CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

Committee on Finance
***Executive Budget Hearing (Public)**
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Wednesday, June 10, 2026
Start: 9:45 A.M.
Recess: 10:14 P.M.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Linda Lee, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu
Shirley Aldebol
Alexa Avilés
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Oswald J. Feliz
James F. Gennaro
Crystal Hudson
Virginia Maloney
Christopher Marte
Darlene Mealy
Frank Morano
Mercedes Narcisse
Lincoln Restler
Justin E. Sanchez
Nantasha M. Williams
Phil Wong

Other Council Members Attending: Avilés, Cabán, Banks, and The Speaker (Council Member Menin)

A P P E A R A N C E S

Laila Delain,
Girls, Inc.—The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria (TYWLS Astoria)

Soukeyna Abbott,
Program Director for Girls, Inc. at The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria (TYWLS Astoria)

Makana Wu,
Girls, Inc.—The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria (TYWLS Astoria)

Gayathri Iyer,
School Counselor, The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria (TYWLS Astoria)

Priscilla Castro,
Chapter Chairperson, Paraprofessional Chapter The United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Chapter John Kemps
First Vice Chair, Paraprofessional Chapter, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Michael Sill,
Secretary of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Karen Alford,
Vice President of Elementary Education, United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

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

Mary Vaccaro,
Vice President For Education; Director of Teacher Center, United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Felix Emerson-Simpson (YOUTH),
NYC Library Patron

Melody Emerson-Simpson (YOUTH),
NYC Library Patron

Dr. Abby Emerson,
Member of Public Library Action Network (NYC Plan)

John Hyslop,
President of Queens Library Guild Local 1321

Donald Nesbitt,
Executive Vice President for Local 372

Vincent Variale,
EMS Lieutenant and President of the Uniformed EMS Officers Union DC 37, Local 3621

Mike Greco,
President of FDNY EMS Local 2507

Anthony Almojera,
EMS Lieutenant and Vice President of Local 3621

Maleia Sheflin,
Queens Resident, Advocate on Behalf of EMS

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

Alia Soomro,
Deputy Director for New York City Policy, New York League of Conservation Voters

Marc Safman,
Advocate on behalf of the Deaf-Blind Community

Barbara Bear,
Program Director at the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens for Home Sharing and Respite Care

Caitlin Garbo,
Manager of Public Policy and Advocacy at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City
Speaking on behalf of:
Jonathan Chung, Manager of Public Policy and Advocacy at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, (NAMI NYC)

Mark Dunetz, President of New Visions for Public Schools

Sean Kreyling,
Founder and CEO of Kreyco

Louis Tsai,
Community District Education Council 26 (CEC26)

Julienne Kim,
Parent Advocating for The Baccalaureate School for Global Education

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

Michael Kimmel,
Parent Advocating for Yorkville East Middle School-MS 177 and Manhattan Youth

Sophie Mode,
NYC Youth Journalism Coalition

Leair Davenport,
Student Advocating for Journalism for All

Camilla Spillman,
Student Advocating for Journalism for All

Jalene Mendes (phonetic)
Student Advocating for Journalism for All

Hala Musa,
Student Advocating for Journalism for All

Imani Davis-Brown.
Advocating for the YouthBuild Program

Gianna McIntosh,
Student Advocating for Journalism for All

Adam Reyes,
Advocating for the D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild

Derry Oliver,
Student from Syracuse University Advocating for the Youth Journalism Coalition

Gray Burce,
Student Advocating for Coalition for Equitable Education

Liam McCarthy,
Student Advocating for the Wildlife Conservation Society

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

Jasmine Claddock,
Advocating for the D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild

Scott Daly,
Senior Director of New York Junior Tennis and Learning (NYJTL)

Reverend Kevin McCall,
Civil Rights Activist

Sylvia Morse,
Director of Research & Policy at Pratt Center for Community Development

Kyron Banks,
Deputy Political Director for 32BJ

Layla Law-Gisiko,
District Leader representing Chelsea Assembly District 75 Part-A

Ambur Nicosia,
Board President of Penn South Cooperative

Guatu Ke Ini Inaru [Ramona Ferreyra],
Founder of Save Section 9

Oliver Nicholson,
New York Young Communist League

Megan French-Marcelin,
Representative of NY ATI/Reentry Coalition

Jason Alleyne,
Chief Program Officer at Exalt Youth

Lily Shapiro,
Policy Counsel at the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the Fortune Society

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

Anthony Springer,
Senior Advocacy Associate at Bronx Connect, Urban Youth Alliance

Kaisha Caraballo,
Senior Construction Trainer at D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild

Shannon Brown,
Senior Manager Of Youth Advocacy at D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild

Gloria Kim,
Director of Policy Research and Impact at Human Services Council (HSC)

Carolyn Conroy,
Senior Director for Policy and Program at the New York Immigration Coalition

Adama Bah,
Executive Director and Founder of Afrikana

Alla Shagalova,
Assistant Vice President, Resettlement and Integration Services at Commonpoint New York (NYC-IRI)

Margaret Martin,
Co-Director of Immigrant And Refugee Services at Catholic Charities Community Services

Kelly Agnew-Barajas,
Co-Director, Immigrant and Refugee Services Division, Catholic Charities

Justin Wood,
Director of Policy at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI)

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

Ali Goldfarb,
Trails Program Manager for Trust Republic Land in New York

Prakhar Verma,
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School Student Advocating for the QueensWay Metropolitan Hub

Michael Sasy,
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School Student Advocating for the QueensWay Metropolitan Hub

Harman Kaur,
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School Student Advocating for the QueensWay Metropolitan Hub

Sol Simbana,
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School Student Advocating for the QueensWay Metropolitan Hub

Shirley Penafiel,
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School Student Advocating for the QueensWay Metropolitan Hub

Lydia Andre,
Chelsea Neighbors Coalition

Chloe Jacobs,
Advocating to Save Section 9 and Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses

Diego Figueroa,
Advocating to Save Section 9 and Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses

Grace Lord,
Advocating to Save Section 9 and Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses

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

Sandy Reiburn,
Advocating to Save Section 9 and Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses

Metin Sarci,
Advocating to Save Section 9 and Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses

Joe Puleo,
President of Local 983, DC37

Jeremy Davis,
Associate Urban Park Ranger with The New York City Parks Enforcement Patrol

Rose Khan,
Senior Policy Analyst at the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (The Alliance)

Rose Kob,
Board Member, Power of Two

Coleen Stevens Porcher,
Executive Director, Power of Two

Laura Ensler,
Board Member, Power of Two

Mbacke Thiam,
Housing & Health Community Organizer at the Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)

Marilyn Galfin,
Advocate from Voices for Shelter Animals

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

Molly Senack,
Education, Employment, And Climate Community Organizer at Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)

Michael J Schweinsburg,
President, 504 Democratic Club

Warren Shaw,
Disability History NYC

Jennifer Choi,
Special education parent advocate, Founder of NYC Parents of Teens with Disabilities

Laura Jean Hawkins,
Advisory Board Chair of Astoria/Queens SHAREing & CAREing

Anna Kril,
Founder and President, Astoria/Queens SHAREing & CAREing

Amy Wilkerson,
Chief Program Officer at Forestdale, Inc.

Krista Larson,
Assistant Executive Director for Preventive Services at Forestdale, Inc.

Erica Mitchell,
Social Worker and Vice President at CAMBA

Lucy Raimes,
Director of Strategic Partnerships and Resource Development at Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City (NHS NYC)

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

Gladstone Johnson,
Executive Director of Bronx Neighborhood Housing Services

Angela Cummings,
Executive Director, Neighborhood Housing Services of Brooklyn (NHS Brooklyn)

Eboni Stalling,
Permanency Specialist at You Gotta Believe

Rick Horan,
Executive Director of QueensLink

Matthew Monge,
Advocating for QueensLink

Mike Scala,
Counsel and Legal Advisor, QueensLink

Jasper von Seeburg
Designer & Operations Coordinator, QueensLink

Betty Fink-Korb,
Advocating for QueensLink

Steven Gomez Bautista,
Advocating for QueensLink

Tahaman Hidary,
Advocating for QueensLink

Alexei Sanoff,
Advocating for QueensLink

Noah Williams,
Advocating for QueensLink

Willow Monge,
Advocating for QueensLink

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

Julien Bryzek,
Advocating for QueensLink

Deputy Director of Advocacy at Center for New York City

Paula Segal,
Senior Staff Attorney in the Equitable Neighborhoods Practice at TakeRoot Justice Neighborhoods

Michelle Villagomez,
Senior Director of Municipal Affairs for the ASPCA

David Louridas
Community Engagement Team at the ASPCA

Del Mar Leon,
K9 Rescue NYC (KPRNYC)

Anthony Feliciano,
Vice President for Advocacy at Housing Works; also representing the NA New York Community Coalition

Sierra Kraft,
Executive Director of the Immigrant Children Advocates'Relief Effort (ICARE)

Patricia Vasquez,
Supervising Attorney with the Immigration Legal Program at Lutheran Social Services of New York

Tatiana Wolkowitz,
Youth Guardianship Paralegal at The Children's Law Center ("CLC")

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

Paul Fleck,
Executive Director, Immigration Law & Justice - New York

Oyber Ochildes,
Peer Mentor at Chinese American Planning Council (CPC), Advocating for the New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

Richard Soohoo,
Tenant Services Coordinator at Norfolk Senior Housing at the Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

Ashley Chen,
Policy and Research Manager at
Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

Beryl Lau,
Youth Advocate for the Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

JiMeng Wuli,
Youth Advocate for the Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

Alan Wong,
Enrollment Specialist, Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

Jeff Lau,
Director of the Adult Literacy Program, Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

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

Edwin Rodriguez,
Family Wellness Specialist with Promise NYC at the Chinese American Planning Council (CPC)

Vipassana Vijayarangan,
NYP Public Library Action Network

Beth Williams,
New York State Policy Director of
Hunger Free America

Jade Vasquez,
Director of Policy and Research at Win

Austyn Smith,
Senior Advocacy Advisor at The International Rescue Committee

Michelle Berney,
Director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center at the Community Service Society

Jayson Walker,
Parent Advocating for Manhattan Youth

Jamie Parganos,
Parent Advocating for Manhattan Youth

Adrian Rangel Sosa
Make the Road Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY); Student Advocating for Restorative Justice

Eman Gad,
Policy and Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity; Coalition Member of The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC-NY)

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

Yelani Joseph,
Student and Organizer with The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU); Teen Activist Project(TAP); Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY)

Sika Agboko,
The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) Teen Activist Project(TAP); Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY)

Kiley Bernard,
The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) Teen Activist Project(TAP); Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY)

Ana Maria Aguarre,
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York; Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York (DSC-NY)

Darias Nazario
Beacon Program Director for New Yorker Edge

Ophelia Lei,
High School Student Advocating for the New York Edge Beacon Program

Aaron Culver,
High School Student Advocating for the New York Edge Beacon Program

Vladimir Martinez,
Managing Director of Government and Community Affairs at Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center (The Center)

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

Nadia Swanson, LCSW
Senior Director of Advocacy and Global Programs at The Ali Forney Center, Advocating for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services

Bryan Ellicott-Cook
Director of Government Relations at SAGE

Keriann Pauls,
Executive Director, TakeRoot Justice

Emi Montenegro,
Coalition Coordinator for: Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC) and New York City's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) at TakeRoot Justice

Katie Mui
Supportive Housing Network of New York

Maritza Rico
Manager of Policy Advocacy, New Destiny Housing

Eustacia Smith,
Westside Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH)

Edgar Pantoja,
Board President of Amalgamated Housing Cooperative

Holiday Woodside,
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York

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

Yaretzi Valcia,
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York

Victoria Avelar,
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York

Angelike Lopez,
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York

Paula Intriago
Youth Leader with Make the Road New York

Máxima Rodas,
Leader with the Trans Immigrant Project at Make the Road New York

Janice Chung,
Youth Leader at the YA network; Intern at the Dignity in Schools Campaign of New York

Jacqueline Harrington,
Representing—Herself

Meetu Dhar,
Managing Attorney for the City Council Program at CUNY Citizenship NOW!

