs that we could have had, um, we only had a handful of RAs that, you know, were willing to kind of commit to being an evaluator for an RFP. So we still need to figure out what, what that touchpoint is. Right now, we've also, um, we've also, um, issued a, a survey to the, uh, to the RAs to get feedback from them. 'Cause your point, we've been there for a while. And so we did issue a survey to kind of get their input of, like, what are they seeing, what do they want to see more of or less of. And so that, that information is— I'm hoping that it'll help inform, you know, the direction.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah. I think one, we have to be at a place where we're doing better at getting feedback from community members and, and key stakeholders, like parents, and principals, and

things like that, so that it can be used part of things moving forward, so we could have it, but also, even when we're doing a new procurement, like, we have to make sure that getting people's feedback. And I think that that's important. And I think that that was one of the missteps, the hiccups, that we had with this RP, um, for the after school. But I think that was totally different, 'cause you all didn't even have that much time. So don't get me started there. But I do want to- us to be thinking about moving forward, how do we make sure that, um, different voices are heard in these conversations.

Um, providers reported that they received a last-minute request to host watch parties for game three, which I'm sure Dave (sic) was excited about, um, for the NBA final series. Um, but again, this is— this becomes an issue. Does the— do OSD (sic) have a formal, um, protocol or best practices around how much, um, prior notice they give providers before making requests for these special events? And are those a deh— are there dupple- additional, um, compensation for these groups and things like that to have to get staffed? Because this goes back to my

staffing pattern; when you only have one full-time person, then that person typically is the only one opening up these places. So just trying to get a better understanding of those type of things.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: So- you know, the Knicks, they won. And, and we were, we were- we worked really closely with our partners at department- at the New York City, uh, public schools, um, you know, to kind of collaborate on, on, on leveraging the fact that our corners, our Beacons, are, are already open, um, um, extended hours during the school year. And so we, we kind of— they were, they're already in the building, they're already providing services. And so we kind of, um, we kind of leaned in on that, um, ability to do that. So they already had their staff. And the, and the thing that was unique and, and beneficial for us was that it was just one location. And so the DOE helped us with security, making to make sure security was there. They helped us secure, um, custodial staff to make sure that the space and the school building was, um, readily available for the- uh, for instruction the next day. And so it was, it was, it was a collaborative, um, approach to make sure that our

communities had, um, access, um, as a, as a community, like true beacons and, and, and cornerstones do. Um, they created that space. Um, and so I- the win for me is that the school administration and, and New York City Public Schools saw this as, like, oh wow, look at our Beacons, they're, they're, they're a core part of our community, and here's what they did for our community. So that was- I think, the timeline, we, you know, we, we worked aggressively in identifying schools. And we gave the providers a choice. We basically said, hey, this is an opportunity, are you interested? And so the ones (cross-talk)-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I hate when we say that- when a funder comes and asks a provider to do something. And I- and they, some do say no. But that's not often because- and the person saying no typically isn't— the person saying yes typically isn't the person opening the program either. So, you know, I think it's kind of hard. I just- 'cause I remember those situations.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The ED is gonna' say, yeah, the ED ain't opening the door though

(sic). So it just becomes hard. And again, this goes back to my issue around the staffing, right? So my next question on per, on providers and both Cornerstones and re- Beacons report that they need three- at least three leadership positions to staff, to balance out the need to have management positions on site at all times, to prevent burnout. However, most sites are not able to support three lish- leadership positions due to budget constraints, and meaning that program directors are often stretched thin working excessive hours. Have DYCD evaluated the staffing structures in regards to the responsibilities and hours of these programs? Will DYCD consider increasing program budgets to address this issue and receive, um, adequate staff- program staff?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: That is gonna' be part of the, the, the assessment that we're hoping to gather. Um, and that'll help determine the, the actual funding, um, need and staffing needs, um, to sustain— to what, to what I said earlier about community centers don't just do after-school.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, I know, Honey (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And so- I know, is what I'm saying. So-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So all the things.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Exactly.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (Cross-talk)

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I always-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -just do that.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -I always say that, um, our Beacons and our Cornerstone directors are mini EDs. I often say that, they're mini EDs-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They run the-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -because-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -yeah, middle of everywhere (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -they run-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -not only are they EDs, they're-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -they're also the janitor, the cook-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Right, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -all the things, the repairman, all the things, the plumber.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And so we are, we're, we're- we want- when we start doing our assessment, and our focus group conversations, and our surveys, those are the kind of things that we are going to be looking for and asking for.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This is another one that happened when I was in community centers that was— it was nice, but this is what burnt me out. In, um, the last few years, the evening hours for both Cornerstones and Beacons have been extended to late to 11:00 p.m., to provide safe space for community members, specifically in the summer. Many programs report that those late hours underutilized- um, under, underutilization by the community system and expectation of sites that have gym facilities. Have DY, DYCD evaluated the impact of utilization of the program sites in late night hours? And again, this was something that I remember when I was running program, we got, we loved, and it was important. But again, because of the structure model, like- and because most directors, even if you have other people in the building, you want to be there because it's your building.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We get unhealthy attachments. And so, you know, you, you end up being there from 8:00 in the morning when you have summer camp to 11 o'clock at night and then starting all over again. And then when we got the extended weekends, we were there on the weekends. And so I remember basically living in a community center and three community centers for three summers. So, um, just trying to- like, how do you guys evaluate, how you evaluate that and, and making sure that these programs are being utilized and that the staff isn't being totally burnt out?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah, we, um, we, we try to work with our providers in offering, um, um, strategies so that- to, to, um, avoid burnout. Um, and so we do that. And we offer, um, you know, information sessions on those pieces. What I will say is that, um, you know, tho-those- we are— we, we've started looking at attendance data. Um, and we started, like looking at it from, like different time slots, um, to determine the kind of, like what is a realistic— and I think to, um, uh, Brewer, like thinking about where are those, um, needs and where we're seeing, like a lot of traffic after a certain

timeframe, and where we're seeing less traffic, um, to determine kind of, like what is that sweet spot. So we–