Alicia Arana, Esq.,
CUNY Citizenship Now! – ASLAN: Supplemental Asylum Services
Supervising Attorney at CUNY Citizenship Now!

Corinna Svarlien,
Workplace Justice Staff Attorney at Make the Road New York

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

Ligia Guallpa,
Organizer and Leader for Workers' Justice Project (WJP), Los Deliveristas Unidos

Riyaj Uddin,
Organizer and Leader for Workers' Justice Project (WJP), Los Deliveristas Unidos

Maiber Solarte,
Director of Adult Literacy at Make the Road New York.

Bethany Dill,
Community Engagement Coordinator with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative

Andrea Ortiz,
Dignity in Schools Campaign

Elizabeth Mackey
Representing—Self

Ximena Pena,
Director of Business Development LATAM at Renaissance Economic Development Corporation, Asian Americans for Equality

Elsie Soto,
Director of Friends of Hart Island

Jessica Sechrist,
Hunters Point Park Conservancy

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

Corey Hannigan,
Director for Safe Streets at Transportation Alternatives

Spike Appel,
Bushwick City Farm (and Garden Acquisition??)

Laurel Leckert,
Bushwick City Farm

Kimbery Olsen,
Executive Director of the New York City Arts and Education Roundtable

Eleni DeSiervo,
Senior Director of Government And Community Relations at Lincoln Center

Muhammed Q. Amin,
Founder and Executive Director Of Caribbean Equality Project

Emily Rios,
Managing Director Of Community Services, AAFE

Audrey Duncan,
Director of Community Affairs, BronxNet

Van Xelo,
Community Organizer At Mixteca

Chaplain Sandra Mitchell,
Parent Leader with the New Settlement Parent Action Committee

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

Dr. Charles Corliss,
Executive Director, Inwood Community Services

Tammy Reed,
Freedom Agenda, Campaign to Close Rikers

Michael Petty,
LifeLinks Clubhouse

Marie Wavre,
Attorney Program Manager of Crime Victims Treatment Center (CVTC)

Matthew Johnson,
Deputy Director of Immigrant Justice At Legal Services New York City

Darren Mack,
Co-Director of Freedom Agenda, Campaign to Close Rikers

Garrett Morgan, Junior
Student Government Association President from LaGuardia Community College

Michelle Alleyne,
9/11 Officer, CUNY, World Trade Health and Compensation Program

Amanda Jules
Parent, School of the Future Manhattan

Davia Willis,
Student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Senator, CUNY University Student Senate

Eva Gray,
Advocating for Dignity in Schools Campaign

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

Jaclyn Okin Barney, Esq.
Special Education Parents for Inclusion,
Commissioner with the City Human Rights Commission

Jindu Obiofuma,
Special Education Policy Manager, Advocates for Children of New York, ARISE Coalition

Randi Levine,
Policy Director, Advocates for Children of New York

Audrey Jenkins,
Doctoral Researcher In Urban Policy

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Advocating for Deliverista Hub

Holden Ellenberg,
HS Student, Assistant to a PhD candidate, Research in Urban Economics

Charlene Obernauer,
Executive Director of the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH)

Cory Hasson,
Government Affairs Manager for the New York Restoration Project; *__Speaking on behalf of: Lynn Kelly, Executive Director__

Evan Bowens,
Advocating for QueensLink

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

Scott Qi,
Opposed to QueensWay

Haley Gorenberg,
President of Brooklyn's Friends of Mount Prospect Park

Jacqueline Daly,
Advocating for Capital Funding Promised for Long Island City Schools

Oliver Rivera,
Representing Bailey Playground

James Dill,
Executive Director at Housing and Service, Inc.

Kayla Spence,
Community Education Council 30

Laura Wolf-Powers,
Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College, Member of the Western Queens Community Land Trust (WQCLT)

Manuel Figueroa,
Freedom Agenda

Mark Gonsalves,
Co-President of Citywide Council on Special Education

Matei Eliezer,
Advocating for QueensLink

Malique Rivers,
Advocating for QueensLink

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

Mike Tucker;
Founder, Lay the Guns Down; Community Hub;
Advocating for Damien Grimes-Fuller

Melat Seyoum,
Director of Policy Advocacy and Strategic Partnerships, New York City Network of Worker-Owned Cooperatives

Kelsey Brow,
Executive Director of King Manor Museum,
Advocating for QueensLink

Seungho Kang,
Advocating for QueensLink

Anthony Phung,
Advocating for QueensLink

Dylan Flesch,
Member of the New York City Public Library Action Network, NYC PLAN

Paul Trust,
Advocating for QueensLink

Maggie Sanchez,
Co-president of the Citywide Council on Special Education

Alexei Sanoff,
Advocating for QueensLink

SERGEANT KUSNER: Testing, testing. This is a microphone check for the Committee on Finance, located in the Chambers. Recorded on June 10, 2026; Public portion by Pat Kusner.

(PAUSE)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, good morning. Welcome to the New York City Council hearing on the Committee on Finance. At this time, please silence all electronics and do not approach the dais. Again, I repeat, please do not approach the dais.

If you're testifying today, please fill out a slip with the sergeants. If you have any questions or concerns, you may also reach a Sergeant at Arms. You may also testify online via Zoom and through testimony@council.nyc.gov; that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

Chair, give us a minute; we are going to do translations as well.

(PAUSE)

TRANSLATOR ONE: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR TWO: Okay, thank you. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR THREE: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR FOUR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR FIVE: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Chair, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, [GAVEL] Good morning, everyone. Oh, yay, we got some responses back. Good morning.

I wish I could do the Korean translation, but sadly I'm not fluent. My parents would be so disappointed. But anyway, I'm glad that you guys are all with us. And I've been saying this in our public testimony, in our previous testimonies, that I am very, very excited to hear from you all today. As someone who was in nonprofit for 20 years, and as a social worker, I was on your side waiting all day to testify for my two minutes. So, I hear you guys, and I want you guys to know that we are going to make sure we get through all of you and we hear all of your feedback. I am actually very excited to hear what you all have to say.

I want to welcome you all to City Hall this morning, and thank you so much for coming out to testify.

Okay, so now for the more formal remarks. Before we begin, I want to... Oh, sorry, we have been joined by Council Member Hudson, Council Member Wong, Council Member Morano, Council Member Narcisse, Council Member Mealy, and J. Sanchez.

Before we begin, I want to remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. 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 recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

I know everyone is into selfies, but, yeah, sorry, can't do that—but you can find the clips online.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic: *New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget*.

And I just want to say, I know that two minutes is going to go by really fast. If you guys can try your best to summarize the main points that you want to get across, that would be amazing. And if you hear the buzzer at the end of the two minutes, it is fine if you are in the middle of your statement; if you could just try to summarize and wrap up, that would be great. So, please keep that in mind.

If you have a written statement or additional testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms.

You may also email written testimony to Testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. So, I want you to remember that you can submit written testimony up to 72 hours after today’s hearing.

Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

Believe me when I say, this is my last plug. I promise, our City Council Finance team, who you are going to see coming in and out throughout the day, literally read every single word of all of your written testimony and take that into consideration as we do our budget negotiations. So don't think that if you submit testimony that it is just going to go into the ether; we will read it, I promise. So please submit the written testimony on top of testifying today.

Okay, when you hear your name, please come up to the witness panel. For the first panel, we will invite—so we are going to hear... And please forgive me if I pronounce names incorrectly.

For the first panel, we have Laila Delain, Makcana Wu, Gayathri Iyer, and Soukeyna Abbott. So if you guys can come up to the witness table, that would be awesome.

We have also been joined by Council Member Avilés.

Feel free to go in whichever order you want. Okay, you can begin when ready; just make sure you push the microphone so the red button is on.

LAILA DELAIN: My name is Laila Delain, a proud three-year participant of Girls, Inc. at TYWLS Astoria (The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria). Today, I am here to urge you to keep The Compassion Program at our school. Growing up, I was often told I was too much. I have a big personality; I am loud, I speak my mind, and I express myself fully. In many spaces, that gets treated like a problem to be fixed. But when I walked into Girls Inc., they didn’t try to quiet me down—instead, they completely celebrated it. They took me to my first-ever Liberty WNBA game, gave me the space to host events, trusted me to lead group discussions, and laughed alongside me when I was just being myself. Because of them, I learned that my big personality isn't something to be ashamed of; it is my greatest strength. That is why your DYCD funding belongs here. Because you aren't just paying for an afterschool slot; you are funding the future leaders of the school. Without Girls Inc., students lose the one place where they can unapologetically be

themselves. Please protect the space where big personalities can grow into big leaders. Thank you.

SOUKEYNA ABBOTT: My name is Soukeyna Abbott, and I'm the Program Director for Girls, Inc. at the Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria. I want to talk briefly about what it takes for a family to walk their daughter through the doors of our program.

So many of her families are working families. In 2026, for working parents to hand their child to a program every afternoon, trusting their child's well-being takes enormous courage. And yet these families and yet these families choose us. That choice is built on trust, and that trust took 12 years to establish.

Here's what that trust produces: An insider relationship our girls can count on; our girls stop racing and start growing. They show up as themselves. They take a risk in front of people who already believe in them. That is where a young woman thrives, not in a program randomly assigned to her, but in a room where she's already known and seen as her greatest self. A thriving young woman is what all of us want in the city. Girls Inc. at TYWLS Astoria

has built a competent and compassionate program. Our competence is in the numbers. This year, at We Alone, we served 129 girls against a contract of 90. And every year we surpassed DYCD's rigorous rubric for program performance.

The Compassion is a safe program with familiar faces that a working family can trust and hold accountable. It is unfair and unjust to assign these young women to a stranger at random. A new provider chosen randomly through a non-collaborative process only inherits a roster of names. It does not inherit 12 years of trust. That trust starts over at zero on the backs of girls and families who need it the most right now. I am quoting one of our 6th grade families who said, "Girls Inc. has been an invaluable partner in supporting the students at the Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria by providing a safe, empowering, and enriching afterschool environment that aligns with the school's mission of developing confident, college- and career-ready young women. Their programming offers students meaningful academic support, leadership development, mentorship, and social-emotional learning opportunities that are specifically tailored to the needs of girls. Families

benefit from reliable, high-quality afterschool care, while students gain access to positive role models and programs that foster self-esteem, independence, and community engagement."

Continuing Girls Inc. as an afterschool provider ensures that our students (TIMER) will continue to receive consistent, mission-driven support that strengthens both their academic success and personal growth. Thank you.