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: –we started kind of, like looking at that– at the data. And I think that we're gonna' be able to take a deeper dive, once we start kind of, like really looking at the holistic design. Um, you know, 'cause the summer is— those summers are longer, um, than the school year. Right? I mean, you know, they didn't– you know, so we're looking at the summer component. And we're looking at the school year component and trying to figure out what are— what does the atteh– what is the teh– the attendants telling us to determine what is that realistic, um, timeframe.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. Those summer hours are long. But I won't lie, those are the best summers I had.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Ah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't think I could do it again in this old age, but–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Chuckles)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –some good times. Um, how does the, um, DYCD collaborate with DOE to support programs with, um, students with disabilities? I will say this, although I am not a fan of Summer Rising– everybody knows that, I've never made a secret of it– um, but I think one of the things that we really did benefit from summer rising is just seeing how students with disabilities should be serviced and being able to provide services. And it wasn't so much necessarily, I feel like, in this RFP for afterschool– which I'm a little disappointed by– but like thinking about cornerstones and beacons moving forward, how do we kinda' make sure that we are including students with disabilities in this conversation, um, and making sure that they are prioritized when we're thinking about these RFPs and rollout? 'Cause it gets really hard for parents who, with students with disabilities, they typically don't have programs to put their kids in?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: No, thank you. That is definitely something that is at the core of our– you know, of, of, of the commissioner and kind of, like looking across the, the spectrum. Um, the goal is to make every reasonable accommodation, um,

that ensures that every participant, um, has an opportunity to engage. And so all of our programs are dedicated, um, to working with young people of various, um, disabilities. And so we recognize the importance of addressing, um, the unique needs of each individual to foster their growth and, and participation. And so, um, we– you know, to your point about Summer Rising, I think, you know, one of the wins for me is— has been just the menu of offerings that— and workshops and info sessions that the DOE has made available. And so, um, although our cornerstone programs are not part of Summer Rising, right, we make sure— we try to create spaces for our, our, our Cornerstone, um, directors and staff to receive that information and learn about best practices and strategies of being in— creating an inclusive en, environment during after-school and evening hours. So that's, that's something that we're definitely committed to en, ensuring, um, that we infuse in, in our work.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Um, another question I got from providers were that, um, um, the beacons are required to do workforce development. But we don't allow stipends as, uh, allowable costs.

Trying (sic) to get a understanding why would that be? Why is that not something that we're encouraging and trying to do more, um, where there is workforce development happening in these programs, and young people are interning, uh, you know, getting specific skills? Why can't they allow stipends?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I, unfortunately, don't have that, um, response. I definitely will get back to you on that piece, um, for the stipends.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I bet you will. Andrew, write that down.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Chuckles)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I want to know why thing–

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I don't want to mess it up, so that’s the reason I’m holding (sic) (chuckles).

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I think that that’s important. And I think, you know, when we're looking at the unemployment rates for young people, specifically between the ages of, um, 16 and 24, they're at the highest since COVID and have not come down. And so especially for programs, we should be looking at encouraging young people. And sometimes

those young people who don't come in a program is because they are trying to make money. And so we should be encouraging it. And so, if— and I don't know, I don't know how they would have money after these Beacon, um, budgets, 'cause they (sic) so tiny. So they got the money. But if they can, they should be able to eek (sic) out and be able to give the, the young people some stipends.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And I know we also work closely with, um, Valerie and her team to try to, you know, create— I mean, with, with, with DYCD, right? And so we definitely try to, um, um, work closely with our workforce team, um, to see where there are opportunities for, um, some of our Beacon participants to attend, like Workforce Center, you know, or any other, um, um, stipend-related program.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. But I feel like especially when we got the kids, we got to keep them, because sometimes when you change them from program to program, you lose 'em (sic). So-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I'm gonna', I'm gonna' tap in Ms. Harris.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I'm gonna' have Ms. Harris- I want to give you my practice.

MS. HARRIS: And (chuckles)- some of our programs as well, um, not directly through DYC, there are providers, but like the ONS, CMS providers sometimes have the ability to infuse stipends for young people, 16 to 24, and job training.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. But it's not enough.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: I- yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Not at all.

MS. HARRIS: We always need more.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No.

MS. HARRIS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's not even that we need more; it's just not enough.

MS. HARRIS: Okay (sic).

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Those stipends sometimes are $100. And don't get me started on that stuff (sic).

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: But those are the things that- I think that that's the feedback that we want to hear. Like if we want to- and, and I think that when we go back and we look at our policy and,

and, and be able to kind of, like, um, get back to you on that, I think that'll help kind of like—

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. I mean, again, like I'm- I've been yelling at the rooftop around how we need more, um, employment opportunities for young people. And again, I would also be clear, when I'm talking to young people, they don't want stipends anymore. They said they want jobs. They said they want to be able to have hours. They actually are annoyed with the stipends, 'cause it's, like less or whatever. But they want real jobs. And so we should be responsive to that. But I think even if there's programs where they're doing workforce development, and they're, like, hey, I want to give them a $100 stipend for coming to these five workshops, that should be allowable, I mean, allowing them to have that flexibility with their budget. Um, the next question I have, um, which I did not know- and this is a question for providers: why is there a requirement for participants to participate three days before being considered enrolled, when there's no similar requirements for Cornerstone or COMPASS? And, and apparently that's happening in the bBacons.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yes, that is true. It is in the, um, current, ih- uh, program design that it— that was, you know, 2017. And so that is one of the things that we're-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Why?