MAKANA WU: Hello, my name is Makana Wu. I am a proud theatre participant of Girls Inc. at TYWLS of Astoria. I am here today to urge you to keep this life-changing program at our school.

As students in an all-girls school, we already know the immense power of an environment designed specifically for young women to thrive. Girls Inc. accommodates and elevates this environment perfectly. For the past decade, it has extended our school's mission past the final bell, providing a safe, continuous space where we could truly find our voices. Through tailored leadership training, hands-on STEM projects, and deep mentorship, Girls Inc. turns lessons we learn in our classroom into real-world confidence.

Without Girls Inc., I would have missed out on crucial life skills like public speaking, managing peer pressure, and building long-term personal resilience.

If this program is removed, future students will lose a vital head start. If every afterschool program could do what Girls Inc. does, do you believe this community would be here today fighting so hard to keep it?

Please continue to invest in our future, protect our funding, and keep Girls Inc. at our school. Thank you.

GAYATHRI IYER: My name is Gayathri Iyer. I'm a school counselor with over eight years at TYWLS Astoria. I'm here sharing this great concern about the potential loss of our long-standing afterschool partner, Girls Inc., and a plea to retain this invaluable, ideally matched resource to our staff and students from all over Queens.

As a former afterschool educator myself, I still serve as a citywide consultant for nonprofits on the social-emotional stakes of these kinds of programmatic collaborations. And now, as a solo parent, I have never been more convinced that the key

to work and family life is quality afterschool in symbiosis with the school day. This means safe pick-up protocol, specialized extracurriculars that parents can't afford, and boutique weekends; skilled staff able to handle all the responsibility of the school day with all the frills that the kids need in those fuzzy hours after their demanding classes.

Girls Inc. is the exemplar where faces light up to see the staffers when they come into the building—a consistent level of service documented by their highest possible ratings in DYCD that was not centered in the procurement process. Their staff has our trust and training that cannot be transferred to another provider: Emergency protocols, community events, materials, complex anecdotal systems, so an incident never lingers into a Snapchat battle at night. They are part of our students' reasons for academic growth and attendance. Their girls and teens have gone on to be interns. Their staffers have gone on to be our teachers. In this beautiful sisterhood continuum, these are not line-item benefits; they are intentional partnerships.

In our feminist faction of Queens, afterschool is school, and reassigning our girls and

family is like taking a horn off our unicorn, or in the words of our students, "Cringe sauce and low-key messed up."

(LAUGHTER)

GAYATHRI IYER: Our Girls Inc team, every day at 2:35, quiets a dysregulated room of kids to direct their attention to the task, saying, "Bring it back, bring it back, bring i t back." On behalf of our students, we hope you understood the assignment.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great, thank you. Yes, clapping, we do this (silent approval gesture).

Really quickly—So, I'm assuming the COMPASS center-based or school-based? Center-Based? Okay, and how many locations is it impacting?

GAYATHRI IYER: This particular program is paired with TYWLS Astoria, but there have been other schools in our district impacted. We lost this provider, and their proprietors are still placed at other schools, but they're not at our school.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. And I know that the DYCD Commissioner, as well as Althea Stevens, our Chair of the Youth Committee, and a lot of us are definitely fighting for the funding and for the programs to somehow... I know they're working

hard on trying to figure something out, so we'll see what happens there.

But we just want to thank you for coming out today and advocating for the program because we know, I'm a public school mom, we have public school parents here. We know how important the afterschool programs are. So thank you.

GAYATHRI IYER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And does anyone else have questions? Sure, go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Very, very quickly. I just want to thank you for bringing your voice. You are so much more than enough. You are perfect as you are. So keep striving. Thank you for being here. Keep advocating.

(APPLAUSE)

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sorry, I gotta be the bad cop and just remind folks. Okay, thank you.

So next we have our panel from UFT: Karen Alford, Mary Vaccaro, who we know, Michael Sill, John Kemps, and Priscilla Castro. Great to see you all. Yes, feel free to start when you're ready.

PRISCILLA CASTRO: Good morning. My name is Priscilla Castro, and I am the Paraprofessional Chapter Chair representing 26,000 paraprofessionals across New York City.

So I'm here today because, for the past year and a half, we have been loud and clear regarding the para RESPECT checks, and we want to ensure that it becomes a reality.

Every year, we spend $1.5 billion on Carter cases. Why? Because our students are not being served. They need the paraprofessionals.

We cannot afford to lose our paraprofessionals, so I'm here today to ask for this body to pass the legislation regarding the paraprofessional RESPECT check. Thank you.

JOHN KAMPS: Good morning, everybody. My name is John Kamps. I'm the First Vice Chair of the Paraprofessional Chapter. I want to thank all the council members for their support in this past year and for helping us get to this point, and I hope that we can continue moving this forward and get it past the finish line.

The legislation represents a critical step towards addressing a long-standing inequity

affecting paraprofessionals who are among the most essential yet undercompensated members of our school communities. Everyday paraprofessionals provide indispensable support to the students, particularly those with disabilities and complex needs, helping to ensure safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments.

The proposed RESPECT check would provide meaningful financial relief while also helping to stabilize a workforce the schools depend on. By improving compensation, this legislation will strengthen recruitment and retention efforts at a time when staffing shortages are impacting classrooms across the city.

Equally important, this bill sends a clear message that New York City values the contributions of paraprofessionals, recognizing that their work is not only a matter of fairness, but it is an investment in the quality of education and support that our students receive.

I respectfully urge you to support the passage of this RESPECT Check legislation and to advocate for policies that promote equity, stability,

and respect for all members of our school communities. Thank you all for your time.

MICHAEL SILL: Good morning, everyone. My name is Michael Sill. I proudly serve as the Secretary of the United Federation of Teachers. I just want to say, first of all, congratulations to the students who came here and spoke so eloquently as self-advocates.

On behalf of Michael Mulgrew and the over 200,000 members of the UFT, I want to thank Chair Lee and the Committee for giving us this opportunity.

I'm going to start just by echoing what Priscilla and John said. I know you all have shown your support. For the para RESPECT check. But in a city like this, when people are doing such important work, like helping our most vulnerable students, they shouldn't have to live in homeless shelters; they shouldn't have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. And that's the reality for some of our paras right now. We can do better. We must do better. Together, we will do better. I look forward to that passing.

Vice President Karen Alford and Vice President Mary Vaccaro are going to get into the

details of some of our other priorities we'd like to talk about today. I know you're aware of them from the legislative breakfast that we had, the City Council breakfast. But one thing I want to say about investing in UFT programs, as you all have demonstrated and know, is that you are investing in programs that you know work.

I was thinking about it on the train over here today, and I think we were on our tenth chancellor since Michael Mulgrew became President of the UFT. And anybody who's worked in schools or worked closely alongside schools knows that when you have a new administration come in, the priorities change, not just a little bit, sometimes 180 degrees; the reading curriculum changes. Are we breaking up high schools this year? Are we putting them back together? So many different kinds of things just change completely. And so the programs that you'll be hearing about momentarily, like the United Community Schools, the Teacher Center, the BRAVE (Be BRAVE Against Bullying) program, and others, represent (TIMER) stability and a good investment, and I hope you'll make that again. Thank you.

KAREN ALFORD: Good morning, everyone. I'm Karen Alford, and I serve as the UFT's Vice President for Elementary Schools.

I'm going to talk to you today about four programs: first, United Community Schools, 32 schools across five boroughs touching the lives of over 20,000 students and families. An investment in UCS is an investment in educator support, a focus on teaching and learning, as well as integrated supports for families.

In 2025, support from the City Council helped UCS schools feed over 71,000 families and provide over 48,000 health and wellness exams, screenings, and check-ins. These supports translate into increased test scores, better attendance, and student engagement at our UCS schools.

Teachers also feel the impact of working at a UCS school. We often hear our teachers say they feel more supported, secure, and engaged, and we know that retention right now is extremely important.

Next, childcare—Investing in our youngest learners is a win for the city of New York, our parents, our members, and definitely our students. We're eager to partner with the Mayor and City

Council to fulfill the promises of Universal 2-K through 3-K and to ensure the successful rollout of both programs.

We also want to also make sure that providers are paid in a timely manner without delays. We have to ensure that there are independent, non-network-affiliated, home-based providers that are included in this rollout, and our youngest learners are provided with the appropriate special education services when needed.

The third program is BRAVE——Building Respect, Acceptance, and Voice through Education. We found it BRAVE as a hotline, and it was(TIMER) meant to prevent bullying across the city. Our students are able to call us, and one phone call helps to protect our children and our families.

And lastly, Dial a Teacher is a homework helpline. We've answered calls from tens of thousands of students. We operate Monday through Thursday in many languages. And with your support, we're hoping to continue and expand all of those programs. Thank you.

MARY VACCARO: Good morning. My name is Mary Vaccaro. I'm the UFT Vice President for Education and the Director of the UFT Teacher Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about several initiatives that are making a meaningful impact on educators, students, and school communities across New York City.

I'd like to begin with the 46-year-old program, the UFT Teacher Center, which promotes teacher excellence and academic achievement for all students through high-quality professional development tailored to the unique needs of each school.

The Teacher Center's work is grounded in the belief that when educators are supported, students thrive. The Teacher Center provided more than 126,000 hours of professional development to educators across the city. These learning opportunities range from instructional coaching and curriculum support to leadership development and collaborative planning. The impact is clear: 99% of participating educators reported that the professional learning they received significantly improved their practice and their students' learning outcomes.

We have expanded our reach by opening more new Teacher Center sites this school year. We have well over 200 site coaches embedded directly in schools, working shoulder to shoulder with educators to strengthen instruction, address challenges in real time, and support student success.

These coaches help schools implement evidence-based practices and build sustainable systems that continue to develop educators and students long after the workshops end.

We know that the UFT Teacher Center, providing support in classrooms and directly in schools, is not only a valuable resource but is also much more cost-effective than using consultants in New York City's schools for teacher training and support.

The Teacher Center has also played a major role in supporting citywide initiatives such as New York City Reads and the Reading for All Initiative. The UFT Teacher Center has teamed up with the Goldie Hawn Foundation to introduce MindUP to over 300 schools, Think Equal to support social-emotional learning in Pre-K, and Common Point for our Wellness days. These partnerships have given us the

ability to make connections and to extend our reach to educators. (TIMER) We also provide TCIS to any school that is requesting it.

And just quickly, I want to highlight the MAP program, the Member Assistance Program, which was developed 16 years ago in order to support our teachers and any educator in New York City in response to any training that they need for mental health issues—15,000 educators across New York City have already used those counseling services. Thank you for your time.

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CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, and thank you to all the UFT folks that came out this morning. You

guys are such huge partners for us in the City Council and in our schools.

And to your point, Priscilla, I hear you because when I was in the nonprofit sector, it was often the folks who provide the most essential work who could get paid the least. And so we are very much all about making sure we're paying people what they're worth, and if we can, more, actually, to be honest, and also to—I see you guys up there too—and to also recognize the dedication and hard work that you do for our kids each and every day. So I just want to say thank you.