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -looking at. I -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Don't know. That's-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: -(cross-talk)-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's so random.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Is it- I don't know- I can't remember how we got to that space. Um, we can definitely, um, dig.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, you have-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: But-

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: -had your light on; don't turn it off.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: And definitely-

MS. HARRIS: I just wanted to ask a clarifying. You said, three days of participation?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Yeah. So it- remember, three days of participation?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's a ten- that's a ten-three days, um, before they're considered enrolled.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Beacon (muffled).

MS. HARRIS: Just- okay.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Um, so- so yeah. Uh, um, yeah, we, we- I can't speak to the logic, how we got to that space. Um, but I will say that that's one of the areas that we're looking at.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Let's add that to the list of things we wanna change.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Chuckles)

CHIEF STEVENS: Um- all right. I think those are all the questions that I, I have. Council Member Brewer, Council Felder, no questions? Okay, well- just thank you very much. But again, I, I know we're talking about the overcrowded. But just in general, um, data and support for youth development that is in a targeting, as this Chair knows, those young people that are not in programs, you know, when I don't think we're making them accessible enough. And it's— I know you're trying, and you've got many other agencies that you're working with, particularly at NYCHA, developments, we need to have just robust

youth development. And I know you're working on it. But I don't feel this imminent, you know, emergency need. That's what I'm looking at. That's what I'd like to see. So, thank you.

MS. HARRIS: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Thank you.

CHAIR STEVENS: Um, I don't have any more questions for you guys. Um, I think that was pretty painless. Um, so-

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: Thank you.

CHAIR STEVENS: -at this time I don't have any more questions for this panel. So thank you so much.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Girl-

CHIEF STEVENS: Look, you did great. I was nice, right? And I told y'all be fah- I see Andrew texted me last night. I said, I'm gonna' be quick.

COMMISSIONER ASHROW: (Chuckles)

CHIEF STEVENS: He said, wrap it up. So thank you guys. Oops. Thank you. I now open the floor to public testimony. Before I begin, I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be

observed at all times. Um, as such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recordings or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but they may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant of Arms for inclusion in the hearing records. If you're wishing to speak today, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant of Arms and wait for your name to be called. Once your name is recognized, you will have two minutes to speak about the oversight topic or the resolution is listed on today's agenda. If you wish— if you have written, um, testimony or additional, um, witness— written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of the testimony to the Sergeant of Arms. You may also email your written testimony to testimony, at, council, dot, N-Y-C, dot, gov, within 72 hours of this hearing. Please note that audio and video recordings will not be accepted. Um, when you hear your name, please come to the witness panel for the first panel. And I believe the first panel is

ASSEMBLY MEMBER Díaz, who will be talking about a resolution we have today. Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: He's from Harlem, I just want to let you know.

CHAIR STEVENS: No-no-no-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: The Bronx-

CHAIR STEVENS: The Bronx (cross-talk)-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: He-

CHAIR STEVENS: -Ma'am (sic).

SERGEANT AT ARMS: -he is from Harlem. I just wanted to know- I know is parents very well.

CHAIR STEVENS: I'm from Harlem too. But we (sic) the Bronx.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: No-no-

CHAIR STEVENS: Us, us, uh, Harlem people are in the Bronx. So please, let him know. Thank you. I appreciate it. We are-

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: I did just come from Harlem. So-

CHAIR STEVENS: (Cross-talk)

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: -(cross-talk).

CHAIR STEVENS: Oh, no.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Uh, first off, good afternoon to the Council. Uh, I want to say

thank you for having me here. I, I am speaking on behalf of Kevin Riley's, uh, resolution, uh, 142, which is for the Fatherhood Initiative, which is in support of a bill that we have in Albany, uh, which is Assembly Bill 89811, which is the Fatherhood Initiative Bill. Myself and Senator Jamal Bailey, hah- he has it in the Senate, Sir (sic). Uh, being a father is one of the greatest gifts I've ever had. My two boys are actually with my father right now visiting. They just arrived in Atlanta to visit my, my older brother, their uncle, uh, Lareek (sic). And my father and my older brother were two great examples that I've had in my life to what it means to be, uh, to be a father. But-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: (Muffled)

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: -I am— (chuckles) yes, you do know my parents very well. But I am a very wealthy man because I have two great parents and a father that came from very little but had a foundation of love for my grandmother. And he bestowed that upon us. What I do know is the young men in New York don't have that same wealth that I have when it comes to that. The Fatherhood Initiative is to create a resource center for the

young men or the young fathers within the state of New York who need access. And even with all the resources I had within my own family, I'll be the first person to say, uh, when my wife was pregnant, there wasn't a lot of resources for fathers. I didn't know about postpartum depression. I didn't know about preeclampsia, where, if not for, for example, Hall of Fame tennis player Serena Williams' husband intervening when she was giving birth, we might have lost the greatest tennis player of all time, because her pleas of pain weren't being heard, and the father of her children had to step in. So I want to make sure that the young fathers within the state of New York have this knowledge, that they understand that- what does a woman go through in those situations and how that they could be a better partner and a better father. Even if they're not together, coparenting is still key when it comes to New York. We want to make sure that the young people in the, uh- the children- the future of New York have parents that have as much resources as possible. As you had in the previous testimony, it's not just about fatherhood, but also making sure that they have workforce development programs, and making sure that

these young fathers have apprenticeship programs, they can get into programs, so they can provide for their children, so that they can have housing, and education, and Beacon programs, and after-school programs. I, I was— I'll be the first to say that the Senate passed, uh, the Fatherhood Initiative. And I'm still kind of dismayed on why we couldn't get it done in the Assembly. And I will go agad- I'll go at it again. I've also had conversations, uh, with, uh, Commissioner Harris of OCFS. And she's in full support of it also, because there are young fathers who are currently in juvenile, dis, uh- juvenile centers that still need to be within their children's lives. And these resources could be used to help it. To the chairwoman, I know her advocacy for young people is ever essence (sic). She works her tail off in our district, in the Bronx, where we overlap, but for all New York City families. And I think the Fatherhood Initiative in this resolution is key. I want to thank Kevin Riley for bringing this to the table. But more importantly, I really hope that we can create a broad coalition across the political spectrum, across the boroughs, religions, or whatever, to embrace this, because I think

strengthening young fathers across this state and New York City is how we create, not just— that's how we make New York better and stronger. And I want to thank the Council for hearing my testimony on this. And I hope that we can count on you guys on creating a coalition to support our bill. And I want to thank, again, for- you guys for passing this resolution. So thank you kindly.