And finally, I'll end by saying that oftentimes a lot of folks say, "Oh, but it's so much money," but you know what, oftentimes when we see this in so many different sectors and industries, it pays to invest because it will benefit—to your point with the Carter cases, it does save dollars from a practical standpoint. So I just want to make that point as well.

I know some of my colleagues also had questions—We've also been joined by Council Members Marte, Banks, and Epstein.

Does anyone, Council Member Narcisse, have anything you wanted to-- Okay, Council Member Narcisse?

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: First, I want to say thank you, and girls, girls power in the back.

They used to say I talk too much when I was growing up. (LAUGHS) I'm always somewhere protesting, rallying. So thank you for being here.

Teachers Support is a great program. Thank you. And we understand it, and I think all my colleagues got it. So we're going to do everything we've been supporting, and I'm sure the Speaker got it as well.

As a former nurse, registered nurse, and ER nurse, I know what it means to do essential work without a paycheck to match it, right?

We hear all the time about schools struggling to hire paraprofessionals, not only to hire them, but to retain our paraprofessionals—If not, we're not matching it.

From where you sit, what happens to our schools and our students if we keep asking paras to do this work at the pay they are getting now?

PRISCILLA CASTRO: We're not going to have paraprofessionals.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Point blank.

PRISCILLA CASTRO: Point blank. That's why we have $1.5 billion in Carter cases, because students are not receiving the services. So they don't have a paraprofessional, which is a disservice not only to the students but to the parents.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Paraprofessionals, for me, are three, four, five in one, just like back in the day registered nurses had to be respiratory therapists; you have to be an emotional supporter, you have to be all that. That's the reason I have so much respect for paraprofessionals. And whatever we can do, myself personally, I'll continue with you. And I know you made me sign your paper to make sure that I... and I believe in it...

PRISCILLA CASTRO: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Not only signing... (CROSS-TALK)

PRISCILLA CASTRO: And I appreciate that... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: In all seriousness, I do. Thank you.

PRISCILLA CASTRO: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Anyone else? Any other colleagues? No?

Okay, perfect. Thank you so much.

Next up, we have folks in the youth justice space who are going to be testifying. We have Messiah Ramkissoon from Youth Justice Network, Jason Alleyne from Exalt Youth, Anthony Springer from Urban Youth Alliance, Lily Shapiro from Fortune Society, and Megan French-Marcelin from Alternatives to Incarceration.

So please feel free to come up to the front. Oh, you're the only one here? Oh, okay.

All right, we are going to skip ahead to the next panel and come back to you guys.

We have more of our awesome youth and young students: [NAMES]. Are you guys here? Feel free to come to the front if you all are here. Ali Goldfarb and Felix Emerson-Simpson. Are they here?

Oh, wait, are you guys coming down from the balcony? Okay, got it.

(PAUSE)

So [NAMES] and Felix Emerson-Simpson.

Are any of these folks here? How about folks? Yeah, because we had a panel from Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School. Are you guys here? No? Okay. All right. So feel free to go ahead.

(PAUSE)

MELODY: Hello, my name is Melody, and I am here to testify about how libraries need money, 0.5%, to be specific. One reason they need money is that the library branch near me has one bathroom and no water fountains. Most of the time, when I am there, there's usually someone in the bathroom, and if it's an emergency, it's a lot worse for me.

Some of the library buildings are old and need upgrades. Also, there are not many fun activities at the library near me. An activity that I would like to have is book clubs. Those would help kids learn about some awesome books so they can try them out too.

My favorite library book right now is "The Cardboard Kingdom," and I would love to talk

about it with the other kids so they can try it and see what they think of it.

Also, the library has an elevator that's, like, really slow.

When I step into the library, I can see people, computers, shelves and shelves of books, hard workers working together to keep the library moving, and it makes me feel peaceful and safe. And those are the reasons that libraries should get 0.5% of the budget.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, wait, sorry, we have to use-- hands up, yeah, sorry, we have to... (LAUGHS) Thank you, that was awesome. Go ahead.

FELIX: Good morning, my name is Felix. I think libraries should get 0.5% of the City Budget. Why? I wish there were more audiobooks at the library because I can't really read big books yet. So the audiobooks can be read for me. There are just a few audiobooks, and the money could buy more.

There are not many activities at the library, but I would like more activities, like art clubs. I wish that the libraries had cozy spots. We

don't have any. The 0.5% could help pay for more cozy spots for reading. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: We all need more cozy spots. Thank you.

DR. ABBY EMERSON: Good morning, good to see you all. My name is Dr. Abby Emerson. I'm a New York City educator, and I'm here today as a member of NYC Plan, the Public Library Action Network, which is a group of patrons and library workers organizing together to amplify, strengthen, and progress the futures of New York City's three Public Library systems.

It's nice to see some of our allies here who have co-signed our ask.

So I'm here to ask that the City Council baseline funding of libraries at 0.5% of the overall City Budget for this cycle and all future cycles. Mayor Mamdani campaigned on that promise, and to date, 11 City Council Members have also signed off on that commitment: Council Member Narcisse, Council Member Avilés, Council Member Epstein, Council Member Marte, and I feel like I'm missing one or two; I'll take a look after.

So unfortunately, the Executive Budget put forth last month by Mayor Mamdani offers libraries across the three systems $526 million, but that only represents 0.042% of the overall City Budget, not the .05% as promised. And that translates to $3 million more than last year. But that figure does not keep up with 3.8% inflation. And for context, it cost Astoria $13 million to update two elevators last year, so $3 million across 216 branches citywide is a bit insulting.

And what does falling short of 0.5% look like for the patron experience? For one, as these two young New Yorkers shared, our branch has very little programming. There's the Babies and Books programming, awesome, teen programming, awesome, but there's actually nothing for the childhood age group. We need consistent funding so there can be consistent staffing, so there can be consistent programming for us.

Libraries, as we know, are also central cooling devices. Our library is constantly closing in the summer because it's frankly just too hot, right?

And additionally, we heard a couple of weeks ago when the VP of the BPL (Brooklyn Public

Library) mentioned (TIMER) unreimbursed wage growth, which frankly means people are not being paid fairly, right? And we know workers need to be paid.

So New Yorkers need more from their library, and we look forward to a 0.5% that can make that happen, considering that circulation is up, attendance is up, and the need is up. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. And as you know, this council has been strongly advocating for library funding for the last however many years, so thank you. I almost wanted to ask which library. But I won't ask because (UNINTELLIGIBLE) want to call them out. But yes, definitely super supportive. And we need to make sure that we have the programming because it's not just... I think we've seen, especially after COVID, how important the library systems are for our communities. And it's not just the books, but it's a lot of essential services that get provided there. So thank you so much for coming in, and thank you both, Melody and Felix, for coming in and advocating.

Okay, next, we have John Hyslop, Mike Greco, Vincent Variale, and Donald Nesbitt.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I know some of these faces.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: We have just been joined by our speaker, Speaker Julie Menin.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great, you may begin when ready.

JOHN HYSLOP: I have to follow those other library supporters?

(LAUGHTER)

JOHN HYSLOP: My name is John Hyslop. I'm the President of Queens Library Guild Local 321.

Speaker Menin, Deputy Speaker and Libraries Committee Chair Dr. Williams, Finance Committee Chair Lee, and fellow City Council Members, thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify on behalf of the over 840 Local 1321 Queens Library Guild members.

Local 1321 members are disappointed. In 2016, with great fanfare and many news articles, Mayor de Blasio and the City Council touted their agreement to quote, "baseline funding across the three library systems."

From an August 26, 2016, City Council press release, these are their words: "Working alongside the Administration, they were also able to secure $43 million baseline funding which was adopted through negotiation in the FY17 budget."

Mayor de Blasio's baseline did not stop him from proposing cuts in successive preliminary budgets.

Mayor Adams continued the strategy and proposed cuts in his preliminary budget.

Mayor Mamdani continued the decades-long library budget dance and proposed cuts in his preliminary budget. With great social media fanfare, he celebrated the 10th anniversary of Mayor de Blasio's baselining by announcing his proposed underwhelming baseline.

As we have experienced with mayoral declarations, baselining is not guaranteed; Local 1321 is calling for our elected officials to guarantee baseline funding and legislate or amend the City's Charter to allocate .5% of the City's budget to New York City's public libraries, which would be an amount that provides substantial financing for library systems.

With a predictable and adequate funding source, libraries can plan for the future, hire additional staff, and provide sustainable 6-day services, modernized library infrastructure, maintain clean branches, provide robust IT, and offer additional programs and services. Furthermore, having baselining will prevent unnecessary conflicts that Local 1321 and the Library's administration are having.

Currently, the administration refuses to recognize and pay a vital group of public library service workers for their invaluable work. Mayor Mamdani, this country and our city need you to succeed. (TIMER) That success comes with a strong foundation of public institutions, including libraries.

DONALD NESBITT: Good morning. Finance Chair Linda Lee and distinguished Members of the Council, I am Donald Nesbitt, Executive Vice President for Local 372. I'm here representing 24,000 New York City Public School employees who serve our 946,000+ New York City students.

Many of our members work in the communities that they live in; they are neighbors to

their students, their families, and some of the parents of the school children themselves.

Local 372 represents, again, 2,600 school crossing guards who provide protection and supervision through the NYPD. The need for increased protections for our students, pedestrians, and members of the community makes it essential for New York City to allocate funding for additional hiring of school crossing guards.

Local 372 respectfully requests the restoration of 500 open positions and the hiring of more school crossing guards.

School lunch employees work hard every day, both in good times and in essential times, to serve breakfast and lunch to the community, but they are required to go according to federal nutrition standards and guidelines. This is demanding work, as they serve 946,000+ students. This is only second to the US Army in serving every day.

Local 372 respectfully requests $10 million towards an additional 1,000 school lunch employees.

Additional struggles that school lunch employees face include air conditioning and proper

ventilation for many spaces. Many of the kitchens that they work in every day have little to no cooling or ventilation and can reach 130 degrees. Proper air conditioning would filter out heat, fumes, and anything else in the air that can be harmful.

Since 1971, SAPIS (Substance Abuse Prevention/Intervention Specialists) workers have provided a range of mental health and intervention services in the largest school district in the nation. Local 372 has testified before this panel about the devastating effects of not having SAPIS within schools. The rise in student reports of bullying comes at a time when (TIMER) we continue... when things continue to swirl out of control, and there are social challenges to our students.

Local 372 requests that the City of New York maintain... and the City Council maintains a dollar-for-dollar $2 million match for SAPIS within the State Legislative Budget.

School support staff, in conclusion, are critical to a functioning school system; they create the space where teachers can teach, and students can learn. Local 372 workers provide these services and are essential to our school system.

Local 372 extends its gratitude to the City Council for your support for our titles. We recognize that there are not enough resources to address every worthy cause or issue throughout the city, and that tough decisions have to be made, but we thank you for your continued support.

VINCENT VARIALE: Good morning, Speaker Menin, Finance Chair, Members of the City Council. My name is Vincent Variale, and I am an EMS Lieutenant and President of the Uniformed EMS Officers Union DC 37 Local 3621.

I represent over 600 EMS sergeants, lieutenants, and captains of the New York City Fire Department. I've been with the Health + Hospitals Corporation and then the New York City Fire Department for 31 years, and I'm here once again to report that New York City's best EMS workforce is in crisis.