CHAIR STEVENS: Um, thank you so much, uh, for being here. Um, I guess my quest- I have a couple questions. One, um, are you— one, I spoke to the OCFS Commissioner as well. And she's also talking about, like rolling this out statewide, even before the office is up and running. Um, she definitely believes in this. But my question to you is, um, um, how are-

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Right (sic).

CHAIR STEVENS: -how are you working with the Fatherhood Initiative at the city level? I know, um, DYCD, we had a major rollout last year where, I believe it's, like 17 additional sites, um, and, and really trying to do this. Have you been working with them? Is that something that you haven't been connected with? If not, I would love to connect you.

And have you heard about the work that they've been doing?

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: So please connect me.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Uh, what we have done is a barbershop series–

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: –with Senator Bailey and Councilman Riley. We did one right near River Park Towers, which we overlap. And it was very successful. We had over 50 young men show up. And it was great dialogue, and talking about coparenting and other legal rights that they have as fathers, right, why– if they're traveling internationally, why you need a notarized letter, you know, if you have an issue with child support, what can we do? I'm— also been working with, as a lawyer, with legal services to make sure that young fathers have legal representation when they go to family court. Because sometimes–

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, that's important.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: –sometimes, do– dee– the judicial interference of families is a

conversation I know you've had with ACS and other oversight that you've been pushing for. And so I think that conversation has been tremendously helpful. And it is at least getting with some, I saw legitimate and tangible results in that short period. And by expanding it, to your point, I think it will only do more for our city.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, they, they did a, they did additional 17 across the city. The two in the Bronx I believe is closest to you is Claremont Center, and then also, I think it's Metropolitan College. So I'll make sure I'll connect you with them as well. In addition, I just want to make sure that I connect you with Bobby (cross-talk).

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: And connect me with Metropolitan College. I do apologize. But I would love to do a tour with you and maybe–

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: –with Kevin.

CHAIR STEVENS: Let’s do it.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: ‘Cause–

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: –Kevin had the gang, the, the dad gang. I had a bunch of dads. And

there's other dad programs that have been, that have been, uh, blooming across the city. And I would love to connect them and really create some, uh, momentum.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, 'cause I think that there are some, some resources there. And even, like I said, the conversation I had with the OCFS commissioner, she was really excited about it also, of, like, how do we connect it? Because a lot of times, a lot of all these things are already happening, and then it's, like, how do we connect the dots to have the biggest impact for all of it? Because there is a lot of momentum around, like Fatherhood Initiatives. And so for me, it's like, well, how- why are we all not working together? So I will make sure that we have a conversation. I'll bring Bobbitt and everyone from the DYCD together so we can start talking about, what does it look like holistically. And I know Councilman Riley's also trying to get a office of fatherhood open at the city as well. I think that's one of his, his priorities this year as well. So I will be due diligent and make sure I connect you, 'cause I know where to find you.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you so much. And I will support Kevin— um, sorry- Councilman Riley on that. And the one big thing I would like to just put on the record, one reason I think this is more important. On the internet, there is this— I'll be honest— this toxic masculinity sometimes that has been perpetuated on social media. And we're trying to counteract that. In reality, fathers today are one of the most interactive fathers in generations. Uh, my kids will tell you they love when I cook. Well, Gail, I know you like my cooking also. But-

CHAIR STEVENS: It's all right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I love his cooking.

CHAIR STEVENS: It's-

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you.

CHAIR STEVENS: -it's all right.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: I do behave with my (sic) cooking. But, but I-

CHAIR STEVENS: 'Cause (cross-talk)-

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: -that we change-

CHAIR STEVENS: -that's all I'm saying.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: That's not, that's- let me— this is on the record, Ma'am. We have- this- we have people-

CHAIR STEVENS: I'm sorry, people are-

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you.

CHAIR STEVENS: -watching; behave (muffled).

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: But more importantly though, we are changing the narrative on what fatherhood looks like. And then he's- it's different examples, right? And, and I think that when they see that you might fit into a different mode of what it is, by the end of the day, as long as you're providing love, and empathy, and caring, for your children, I think that is what it needs to be magnified. And I think you're doing it. I think Gail has always been doing it. I know that— I know the senators talk about family values als— sorry- the Councilmen has talked about family values also. I'm sorry, I'm just used to calling him Senator.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Don't be sorry.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: (Chuckles).

SERGEANT AT ARMS: I don't know what I am. (Cross-talk)

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: (Chuckles). But this is something I'm very, uh, passionate about. And thank you so much for (cross-talk)

CHIEF STEVENS: Yeah, there was a- there's a father advocate that was here- I think he left already- that comes to a lot of my hearings too. If he comes back, I'll make sure I connect you, 'cause he's come to talk about his struggles as well and trying to bring fathers together as well. He, he was here, but he left out. So I'll definitely connect you with him as well. So thank you so much for being here today. Oh, Council Member Brewer has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Assembly Member. CUNY, City University of New York, are you working with them? Because they had a horrible situation with the, the feds cutting some of their funding for this issue. And I don't know where they're at. Um, so I was wondering if you also work with some of the fathers there.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: I, I will- we, we had conversation on trying to put back funding for CUNY. Obviously SUNY and CUNY took tremendous hits. And we did our best in our— in this current state

budget. You know, we did get our budget done, unlike the Council yet. But, um-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: (Indiscernible).