The same EMS officers, paramedics, and EMTs who ushered the city through COVID, rushed through the burning towers of 9/11, and who save the lives of New Yorkers multiple times a day, every day, are being driven out of the ranks due to outrageously low and unfair pay and benefits.

We have EMS members living far outside the city because they can't afford to live in the city they serve. Some are actually living in homeless shelters and in cars because they can't afford the rent. It is an outrage and a slap in the face to city workers who serve all of us every day.

It does not go unnoticed that EMS is one of the most diverse uniformed services in the city, consisting of predominantly non-white and largely female members. The lack of resources and equity for our EMS members jeopardizes the health and safety of every New Yorker.

EMS operations represent about 80% of the overall 911 FDNY call volume; however, they account for only 25% of the FDNY and receive only 16% of the FDNY Budget. At the same time, due to high turnover and attrition, we are losing EMS officers, EMTs, and paramedics at an astonishing rate. We are going to lose up to 1,500 EMS members in the next year alone, and EMS is staring down the barrel of a stunning 70% turnover rate within the next three to five years.

EMTs and paramedics simply cannot afford to remain and feed their families. This is increasing

response times to 911 calls for life-threatening emergencies.

The 2026 Mayor's Preliminary Management Report just found that in the first four months of Fiscal Year 2026, response times (TIMER) for life-threatening emergencies have increased up to ten minutes. That's up to two minutes and 30 seconds. That's an extra 2.5 minutes while your spouse is having a stroke, your parents and grandparents fall and suffer a serious injury; 2.5 extra minutes to wait while you're suffering a massive heart attack; 2.5 extra minutes to wait when someone calls about a person on the street or on the subway, having a severe mental or emotional crisis.

In a system where minutes matter, we have a system that is completely out of balance and teetering on the brink of collapse. Without change, EMS simply cannot keep up. New Yorkers must know that this is now more deadly in our city if you or a loved one suffers a heart attack, life-threatening illness, or serious accident or fall. Health and emergency care in our city is in serious jeopardy. The survival rate is currently at its lowest: cardiac arrest at 17%.

This is a public safety crisis. It didn't happen overnight. It's been a long time in the making, with years of neglect and bad decisions. This Mayor didn't cause it, nor did this Council. In fact, this Council has been an advocate for EMS over the years. And we want to thank you for your effort and help. And we know that this Mayor is committed to equity, affordability, and fairness.

Pay equity is an affordability issue. Emergency medical care for New Yorkers must be a priority. We ask you to help us do what's best for our city and prioritize this issue because it is literally a matter of life and death.

We need to adequately compensate and resource our EMS first responders so they can properly protect and save the people of the city during emergencies. Thank you very much.

MICHAEL GRECO: Good morning. Thank you, Chairperson Lee, and to all the Council Members. My name is Michael Greco. I am the President of Local 2507, which represents the EMTs, paramedics, and fire inspectors of the FDNY.

For years, New York City has relied upon EMTs and paramedics to serve as the frontline of the

healthcare system, responding to over 1.6 million emergency medical calls annually. They arrive at shootings, cardiac arrests, overdoses, traumatic injuries, and countless other life-threatening situations. Yet despite their critical role, they continue to be compensated at a level that bears little resemblance to either the cost of living in New York City or the immense responsibilities they carry.

EMT starting salaries remain around $39,000, with top EMT pay remaining dramatically below that of firefighters or police officers. This city has long acknowledged a recruitment and retention crisis within EMS. Yet the budget fails to address the root cause: compensation.

New York City EMTs and paramedics routinely leave to seek a livable wage somewhere else. This result is predictable: vacancies grow, overtime increases, burnout accelerates, and experienced providers walk away from a profession they once loved. The consequences are no longer theoretical; they are measurable. Ambulance response times for life-threatening emergencies have increased, with average response times approaching 10

minutes. And it's getting worse, driven in large part by staffing shortages and increasing call volume. FDNY's own performance goals remain out of reach, not to mention the fact that every day we're holding jobs, sometimes for hours.

Every minute matters during a cardiac arrest. Every minute matters when a child cannot breathe or when a trauma patient is bleeding to death. Delayed ambulance responses are not merely operational statistics; (TIMER) they represent New Yorkers waiting longer for life-saving care.

When elected officials choose not to invest in EMS staffing and compensation, they are making a policy choice that directly impacts emergency response capabilities and public safety outcomes.

The City Budget reflects its priorities, and once again, it fails to make a substantial commitment towards solving one of the most obvious public safety challenges facing New York City. The workforce shortage in EMS is not a mystery. The solution is not complicated. Competitive compensation attracts qualified candidates, retains experienced

providers, reduces turnover, improves staffing levels, and ultimately decreases response times.

New Yorkers deserve ambulances that arrive quickly when their loved ones are experiencing the worst moments of their lives. They deserve a government willing to invest in the professionals who provide care. Until the City commits to meaningful EMS pay parity and long-term workforce investment, response times will continue to suffer, staffing shortages will continue to worsen, and public safety will continue to pay the price.

The question is no longer whether New York City can afford to invest in EMS. The question is how much longer can New Yorkers afford the City not to?

And I just want to add, in the past 10 years, New York City has hired about 6,000 EMTs. We are currently 2,000 under staffing levels. That's an investment of a quarter billion dollars in training that has not gotten them over the 4,000-person hump. That is the stuff we're talking about here today. Thank you.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Good morning, City Council. Thank you for having us today.

For my testimony, I need a little interactive participation from the City Council, if you don't mind.

So, all the City Council Members who are from Manhattan, can you raise your hand for me, please? Just the one? Two. Right now you're down 14 ambulances as we speak.

How about from the Bronx? Yeah, the Bronx, you're down 19 ambulances as we speak.

Queens, do you have any... Yeah, Queens.

UNIDENTIFIED COUNCIL MEMBER: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE) Rockaways.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Rockaway is down one.

UNIDENTIFIED COUNCIL MEMBER: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Seven.

So that's a big number, especially because Rockaway's got a lot of issues. You know, as you know... Queens right now is down about 11 ambulances. For the evening tour. We are projected citywide to run down 70 ambulances; Brooklyn right now is down seven ambulances; Staten Island, you guys win, you're down two ambulances, but that's two out of 30 for a borough that has doubled in population

since I started; it has only gotten busier. And as you know, with the big fire the other day, they were pulling units from Queens to go there because we don't have enough.

We are losing 10 to 15 people a week, ladies and gentlemen. Not only is this damaging, as the Presidents just testified, but it is a moral injury to the EMS workers—14 of us—who have committed suicide since 2020. And over 45 others have reached out to me personally, saying they wanted to do so. It is killing New York City residents. You, your constituents, are literally dying. That is not hyperbole. So this has to be addressed and fixed. (TIMER) Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay, I really want to thank this panel for your incredibly compelling testimony. We are deeply concerned about this issue. We are deeply concerned about the pay issue for EMS workers. It is something that we are absolutely committed to. The increased response times are unacceptable. And the wages are unacceptable, so I can assure you that this is something that we care very deeply about and are going to go to the mat on.

So I just want to thank you so much for your testimony today.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: We have Members with questions. First, Selvena N. Brooks-Powers, followed by Council Member Avilés, then Council Member Cabán.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you, and just echoing Speaker Menin in terms of the panel, thank you for your testimony and thank you for, you know, making it real. I noticed you said Rockaway had a total of how many ambulances, you said?

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Seven.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Sorry?

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Approximately seven ambulances run out of Rockaway.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Seven—geographically isolated peninsulas. But Staten Island, I am grateful, has 30, because they are also geographically isolated.

First and foremost, I support pay parity for EMS work because EMTs, like you, should be paid the value of the work that you are doing, and that is saving lives. So full stop on that.

I also wanted to understand, since you had a little bit of data with you, because I talked

to some of our FDNY as well as EMT folks on the Peninsula in terms of what the impact has been since the closure of Peninsula Hospital, which was our trauma facility. Could you shed a little light on that for me, please?

MIKE GRECO: I was a paramedic in Queens for a long time, and when they had Peninsula, it was a much quicker response to the hospital, so you would have a two-to three-minute transport time. What happens now is, I mean, everyone knows in Queens the Van Wyck is never out of traffic.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: It's a parking lot.

MIKE GRECO: Never.

(LAUGHTER)

MIKE GRECO: So, when you leave the Rockaway with a trauma, it's not only trauma; it's also heart attacks, so the only STEMI center is at Jamaica Hospital as well. So, it's about a 20-minute full lights-and-sirens trip to get to that hospital. So that is the problem with the person you are treating. Now we are not going lights-and-sirens to get back. So your district is without an ambulance for at least 40 minutes, because it takes us that

long to just get back. And because we are so busy, that ambulance sometimes doesn't get back to the Rockaways because they are going to get called for a job.

At this time yesterday, we had a six percent availability of BLS ambulances, which are EMTs in all of New York City.

An engine company has an 87 to 80%, maybe a 75%, availability at any given point. This situation is not complicated. We are staffed and budgeted to handle about 3,000 EMS calls a day. We are hitting 6,000 every day.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Can you tell me what the wear and tear is on your members that have to make that route, right? Because you're talking about what should be like a two to 10-minute trip if it's a trauma matter, now taking 20 to 40 minutes. Lights and sirens, on the parking lot, Van Wyck Expressway. Thank you also for giving context in terms of the ambulance not returning, because there have been moments where I've had to call personally to Saint John's and to the local FDNY to see if there were ambulances, because someone had a heart attack in a park in Rockaway, and I was told that not one

ambulance was on the peninsula at that moment. So now I understand why not. I didn't have that full concept in terms of even the return.

MIKE GRECO: Right. So I mean, if you're asking about the stress, it's when you have somebody who is in critical condition, and you're in the back of that ambulance. I don't think I can explain to any civilian—I mean, I've got about 50 of my members upstairs. If you want to talk to them outside, every single one of them will tell you their trauma story. It's frustrating, but then it's also frustrating to be at the hospital trying to get there when you find out there's a pediatric arrest. So you know the system has put you in a position, and now you can't help the next one because of what's going on.

Every single one of my members who are here and every single one of the ones in the street right now, they do this not because they're going to get rich. They do this because they love the job. And when we can't help somebody, that puts an extra mental toll on what it is. But I can't stress enough: this is a disservice to New York City because your constituents and the visitors of New York are not getting served the way they should.

When you call 911, you expect one of three things to happen: If somebody's robbing your house, you expect a cop to show up. If your house is on fire, you expect the firemen to show up. If your mother's having a heart attack, you expect us to show up. We're not showing up right now. And that's a direct problem with the budget, and that's a direct problem with the resources and the investment that's being put in EMS services.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

VINCENT VARIALE: If I may, I'd like to add something like, this is the domino effect as well, because we've heard the UFA President also testify that when Fire responds to an EMS call, and most of the calls are fire... or EMS calls, they are now put off service, taking care of, treating that patient, waiting for an ambulance to arrive to take care of that patient.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Mm-hmm!

VINCENT VARIALE: So now when that ambulance is stuck at Jamaica Hospital and taking an hour to come back, and then it gets diverted to a call nearby because they couldn't make it back to

Rockaway. That fire truck's gonna sit there longer. So now you have a fire truck off service, and you have an EMS truck service taking care of another call. It's just a domino effect.