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: -(chuckles). That's true, you guys passed yours on time, unlike us. But I will have those conversations, because I think in our education, um, in our education facilities, I think putting this as a part of it is key. And also, making sure that single fathers, or single mothers, or single parents in general, have, also, childcare opportunities at those places, so they can further their education and their, and their jobs. Uh, but I also think there's something, you know, I think there's something amazing at those same schools, even starting in high school, in, in, like, bringing back home ec to a small degree, on how to change a diaper, how to swaddle, how to prepare a bottle. I think all those things are life lessons that we all need to learn, regardless if you plan to have a family or not, 'cause you might be an uncle, or aunt, a godmother, godfather, or godparent. I think all those skills helps (sic) us as a village to come together. So I will work with, uh, with City

College in the CUNY system. And thank you for bringing that to my attention.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And the Times, they had a article the other day about how much more fathers are involved than they–

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: –were when I was growing up. So yes, I think, you, um– obviously, you just need to make sure that people have the support.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Yes. And, and further to that knowledge, one thing that I want to also make sure that we make public knowledge is that not only that, they have actually shown that Black and Brown fathers are actually one of the most proactive–

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: –in changing the public perception of the absent Black and Brown father. And we're— actually know through the empirical data, that is actually not true. And we, we, we need to make sure that we echo that, uh, from coast to coast, from city to the, to, to the farms, because we need to let people know that fathers are

very active in 2026. And we need to continue that process.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Assembly Member.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you, Council Woman Brewer.

CHAIR STEVENS: Thank you. Um, I don't have any more questions for this panel. So thank you for joining us, Mr. Assembly Man.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you, Chair Woman. Thank you, Council Woman Brewer. Thank you, Council Man, uh, Falder.

CHAIR STEVENS: I'll be calling the next panel. Um, Christy, um, Mansell, David Garcia, Pedro Pez, Kate Connolly, Annie Nelson.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENSELL: (Muffled)

CHAIR STEVENS: Uh-hm. You guys can get started, whoever wants to go.

KRISTY MENSELL: Good afternoon. And thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Christy Mansell. And I am a division director for school-based programs for the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. I'm here to

speak about the critical role that Beacons and Cornerstone programs play in our communities, and about the need for the city to protect and adequately fund these models as true community-building programs. I've been working in or overseeing beacon programs for the Center for Family Life since 2003. We operate two dual city Beacon programs in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. And I believe they are vital resources to our neighborhood. Our Beacon programs are anchors in the community, serving people across age groups and building trust over many years. Our Beacon programs are places where many people find belonging and connection with their community, which combats isolation in these challenging times. Community members not only learn about and access resources from the Beacon staff, they also become resources for each other, strengthening the fabric of our neighborhood. The Beacon model allows providers to create unique community spaces that are both reflective of and responsive to the community we serve. They are welcoming spaces for new New Yorkers, long-time residents, young people, families, and older adults. They are not solely after-school programs. From ESL instruction and Know Your Rights

workshops, to soccer leagues, dance troops, and family cooking classes, there is something for every member of the community. And if there isn't, there's flexibility to create, host, or partner with, neighborhood groups to bring new programming to life as new needs emerge. Our programs are being asked to meet real community needs while operating within funding structures that do not reflect the current cost of the work. Rates need to reflect what actually– it actually takes to run high-quality, safe, responsive, programs today. This means investing in the workforce that makes this work possible. The jobs are hard, with late nights and weekend hours. And programs are often asked to extend hours, pivot quickly, and respond to urgent community needs. Staff, the majority who, uh, community members and former participants in the Beacons themselves, themselves rise to those requests. So the city must recognize that what is being asked of these programs and invest resources to support them. The city should also support the leadership pipeline within Beacons. Many participants volunteer their time as counselors in training or as youth coaches, because the program has

been meaningful in their lives and they want to contribute to their community. That commitment is powerful. But they should not have to work for free. We should be able to provide stipends for interns and create pay, paid career readiness pathways for young people who want to give back to their communities. Finally, community voice must be central in any new Beacon-designed process. Families, participants, and school partners, um, should have a real voice in describing the value of their Beacon and shaping its future. Thank you.

DAVID GARCIA: Um, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is David Garcia. I'm here to talk about the importance and impact of Beacon programs in New York City, under the OACD. I didn't just learn about Beacon programs, I lived them. And growing up, I was a participant in Beacon Program. It was just– it wasn't just a place to go to for after-school. It was a safe space where I could be myself, build relationships, and stay engaged in positive activities during critical hours of the day. The after-school program gave me more than structure; it gave me opportunity. I had access to academic support that helped me stay on track in

school, but also, creative outlets, where I could explore the arts and discover my interests. Whether it was theater, music, or other activities, I was encouraged to try new things and express myself. In the evenings, the neighborhood center programming extended that support. As a teenager, I had a place to channel my energy in a positive way, from playing basketball to participating in performances and community events. I stayed involved and connected. The program kept me engaged, active, and surrounded by mentors and peers who helped shape my future. Beacon programs do more than fill time; they build community. They create safe space, support environments for young people and families, particularly in neighborhoods where those opportunities might otherwise be limited. Now, more than 20 years later, I've come full circle. Today, I have the priv, privilege, privilege of serving as a codirector of a Beacon program. I help lead the same kind of programming that once supported me. The full-circle experience is powerful. And it speaks to the long-term impact of these programs, not just in helping young people succeed in the moment but in shaping future leaders who give back to their

communities. When you invest in Beacon Programs, you're investing in safety, in opportunity, and the potential of young people in New York City. Your- you, you are supportive (sic) spaces where youth can learn, grow, and thrive, just like I did. I'm living proof of the value of this work. Thank you.

PEDRO PEZ: Good evening. I am truly honored to have the opportunity to speak today and express my gratitude for the Beacon Program, a program that has had a tremendous impact on my life and my family's journey. Growing up in a single-parent has- household, I watched my mother work tirelessly to provide for our family. Like many families, we faced challenges. There were many resources— there were many times where resources were limited and opportunities seemed out of reach. Despite those hardships, my mother never stopped encouraging encouraging us to work hard, stay positive, and make the most of every opportunity that came our way. As a mother of four, she pushed each of us to our, to our best. All four of her kids grew up in Beacon, which speaks to how- to just how important the program was to our family. Beacon, Beacon wasn't just a place for us to go after school;

it became a second home, a support system, and a community that helped shape who, who we are. One of the greatest opportunities I was given was becoming part of Beacon. While the activities and programs were valuable, some of the most meaningful things I gained were the relationships and connections I built along the way. I met friends who became family and mentors who guided me through some of the most important stages of my life. Those relationships taught me how to communicate, collaborate, and build genuine connections with others. As I grow— grew older, I realized that those lessons I learned here extended far beyond the walls of the program. Beacon helped preva- prepare me for school, work, and my life. It gave me confidence in myself, taught me responsibility, and encouraged me to believe that I could achieve more than I ever imagined. Today, I have the prili- privilege and honor of working for the very same program that once supported me as a participant. It is a true full-circle moment to go from receiving guidance and encouragement to now being in a position where I can support young people who are walking a path similar to mine. It's something I never take for granted. Every day, I

take the opportunity to give back to a place that gives so much to me and my family. There is no greater feeling than being able to help a child discover their potential, build confidence, and create memories that may stay with them for a lifetime, just as Beacon did for me. The impact you make reaches far beyond what you see each day. Uh, to everyone in this room, I ask that you keep believing in these young people involved in this program, encourage them to embrace every opportunity, build meaningful relationships, and believe in their own potential. You never know where those experiences may lead them. Thank you.

ANNIE NELSON: Thank you to Chair Stevens, The Children and Youth Committee, and New York City Council, for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Annie Nelson. And I'm a policy analyst at Children's Aid. For over 170 years, Children's Aid has worked to ensure that young people face no limits, their aspirations, or potential. In service of this mission, we operate more than 50 DYCD contracts across New York City, including a Beacon community center on a school campus in the Bronx that serves over 600 children,

youth, and adults, as a year-round community hub. As a provider operating multiple youth programs, we see first-hand the value of a comprehensive model like Beacon. Our site operates late evenings, weekends, and throughout the summer, because community need does not end when the school day ends. At our Beacon, community members of all ages can participate in sports and arts programming, academic enrichment, workforce development, adult education, financial empowerment services, and community events, and partnerships with other local organizations. Yet despite strong community demand, these programs are reimbursed at lower levels than other afterschool and summer initiatives, creating persistent and growing strains on providers. At the same time, we know contracts have not comprehensively been updated in almost a decade, and many requirements and payment structures no longer reflect operational reality. We really appreciate that city leaders like Chair Stevens are considering the future of Beacon and Cornerstone programs. And we see this as an important opportunity to issue a new RFP that aligns funding and program designs with the reality of these community-based centers. Um, at a high level, we

urge the next RFP first to be developed through early instructor— uh, early and structured engagement with providers and families, including concept papers papers before release, to ensure program design and fiscal assumptions reflect on-the-ground realities. Second, establish base contract rates that reflect the true cost of operating extended-hour multigenerational community centers, including staffing, security facilities, and the full range of services these sites provide. This should include dedicated support for programs we know have demonstrated high demand, like adult workforce development initiatives, financial empowerment programming, and food access initiatives, um, and finally, include cost of living adjustments in all contracts to stabilize the workforce and sustain service delivery over time. Uh, without these updates, providers will remain stretched to meet expectations that no longer match funding structures. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. And we look forward to our continued partnership.

KATE CONOLLY: Hello. And thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kate Connolly. And I am a senior policy analyst for

United Neighborhood Houses, an umbrella organization that represents settlement houses across New York State. Settlement houses within our network operate one third of all Beacon programs and half of all Cornerstone programs. Um, I just want to start by saying thank you to the Chair for hosting this oversight hearing. I think, um, attention to these programs are long overdue. Uh, and despite the benefits of these programs that you've heard all throughout today's hearing, both programs are chronically underfunded and have not seen new RFPs in years. As DYCD and the city plan for the future of these programs with a new RFP or with other updates, they must meaningfully engage community members, families, and staff, early and often, to ensure that their needs and priorities are shaping decision-making. Um, in the meantime, it's critical that the city invest in our city's community centers by increasing overall funding for Cornerstones and Beacons to respond to the pressures for minimum wage increases and inflation and to address the changing needs of the community. Alongside increasing overall rates, DYCD must permit intern and counselor-in-training stipends as an eligible budget

expense to strengthen the workforce development opportunities for our youth. Um, and then while funding increases should be the top priority, there are a lot of other challenges that these community centers face. For example, many providers cite growing mental health needs among their communities. At current funding levels, hiring qualified mental health staff is often unrealistic, leaving many providers reliant on referrals to external clinics that have long wait waitlists. Programs should have the flexibility and funding to offer onsite services directly or through partnerships with community-based mental health providers. And then regarding NYCHA infrastructure, as you've detailed today, they face significant challenges due to long-neglected buildings, not only disruptions to services, but, um, slow response times to emergency repairs. And they also receive fines from DOH and FDNY for issues already reported to DYCD and NYCHA. Um, as these programs evolve, agencies must establish clear communication and accountability so providers and participants are not left bearing the costs of delayed repairs, fines, or administrative failures. Um, we appreciate that DYCD has already started

taking some steps. Um, but they need to do more. Um, and then as you heard earlier, Beacons and Cornerstones are so much more than after-school programs. And as the city and— however, and the— as the city continues to work towards a vision of universal after-school, they need to think about how beacons and cornerstones can play a role in this, and especially serving communities that would benefit for more comprehensive services. Thank you very much.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, I just- uh, the universal thing always stresses me out, because I feel like we need to fix so much stuff before we get there. So- but thank you guys. Appreciate your testimony. And I don't have any questions for this panel. I'll be calling our next panel Vincent Price, Chris Peña, Lea, Leonardo Richards, Vinnie Dung Owee (sp?)- how do you say - Kot-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Kotay (pron).