Same thing with the police officers. If they have a patient that they're standing with, they're waiting longer. Now they're off service until we get there. So it's a domino effect on all emergency services in New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: I just want to add one thing to the Rockaways. I believe the Rockaways Boardwalk is the largest in America. And it might be a little off with that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: I don't know if it's the largest, but it's a significant stretch. It's one of the largest for sure.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: During the summertime, there's one Gator staffed by two MTS covering the entire length of that boardwalk.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Mmmm!

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: So not only do you have the stresses that we just mentioned, but during the summer season, I hope nobody has trouble swimming, or

there's a shark or any of those things. So just a heads up.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Council Member.

Council Member Avilés, Council Member Cabán, and then Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much to this panel, and thank you, everyone, who came here.

We are well aware that a thank you is not feeding you; a thank you is not providing the healthcare that you also deserve, the mental health care. And this is one of the most egregious and infuriating situations here for us at Council.

I'd like to know how many ambulances. Just have one EMT?

MIKE GRECO: We don't. We're not allowed to go with just one. It'll always have two EMTs, or it's out of service.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Or it's out of service...

MIKE GRECO: Or it's two paramedics. We're not allowed to send out an ambulance with just one provider.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank goodness. But, even...

VINCENT VARIALE: (INAUDIBLE) responders, EMS potential, will add, we're the only first responders that go out by ourselves. Just so you know.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it.

VINCENT VARIALE: We’re the only ones. We should have a partner or an aide. We don't have that— police, hazard, fire, everybody has one, not EMS.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it. And how much money is required to get us to a pay parity?

MIKE GRECO: That's an interesting question because there's so much more to it than just what it would cost as a dollar figure. What it would take is everybody to get into a room with all the stakeholders. It would take the Office of Budget; it would take OLR; it would take the Mayor's Office; it would take City Council; it would take the unions, and it'll take... Remember, we have a pay equity

lawsuit as well. That's outstanding. So it's not just about the pay; it's about that...

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: That's right.

MIKE GRECO: We are 35% women; we're 51% non-white. We are systematically kept down in order to fund and support equity and diversity in Fire. So this would take a massive undertaking, and ask the unions: how can we get to yes? Right? There are a whole bunch of things that we are willing to do, but we need people to understand that it needs to be revamped. They've been putting their fingers in the dikes for a long time. I mean, I hate to get too nerdy, but when this country first started, and the Constitutional Convention had to happen, it was either we redo the Articles of Confederation, or we write the Constitution and start anew.

EMS needs to start fresh and have a whole new brand new idea. Because if you have 9,000 firefighters to deal with 500,000 calls, and you have 4,000 EMTs to deal with 1.6 million calls—the simple explanation is double our budget. But it's not just that. There are so many things. So we ask to get all the people in the room. That's what we're asking.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you for that.

I'm going to say double the budget; start there, get all the people in the room right now.

MIKE GRECO: I agree, I agree.

(LAUGHTER)

MIKE GRECO: Where do I pick up my check?

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Lieutenant, thank you so much for all your work.

What is the single most important thing for this workforce that you see needs to happen? I think, in particular, what I'm looking for is how many people are we losing a week from the services, and what does it mean to have someone who's been in service for 20 years?

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Well, I'll answer that in reverse. I don't know what it means anymore to have someone in service for 20 years because there are so few of us. You know, EMS, EMTs, and medics are like any other medical professional; we get better with age—maybe not the knees—but the experience and the know-how and the ability to walk into a door and see Ms. Lee right there and say I know what's going

on with her just by looking. It's almost magic. But that comes with age and experience and time on the job.

Right now, the average age of the workforce is about 23 years old. When I came on, the average age was about 31. So I don't have 20-year people anymore. Literally the other day in my station, which covers Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, parts of Dyker Heights, and other neighborhoods surrounding it, I recently put somebody who had two years on the job with somebody who had six months on the job.

The Academy classes aren't being filled, according to the Fire Department's numbers—not my numbers, not the union's numbers, the Fire Department's numbers. We are losing 10 to 15 people a week.

The other day I did overtime up at Station 18, which is in Bathgate, to my Bronx Councilman back there. I got there a little early; I was talking to the overnight Lieutenant as I was standing there, and an EMT walked in and said, "I quit." I asked him why he was quitting. He said, "I can't do this anymore. I did 10 jobs last night. I'm working two jobs to pay the bills. And I've been here

six years, and I don't see any hope." And he quit. And that is happening every day.

So what does it mean to have 20 years of experience? It means people are being saved. It means experience. It means I get to pass down my knowledge and help the future of New York City and the citizens of New York City. That's what it means.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank you.

MIKE GRECO: And I want to put that into numbers for you. It cost $42,000 to train and hire an EMT. That's what it costs. They aim to do 600 a year. And if you're losing 599, that's where the money is going.

There are many studies that show experience helps with cardiac arrest survival. And right now, that's why we're down to 17%. It takes time to work with an experienced person to walk in, hear a lung sound, and know that's rales, that's wheezing, that's fluid in the lungs, versus that's an asthma attack. And it is those subtle nuances that an experienced provider will bring—so, are you starting an IV to get the fluid out? Are you doing BiPAP, or are you doing albuterol to help the wheezing? Those

are seconds, and that's what somebody with time on the job knows.

So there's a huge consequence for citizens in losing that sort of experience. And it's not like they are going to nursing school or wherever; they're going to drive for Uber because it's making more money for them to go... we say it as a joke, and I'm serious, it used to be that you would go to fast food chains to get experience to come to work in a career job. Right now, you're coming to EMS to get experience to go work at McDonald's.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Oh, okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Before we go to Council Member Cabán, I just want to pass it to Council Member Brooks-Powers, who is going to make a special announcement.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you, Chair. And again, thank you to this panel.

I just wanted to take a moment to recognize some students who have traveled all the way from Wilberforce, Ohio, from my alma mater. Wilberforce University, the first privately owned and

operated university in the nation. Welcome to New York City, everyone. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Welcome. And today is a very special day because you get to see a lot of our civic participation in action. Welcome.

Okay, Council Member Cabán, followed by Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I just want to start by saying thank you for being here. Thank you all for being here and for the work that you do every day.

I am going to start with a comment and then ask a question, but I will say, you know, this is serious trauma work, and vicarious trauma is real, and we're going to talk about that in a second. But I remember being a baby lawyer responsible for people's lives in a very different way, right? And I cannot tell you how invaluable it was, how necessary it was to have veterans around me when I was first starting to practice the law, right?

And the stakes are even higher when we talk about, you know, emergency triage. I know that you were saying that the cost is what it takes to train somebody?

MIKE GRECO: Around $42,000 per EMT.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And then they're leaving...

MIKE GRECO: They’re leaving.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And then you're bringing in a new class to train all over again. And you know, if we're lucky enough to get these wonderful committed public servants to stay in Emergency Response, you're basically paying to train folks in other agencies and other response systems. So you guys need and deserve a lot more money for all the reasons that you said, but I want to take a second to talk about the mental health impacts.

You talked about the suicide rates, and obviously that's a worst-case scenario. I know that there are many of your members who are living with a lot of hardship each and every day because of the toll that this work takes. And last year, the Progressive Caucus fought really hard to get the $1 million for the Regional Emergency Medical Services Council of New York (REMSCO) Program Pilot that would really be focused on maintaining and helping the mental health of the workforce.

I want to know, and I know the answer to this first part, but have you seen the money yet? And how important is it to continue to invest in the mental health of your members and the workforce? And what are some of the impacts of that?

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: As far as the REMSCO money, it's trickle-down, you know. And as many of us know, trickle-down economics doesn't work. Trickle-down mental care is not working either. There has to be one-on-one engagement, which is what we recommended to REMSCO and other health agencies that have tried to give mental health responses.

We have something called the EMS FDNY Help Fund, which, through raising money, was really meant to help members in need, such as when their house goes on fire, et cetera. It is now paying for their mental health care, and it's exploding.

So what's needed is a little more nuanced and direct, catered to EMS members specifically for what we see and what we do. Could REMSCO do that? Yes, of course, they’re REMSCO.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I think the issue is they haven't been paid the money.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: They haven't been paid the money.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: For the services.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: Yes. The issue is that... the language is coming down, the conversations are happening, but the actual resources aren't happening.

MIKE GRECO: And you also have to remember right now the system isn't set up to take care of us. We just finished telling you we have a 3% availability. So when we take that baby to the hospital, and they don't make it, there should be identifiable situations for critical stress debriefing. That person should be taken off the truck for at least a little bit to talk to somebody. But because we're so busy, we have to bury it. And it's the same old years... and what led us to the mental health crisis in EMS is, "Well, that's your job," you know, "just bury it, dissociate," and that's what we're supposed to do. So when people want to try and do something for us, you can't because there are no ambulances available. So we have to go deal with that trauma job, have to deal with that 95-year-old woman who passes, and the 95-year-old husband tells us,

"This is going to be the first night I've ever spent without my wife in 75 years." And then you're just, like, great; I got to go pick up the abdominal pain in five minutes.

Like it needs to be completely understood, revamped, addressed, and funded properly so the correct measures could be put into place and not a stopgap on every single turn.

VINCENT VARIALE: I also want to add to that, the issue about time off and all that. You know, we get 12 sick days a year compared to uniformed services, emergency services that get unlimited sick. We get 12, and we deal with sick people. So during COVID, it became such a problem that so many people fell off payroll. They had to give excused leave; otherwise, they were going to lose a workforce and have like a third of the workforce without pay. And when you go off payroll, not only do you lose your paycheck, you lose your health insurance because now you're off payroll. So it's a bigger problem. You're having a medical problem. You have a mental issue you're trying to handle. Guess what? You're off payroll now. Now you

can't even get the help you need because your health insurance has been canceled.

So, it's a huge issue. And that's why, when we talked about parity and how much it would cost, it's a bigger issue, a big look-at, because it has to do with mental health assistance, healthcare, sick leave; all of these things have to come into play with this. Because to help someone who is dealing with a job that's so complex as this—dealing with sick people, dealing with massive trauma—remember, we are responding to your worst day; the most horrific things that happen in life happen when we are there. And that's our job. We get that. And nobody is complaining about it. But a little support for us to do that job would be helpful.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you.

Council Member Narcisse?

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, Chair.

Start with libraries. Folks think that libraries are just a place you get a book. And I can tell you that librarians have evolved with the times. There's much more going on in libraries. So, we love

libraries here. You don't even have to say anything about the libraries. We're on top of it, and so are the Speaker and all of us.

And for the staff, the hot, heated place, it's not only about them. It's about the food because there is a certain degree that you have to hold the food at. So this is serious business, and I'm sure the Speaker has heard it, and we're going to look through it to see what we can do. Because the workers are very important to us. They provide quality services to our children that we love.

To the EMS, as a registered nurse working in the ER, I know the importance of a level one trauma center, and I do appreciate your work, guys, because you bring the patient alive enough for me to save them in the ER.

We cannot build a health care system structure on people who do not stay because they cannot afford to stay. What do you say to your workers when they know they're providing lifesaving quality services to our city and yet they are struggling to stay?

I have been hearing from you things that you cannot even say anything about because it's

really... They're helping us. It's a tick-tock moment, like I always said. So, what do you say to your workers, you know, who are struggling through this process?

ANTHONY ALMOJERA: To be honest with you, when I address the workers, when I go meet the members, I feel shame. I don't know what else to feel. I don’t know what else to feel. I look at people with a thousand-yard stare. They look back at me, and they're leaving. And I feel shame because, as Presidents Variale and Greco have said, we've been here numerous times to fix this problem. And every time I go back to the members, and I go, we're trying, we're doing, we're meeting, we're this, we're that—it's like, you know, in this country, which there are many issues at the moment, to put it lightly, it used to mean something to take care of the workers who were taking care of the people. And when I go back to the members, and they sit there, and they tell me that they can't pay the rent, literally, we have homeless people who have testified here in front of the City Council who are EMTs. When I have people who are leaving because they can't afford a quality of life in New York City, I feel

ashamed. I feel on a personal level that I just spent 23 years doing something that I'm starting to regret.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And I want to thank you, and cost-effective as well. We train costing about... how much money to train one EMS?

MIKE GRECO: One is $42,000, and as I said, I like to look at the 10-year plan. This city has spent a quarter of a billion dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So it's not cost-effective.

MIKE GRECO: Unless you like throwing away a quarter billion dollars and you feel...

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: We don’t.

MIKE GRECO: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And my Speaker is here listening to you, and I will leave it at that. I just wanted to highlight the areas, because I work with EMS. They have to bring the patient to me. Thank you.

MIKE GRECO: And I want to say I am hopeful, right? I'm recently elected. I run, and I do this because I do have faith in my service, and I have faith in the fact that this will get fixed. And having Mayor Mamdani here right now, somebody who has

fought for affordability, somebody who has fought for the working class, I can only have a hopeful nature. And if you ever take that out of me, I'm going to be very upset.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes, with the Mayor and the Speaker, that's a business background and a healthcare background, paying attention to the bill that we were having a hard time putting in, to get clarity on the budget on how people are being billed in our hospital and making sure we have equity throughout all our hospitals. And the Mayor, of course, we are going to do our very best, I believe, so.

MIKE GRECO: The City Council has always been supportive of us; you know... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I'm sure. We love you guys. We... (CROSS-TALK)

MIKE GRECO: Before COVID, we've had non-binding resolutions for pay parity. We need to get the other side in to really get them to understand. So we come here every year, and we talk to you because we know how supportive you are, and we know we need you in our corner to do this. So once again we're here begging (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: That's right.

MIKE GRECO: (INAUDIBLE) my members. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And Speaker Menin passed the transparency bill for the hospitals. So, (INAUDIBLE) Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Council Member Restler and then Speaker Menin.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much. I really want to thank this panel for being here today and for your great advocacy for EMTs.

Do I have this right that after five years a new EMT makes $59,000 a year?

MIKE GRECO: It's $59,552. We need that $552.

(LAUGHTER)

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: To be clear, you need every penny when you're making $59,000... 59... $59,520 after five years.

You know, an entry-level worker in my office is paid more than that. And they do great work, and I adore the young kids who come to work for me, the young people who come to work for me, but after five years of working as an EMT in New York

City, not being able to afford basic necessities is disgraceful. And this has been an issue that has been hanging over us as a city for far too many years. It's one that we desperately and urgently need to fix.

When you have looked at this—and congratulations on your ascendance, and I want to thank you for your leadership over the years, and Vinnie and Donald and everyone, thank you for your hard work on this issue.

When you look at the cost for pay equity for EMTs, what do you think the range is of what it would cost the City of New York to make it happen?

MIKE GRECO: I mean, if it's simply pay equity where we don't take anything into account, I would have to look at the exact budget and see what we are spending on the salary costs and simply double it. That would bring us close to what it is. They talk about the FDNY budget: two-point-something billion dollars, and they say 90% of it is the salaries. Well, again, you are paying three times the rate for the salaries of the uniform service, and we are doing three times the work. So the way I see it, if you double our salary, double our workforce, you'd

still save a third of that budget. So that's why it's always tough to put an exact number on it, but that would be the basic. I think if you doubled our budgeted salary for salaries, and every single one of my members, instead of making $59,552, made $100,000, not only would you keep people, but then instead of hiring 600 a year, you'd only need to hire 200 a year.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's right. Because the retention issues are real, and we're unable to respond in the timeliness that we need to because we don't have enough workers because we're paying people so poorly that they don't stay in the jobs. I completely agree with you and think this is a smart and necessary investment.

And I just want to note that, you know, at our FDNY Budget Hearing last week, I was greatly pleased that the Commissioner, the Chief of Department who oversees the Fire side of things, and everybody else on the panel said the number one priority for FDNY today, if we have additional resources, is pay equity. And that was stated clearly by the leadership in the FDNY. I think it is a powerful thing that we have our first former EMT

leading the Fire Department. And we need this administration to deliver.

Generally, these things happen through collective bargaining. We know that you all are the folks who have been struggling the longest without a contract in all of the City of New York. Through every channel that we have, through every advocacy vehicle we have, we need to be pushing to deliver a real solution that guarantees the wages and the benefits that your workers deserve.

So, thank you for your advocacy and for being here today.

MIKE GRECO: Thank you.

I do want to point out: to have the FDNY come up here, because I was in attendance for that testimony, to have them come up here and not only admit that, that should scare the heck out of everybody. The Fire Department, which never wants to spend money on EMS, is now sitting here begging. If that doesn't scare the citizens of New York, and if that doesn't scare this council, and that doesn't scare you, you know what, you'd better take that shooting victim and put them in a car, because you're going to have a better response time.

When the FDNY comes up here and says we need to do this, we'd all better move.

VINCENT VARIALE: I've got to add to that. I've been on this job for 31 years, 16 years as president, testifying over and over again. I've never seen a Fire Chief of the Department, the Fire side, saying that EMS is a top priority because it's so bad. That is, like Mike said, amazing and eye-opening. I was shocked to hear that myself.

ANTHONY ALMOJERA Lincoln, I just want to add one thing: that has to happen soon, because we've reiterated over and over how people aren't staying on the job. People aren't coming on the job. The Academy class was slated for 300. I believe they only got 158 recruits. So, this has to happen, you know...

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. I want to close by once again thanking the panel, but most importantly, I want to thank all of you, the EMS workers. I can't thank you enough.

On a very personal note, my father passed away in July, and the number of times that I had to call all of you at a very difficult time, your professionalism, your dignity, your compassion, your care personally got me through a very difficult time,

as well as literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of families across New York. You are heroic. We owe you a debt of gratitude. Thank you so much for everything you do each and every day for New Yorkers.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. And just before...

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: To close out, I just wanted to thank you also, John, for your work in the Libraries.

Donald, I know you touched so many different aspects of the schools. I had one quick followup question for you: I know there was a program to also increase the number of air conditioners in the cafeterias for the school lunch aides. And so I wanted to get a followup on where that was at right now.

DONALD NESBITT: So the Office of School and Nutrition, the leadership there has been supportive in taking part of their own budget, and just putting it into ACs. We're working with our Local that actually builds schools at the School Construction Authority, Local 1740, and what they've

said to us is that not every school's solution is AC. There may be split units that are needed. There are some kitchens that do not have windows. So AC is not something that they can actually support.

The last time we testified here, for the Capital Budget, we requested about $70 million that should go into a solution here. But just to put it... Council Member Riley, a few years ago, in his district, I visited a school in the Bronx, and at this school, it wasn't in a basement; it was on the eighth floor. The temperature was at least 135 degrees. The workers were sweating so much that they had to step outside the kitchen to have a conversation.

This is something that we need to address, and address it immediately. In those same conditions, if an animal owner had the animal in those conditions, they would be arrested. And so to have workers in those conditions, it's just unacceptable.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

And finally, thank you so much to our EMS/EMT folks.

I just want to echo because we have a speaker here who really is fighting so hard and a council that's fighting so hard. There's a lot of folks in this room who are fighting hard, and I think one of the themes we're seeing is pay parity for EMT/EMS, as well as a lot of our childcare workers who are here, home care workers. I think there are a lot of folks here that we need to definitely pay what they're worth, and it does take a toll on each individual's mental health. And something that we've seen is that oftentimes the frontline workers are the ones that don't get to take care of themselves, because they're always taking care of others.

But it is top of mind, and just to illustrate how top of mind, I think it was last year or so when Norovirus was going around, and my husband called EMS because I was literally frozen on the floor like this, and I didn't know what the heck was going on. And he didn't either. So, in the middle of EMS coming, I couldn't really talk that much, but one thing I did say was, "Pay parity. We're getting you guys pay parity. We're trying to fight for pay parity."

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And then they were like, "Okay, just calm down. Like, we got to get you to breathe first."

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: That's just an illustration; that's how top of mind it is, I think, for so many of us on the Council. But that's the first thing I thought of. Like, "Pay parity!".

So, we will obviously try to continue to fight for that for you all. So, thank you so much.

Okay, our next panel will be: Barbara Bear, Katherine Bromberg, Alia Soomro, Maleia Sheflin, Jonathan Chung, Malaya Sheflin, and Jonathan Chung/Caitlin Garbo, and Marc Safman.

Okay, great. Feel free to start, and again, hopefully you guys have all submitted your written testimonies as well. So, thank you all for being here, and feel free to start.

MALEIA SHEFLIN: Hello, my name is Maleia Sheflin, and I am a tax-paying Queens resident on behalf of EMS.

During the hearing on June 1st, FDNY Commissioner Bonsignore stated multiple times that the priority of the Department is the stabilization

of EMS via pay parity. Yet, the Council decided to focus on the reinstatement of a fifth firefighter from the de Blasio era. What's the point of having a fifth firefighter if there's no EMS on scene to provide the antidote to the cyanide poisoning created by that fire? And for the MVAs where only EMS can provide medical care, now instead of four firefighters waiting around for an ambulance to arrive, you'll have five. For what? A return to the old days. But hey, if you're going to be so focused on the past, let's take a look at the 2001 Local Law 19 and the 2020 Resolution 1062-A, which were enacted to recognize and pay EMS as the uniformed service they are, instead of as civilians. Somehow, you're able to ignore these two pieces of legislation while also being allowed to introduce legislation to raise your own salaries. Council Members already make a salary of $148,500, while we have members of EMS living in their cars and in shelters because they can't afford to live in the city they serve.

What are any of you doing that warrants a $24,000 raise? Are you risking your life to save the lives of others when you go to work? Have you gone through extensive training to become a medical

professional who administers the same interventions given in the emergency room? Have you had to maneuver an ambulance through New York City traffic or give CPR to a patient while keeping balance in said ambulance? No. You sit up there in a position of power that was given to you by the people of this city. You work for us, and we are dying.

You may not care that Adam Benhammou, who waited 41 minutes for an ambulance before the NYPD transported him themselves, died due to your failure. But there have been instances of firefighters and their families needing an ambulance, and they too ended up waiting. These are the people you would think absolutely would get preferential treatment, and yet they waited over 40 minutes while their condition worsened.

I hope you understand the gravity here. There are no more strings to pull. EMS attrition rates are already higher than they've been in recent years. (TIMER) If this budget passes without pay parity, there will be a mass exodus, leaving an already severely understaffed service in shambles. But maybe the rumors are true. Maybe the City wants

EMS to collapse in hopes of breaking their unions to ultimately combine all under one.