CHAIR STEVENS: -Kotay.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: -Dialis (pron).

CHAIR STEVENS: -Dialis,

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Falsnebo.

CHAIR STEVENS: –Falsnebo– I, I'm sore, I messed up your name. Please say your name before you speak. I apologize.

VINCENT PRICE: Okay. Um, my name is Vincent Price. And I'm here with, um, Father Speaks Up. And we're trying to get, um, we trying to heard– um, we're trying to be heard about, of– our, um, values and viewpoints, as far as us being fathers. Um, I'm basically here today to see if I could get a chance to be in my kids' life. Um, their mother picked up and left in 2020 and moved to another state. And I went to the court to advise them of that. And I did find where she moved to. And I filed paperwork. But after that I didn't– that, that's– that as far as it went. I didn't really get no help from the court. So I'm here today seeking– hoping I could get some type of advice and counsel what to do next.

CHAIR STEVENS: Are you done? I'm sorry, (cross-talk).

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, I'm finished.

CHAIR STEVENS: Anyone else (indiscernible)?

LEONARD RICHARDS: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Leonard Richards. Um, I'm here, part of the Fathers Speak Up movement. And myself, I reached out to, um, Dionez (sic), 'cause because he's the CEO of the, of the, um, of the movement. Because going through joint custody with my kids, my– well, my ex-wife, um, I won joint custody in 2017. Everything was going good. Everything was going smooth. Then next thing you know, she just snapped on me, um, made it hard for me to see my kids. Then when I was trying to go— then when I was to go to one of my visitations, I went there. She didn't open the door for me to see my kids. I called the police. The police came. They said there's nothing they could do, I had to go back to court. So I had to go back to- through the whole ring-around with the court system. I felt they wasn't (sic) hearing me. And I feel like they want us as a, as a dad to snap and put our hands on the woman, which in my case I'm not gonna' do, because I know that's what some of the mothers want. Not all mothers are like that. But with my ex-wife, I know that's what she's— what she's like; that's what she wants me to do. And ever since winning the joint

custody, I've never argued with her, I never threatened her, never scared her, anything like that. And also, I should, um- I meant to include, I was picking my kids up from the home. Then next thing you know, she snapped and said, oh, she feels unsafe for me coming into the building to pick up the kids. I don't go upstairs to the door. I just meet in the lobby, text her that I'm here. She's supposed to come down. So then she went back to the court, told them she feels threatened, she feels scared. So now, for the past three years, I've been picking my kids up from the, from the police station. I don't want my kids going through that. But you know, they're going through it now. I can't— it's about so much I could do. My son recently just graduated college from Auburn University, Upstate New New York. Um, my daughter, she's 10 years old. My kids love me- like they love the ground I walk on. And the fact that she's trying to paint this narrative that I'm not a good father, a good dad, it's, like I have proof, I have pictures, I have everything. I do everything with my kids. When I have the time, when I have the- my weekends with them, I go get them, we do things, we go out of state, we just enjoy. And I'm just

trying to be in my kids' life. And that's about it. I want to thank you so much.

CHRIS PENA: Uh, my name is Chris Peña. I am a birth doula and journalist out of CUNY Kingsborough Community College. Um, I've noticed first-hand as an emergency medical technician, uh, why we need these Beacons for the youth, um, what I witnessed their, um, high suicide rate, their high pregnancy rate, and their high STD rate, due to not having any guidance from broken families. Um, as a survivor of domestic violence and a parentally alienated father of two for 10 years and 13 birthdays, I began advocating for maternal care, and against parental alienation, and to keep families together. And now, uh, King, Kingsborough Community College is helping me build my freestanding birthing center. So in order to get these Beacons ready to go, I believe we should keep advocating against parental alienation to better guide these youths the way we do through our annual movements, like the Brides March, to bring femicide, femicide rates down and keep guiding these youth, because now, everybody, all the youth around me, all want birthing centers now. So it works. And thank you for having me.

CHAIR STEVENS: Are you next? Just press the button and be ready to speak.

OLGA KOTYK: Sorry, I just feel my topic is a little different. But- yeah, of course. Thank you so much, um, Chair Stevens and Committee members for the opportunity to speak in front of you. Uh, my name is Olga Kotyk. I'm a New York City resident. And also, I'm a representative of, uh, international civic platform called Allatra, which is registered in the United States as a nonprofit organization. And Allatra brings together scientists, experts, professionals, from different fields and more than 180 countries. Our main goal— we are united by commitment to advance science and public awareness, uh, to help build a safe and sustainable future for all of us. And under our legal framework, we also have an established, uh, think tank, Allatra Global Research Center, which advances our mission, uh, our educational and scientific mission, uh, through independent and volunteer-driven research and analysis. And today, I would like to draw your attention to, uh, an issue that concerns the health of— the health and future of New York City's children, the exposure of micro and nanoplastics,

which is one of the areas that we work on. Micro and nanoplastics are tiny particles, tiny plastic—

CHAIR STEVENS: I- I'm sorry, how does this- how is this connected to the topic of- which is, um, evaluating corn, Cornerstones and, and Beacons, and then also—

OLGA KOTYK: I don't know why I was-

CHAIR STEVENS: -(cross-talk)-

OLGA KOTYK: - put in this line (sic) (chuckles).

CHAIR STEVENS: Well, this is the hearing of the topic. I'm just trying to get an understanding. Is it connected to-

OLGA KOTYK: I, I-

CHAIR STEVENS: -those programs?

OLGA KOTYK: I-I, I don't know (sic). I registered to the hearing of, like, youth and children. Uh, and I'm gonna' talk about, like, how microplastics is impacting the health of children. I don't know it's specific to Cornerstones and Beacons.

CHAIR STEVENS: Yeah, the-

OLGA KOTYK: I'm sorry.

CHAIR STEVENS: -the, uh, hearing is specific to Cornerstones and Beacon programs or some

of the, um, different, uh, resolutions that we heard, which was one of them, the Father Initiative, and, um, some baby bonds, and some other ones around.

OLGA KOTYK: I felt like something-

CHAIR STEVENS: Um-

OLGA KOTYK: -yeah.

CHAIR STEVENS: -and so, um, I'm sorry, we have to keep you on topic. So I can speak to you afterwards. And we can have a conversation, if that's okay.

OLGA KOTYK: Okay. Yeah, I would love that.

CHAIR STEVENS: All right.

OLGA KOTYK: Thank you so much.

VINNIE DONG: Good afternoon, my name is Vinnie Dong. And I'm a sophomore at Queens High School for the Sciences. I'm here to talk about the importance of youth sport, and this regards to Resolution 32-2026. It is beyond essential, in this day of age, for youth to be able to participate in a quality sports program. Whether that is through public schools or through NYC parks, I believe it is essential for the City Council and the city to advance youth sports. As a current student in the

New York City public school system, PSAL is consistently underfunded. PSAL is the only way— one of the only ways we could get, get into varsity or junior varsity sports. And the way that the organization funds teams, in regards to big schools, small schools, where they're located within the boroughs, is extremely inequitable. And often, small schools or neighborhoods with smaller student counts are often not able to offer a diverse or any sports teams. And that is very inequitable within New York City schools. Now, on the other part with NYC Parks, and specifically the Saturday Night Light programs, there's a huge disparity in the amount of location and the type of programming offered by this program within New York City. For example, I go to, um, the Saturday Night Light program at Al Ortiz Recreational Facility. The facility gymnasium is very apparently run down. We are very overcrowded. And it is very clear that immediate action or more programs should be opened up to help this effort. Thank you.

CHAIR STEVENS: Thank you. Oh, look, you were right under time. Um, thank you so much. Um, I know we were talking about the— you folks were talking about the fatherhood initiative, I mean,

talking about some issues around you're having with the father. My staff just, uh, um, he came– you can get it– give him your contact information, so we can kind of connect you to some of the resources and Assembly Member Diaz, who was here– and I know that he's been working with some legal, with some legal organizations as well– and so just how I'll be able to take your information and, and get our information so we can stay in contact. Um, and those are the only questions I have at this time. And thank you for talking about the sports, uh, program. And, and that is a good initiative to get that money from the state so it can be distributed throughout the city. So I have no more questions for this panel. Thank you so much. Thank you. Oh, yeah. Oh, no. Thank you for everyone who, um, came here to share your thoughts and experiences today. If there's anyone else left in the, in the room who wishes to speak but have not yet had the opportunity to do, tp do so, please raise your hand and fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant or Arms in the back of the room. Seeing no hands here, we will now shift to Zoom testimony. When your name is called, please

wait until the member of our team unmutes you and the Sergeant of Arms indicates that you should begin.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The first Zoom registrant is Amanda Wilkinson. You may begin.

AMANDA WILKINSON: Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. And thank you, Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children and Youth. I am a single mother. I am a healthcare provider and mandated reporter in the City of New York. I'm here in Harlem, West Harlem, as a mother and as an advocate for my own child, but also in community. I have brought more awareness, and I've heard more awareness from other parents who have had the unfortunate experience of immense and intense bullying, physical assault, and harm, um, within schools where their children were not safe. But when these reports were being made by— with school staff, by the students or the parents, those reports were ignored. They were not addressed in any way. And then reporting has to go above the school leadership.

CHAIR STEVENS: Hi.

AMANDA WILKINSON: It's become a hopeless-

CHAIR STEVENS: Is- does- does this have to do with Cornerstones or Beacon or any of the resolutions? Otherwise, we need you to stay on topic. So-

AMANDA WILKINSON: Understood.

CHAIR STEVENS: Okay. Thank you.

AMANDA WILKINSON: I've looked at neh— my proposal. And I actually do have, um, some comments. And I'm actually very happy to hear about the cornerstones Stone and the Father's Initiatives. Um, being a single mother, um, it is nice and refreshing to hear that fathers do want to take the initiative, because unfortunately, I'm also an advocate for mothers who can't find resolution in having support for their children, like myself. Um, not being able to afford also legal representation or any advocacy when the fathers are, um, absent, and they don't have, um, the ability to receive child support or any services that their children do deserve and need, um, by state law. Um, so I would love to also support mothers in that way and somehow, and with, um, with community help. But I would also somehow even like to support the fathers who are taking the initiative too, because it's a, it's a community, it's a

collaborative community, um, there's two sides of it as well. But–

CHAIR STEVENS: You–

AMANDA WILKINSON: –(cross-talk).

CHAIR STEVENS: –thank you. Your time has expired.

AMANDA WILKINSON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The next Zoom registrant is Jennifer Nicole Alameda.

CHAIR STEVENS: You may begin.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is she still on?

CHAIR STEVENS: We are making a final call for Zoom resident. Um, uh, participants who have not yet spoken. If you are currently on Zoom and wish to speak but have not yet had the opportunity to do so, please raise your hand, the raise hand function. Another– a staff member will unmute you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No hands.

CHAIR STEVENS: No hands. Seeing no hands, I would like to, um, note that everyone can submit ris– written testimony at testimony, at council, dot, N-Y-C, dot, gov, within 72 hours of this hearing. I would like to extend my thanks to my

dedicated community members who offered their testimony today, to the folks who ran these excellent community-based programs, and to the staff who helped organize this hearing. With that, I will adjourn this hearing.(Gavel)

C E R T I F I C A T E

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

Date ____08 SEPTEMBER 2026___