And while your continued inaction fans the flames of a systemic EMS collapse, you or a loved one may find yourselves in need of their services. There already aren't enough paramedics and EMTs to go around. So, no matter who you are, council member or not, you or your loved one may die while waiting for that emergency medical care. You may feel indifferent about sacrificing the lives of your faceless constituents, but the time will come when it affects you directly—and your shiny title and bloated salary won't be there to save you. Only EMS can do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

ALIA SOOMRO: Good morning. My name is Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters. Thank you, Speaker Menin, Chair Lee, as well as Members of the Committee on Finance, for the opportunity to testify.

I have submitted longer written comments that go in depth about NYLCV's environmental funding priorities.

We appreciate the City Council's environmental commitments in their Preliminary Budget response, as well as the Mamdani administration's commitment to the environment in the Executive Budget.

I'm going to use my time today to outline just a few of our environmental funding priorities. I'm going to start with Parks.

So, as a member of the Play Fair Coalition, we appreciate the administration's baselining of $15 million for Parks in the Executive Budget. This means that 161 of the 276 temporary or one-shot positions will be guaranteed a job by June 30th. This is a critical step forward, but we urge the administration to baseline the remaining $8 million, which would mean that 115 critical Park staff, who will lose their jobs by June 30th, would be guaranteed permanent jobs.

Along with the Forest for All Coalition, we really appreciate that the City published the City's first-ever Urban Forest Plan, and we request $150 million to help fund and implement this plan.

Moving on to Buildings—again, we appreciate the administration's commitment to

implementing Local Law 97 with $1.8 million for the new co-op and condo hub for New York City Accelerator. We want to continue to underscore the importance of funding to help implement that law.

Moving on to Transportation, we appreciate the City Council's support for Fair Fares, and along with other advocates, we really urge the City to expand eligibility to 300% of the federal poverty level. My written testimony outlines more on that front.

When it comes to Zero Waste, we are pleased to see strong funding for waste containerization (TIMER), and we support the community composting network's funding request.

I'll wrap up. We really look forward to working with the City Council as well as the administration and advocates to ensure that our environmental and climate programs are funded. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, go ahead.

MARC SAFMAN: Good morning. My name is Mark Safman. I moved to New York City in 1997, and I've been here for about 30 years. In 1986, I had an

acoustic neuroma removed, and I started living as a deaf blind individual.

June is Deaf Blind Awareness Month. Helen Keller's birthday is on June 27th. She was born in the same year as Roger O'Kelly, who was the first Black deaf blind man to graduate from law school. They're vastly different people, but they're both amazing.

Helen Keller: people look at her, and they remember her name. Helen Keller was someone who dealt with a lot of people who were in positions of power like yourselves, who absolutely were ignorant.

We're here to talk about the basics of deaf-blindness, a combined vision and hearing challenge. "I'm not deaf. I'm not blind. You can't talk to someone who's blind. You can't talk to someone who's deaf and expect them to understand anything about being deaf-blind." Unfortunately, people don't understand that. And no one really understands that.

In America, there are 2.47 million deaf-blind people. In New York, we have approximately 120,000 deaf blind individuals. The city has 51,228. There are about 197,000 people with vision challenges

and 181,000 people with hearing challenges. This comes from the American Community Survey. I reached out to the Institute on Disability. I'm helping write a law to create a statewide co-navigator program.

Our deaf-blind community: you have to understand that there's a range. I am sighted deaf-blind. The majority of our population is older because, as you get older, you lose your vision and hearing. The leading causes are Usher (TIMER), CHARGE, and Down Syndrome. The fact that it's a combined vision and hearing challenge makes it very difficult to diagnose. I mean, if you have Usher, your vision might not be declining; you'll lose your hearing, but your vision might not be declining.

The key issue here is communication access. Our communities, in order to participate, need communication access. It's 2026; tremendous difficulties getting this arranged.

I know that the Rent Guidelines Board doesn't make accommodations. We had issues; there are a lot of issues. But if we could talk about the MOPD Budget. This is a little analysis that was done earlier in the year. Two other deaf-blind people and I met with the budget analysts and the disability

committee people, uh, the attorney and analyst; we talked about the CoNavigator Program. The CoNavigator Program uses tactile ASL, which is a touch-based form of ASL, and people help you walk around, you know, help you... They provide you with environmental information so that you can go about conducting your business. We don't have that program in New York. Our programs are connected to VR, Vocational Rehab. If you want to go for a walk, go to the gym, get your nails done, go to a holiday party, or attend religious services, you get no help. So our community is largely trapped in their homes. You sit in your apartment because you can't get anywhere. MOPD...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, we're...

MARC SAFMAN: We're 12% of the population; disabled people are. You're harming us. Your ignorance, your fear; our mayor doesn't show up for disability events. He ignored the Disabilities Forum while running. He spent 20 minutes with Chris Alvarez and gave a 20-minute interview. You ignore our communities. You don't understand our communities. The idea that you want to fully fund MOPED at $850,000 is disgusting. You people are a group of Nazi generalists here debating, you know, performance

metrics. You're harming our communities through your ignorance, your fear. It's disgusting. It's 2026. You're denying our populations the right to live, healthcare, education, and jobs. We need to take an integrated, holistic approach, and the fact is, if you fund MOPD at $800,000, you're like you're not serious.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I totally agree...

MARC SAFMAN: It’s disgusting. You're cutting our communities...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, when I...

MARC SAFMAN: You're denying us opportunities. You're denying us, you're denying us rights. And we got a mayor talking about socioeconomic justice, and you people don't know what the hell you are talking about. (TIMER) Your staff is ignorant. I mean, I talked with these people, and it's just like they did not... (TIMER) They included pretty much everything that we...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sorry, Mr. Safman...

MARC SAFMAN: (INAUDIBLE) budget...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: We're going to take a look at your written testimony... (CROSS-TALK)

MARC SAFMAN: (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: But as chair...

(CROSS-TALK)

MARC SAFMAN: (INAUDIBLE) Population of New York is limited.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, sir.

MARC SAFMAN: And it's kind of like... that's nonsense; I gave them that information...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sorry. We have to try to keep it under... But one thing I will say, though, is that as Chair...

MARC SAFMAN: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: No, no. As Chair of the Disabilities Committee previously...

MARC SAFMAN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: So, as Chair of our Disabilities Committee before, the $800,000 budget is definitely a lot lower than what is needed, and so we totally hear you on that. And I know that our Chair is fighting for a higher budget for that.

So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Okay. Sorry. Go ahead.

(PAUSE)

BARBARA BEAR: Good morning. I'm happy to testify, and I am happy to follow this gentleman.

My name is Barbara Bear, and I'm the Program Director at the New York Foundation for Senior Citizens for Home Sharing and Respite Care. And, Chair Lee, I'm going to follow your direction and synthesize my testimony.

So, I want to say that home sharing and respite care are cost-effective and compassionate, and the home sharing and respite care services are in line with our mission of keeping seniors at home, keeping them from being isolated, from being depressed, and from being institutionalized. Our home service, home sharing service, is done by social workers, and we match, as you know, hosts and guests. And we match hosts and guests at a rate of $4,000 per person so that it matches under $10,000. And I want to point out that when I match two people, I think of it as an affordable housing match. And I remember that building an affordable housing unit costs $500,000. So we do think, you know, for seniors, it's an interim way to save money and give them safe housing.

And secondarily, with regard to respite care, we place home health attendants in housing, and the seniors pay $19.60 per person in contrast to $40.00 when one goes to a home agency. (TIMER)

So thank you all for your work. I have to say that I think our program is terrific, and the amount of money we're asking compared to this incredible budget is peanuts. On the other hand, when I listened to the testimony about EMT, I found it really daunting. But I hope you will consider home sharing as an effective way to get some affordable housing for seniors. And I thank you so much.

KATHERINE BROMBERG: Good morning, Katherine Bromberg, and I'm a senior staff attorney with the Employment Law Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group.

I was meant to be testifying here along with other nonprofits, but unfortunately, they got stuck in the security line. So I'm testifying on their behalf as well.

The Employment Law Project at NYLAG provides client-centered, community-based legal advocacy for low-wage and immigrant workers facing

exploitative labor practices, discrimination, and harassment.

NYLAG strongly supports increased funding for the New York Commission on Human Rights, which is needed now more than ever in a climate where employees face far greater federal hostility toward their rights. An approximate 10% cut to funding for the Commission would be a blow to the already besieged agency and its attendant staffing shortages.

We asked the City Council to support an increase to the Commission by $10 million to a total of $25 million. This revision to the budget would be minuscule, comprising only 0.02% of the City budget. However, the impact would be vast.

The Commission has been operating on a shoestring budget, and further staff attrition will continue to deprive many low-income New Yorkers of means to vindicate their rights. It has, at times, only been equipped to hire one staff member for every two who depart. Further cuts will not only harm the employees at the Commission, but will diminish their ability to provide services to so many workers in need.

There are simply not enough employment attorneys in the city to represent every working-class client. And it is even more difficult to find advocates where damages may be low due to employees' meager wages and lower back pay awards. Therefore, one of the most significant assets of the Commission is its ability to support pro se employees.

Now cases languish for years at the Commission, as each time a staff member departs, it can take six months to reassign a new employee to a case, leaving clients in the lurch and without consistent support. And where cases cannot be settled, clients may wait a literal decade before they're able to be heard at OATH.

In this climate, where the EEOC (TIMER) is also much diminished in capacity and is now prioritizing reverse discrimination in areas such as national origin and race, support for workers in the city is all the more essential.

Moreover, undocumented immigrants may no longer file at the EEOC because they risk having their information shared with DHS.

We thank you very much for your time this morning.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Good morning. My name is Caitlin Garbo. I'm subbing in for Jonathan Chung. I'm the Manager Of Public Policy and Advocacy at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, NAMI NYC.

We deeply appreciate your support, Chair Lee, and all members of the Council, for your previous support of our organization, and we respectfully ask for that support again in the next fiscal year.

NAMI NYC is specifically asking for our own restoration of $250,000 for the Youth Peer Support Initiative, restoration of $500,000 for NAMI NYC's Peer Programming through The Peer Support Specialist Initiative, and $150,000 in Speaker Initiative funding for NAMI NYC's family support services.

These investments will enable us to expand the reach and capacity of our helpline, our evidence-based education programs, more than 30 monthly support groups, outreach presentations, and family match mentoring programs, among many other

things we do in underserved communities throughout New York City.

Additionally, as the Council considers the executive budget, we would like to highlight a few other things: Resources to bring vacant supportive housing units back online. The expansion of the capacity of crisis respite centers and crisis stabilization centers, expanding the number of school-based mental health clinics, additional housing opportunities for justice-involved individuals living with SMI, and we urge the City to increase baseline funding for IMT teams to at least $66.3 million, $22.8 million for ACT teams, and $6 million for FACT teams.

And while we appreciate the increase in funding for B-HEARD, we are still falling short. We want to make sure that there's citywide coverage and 24/7 availability. Mental health crises can happen anytime, anywhere in New York City, and we deserve crisis response led by professionals and peers trained in deescalation and trauma-informed care.

We also believe that the correct crisis intervention (INAUDIBLE) model for crisis response should be adopted.

And lastly, just again, for more than 40 years, NAMI NYC has supported lives and families. (TIMER) We strengthened the community. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with you. And we'll be in touch. And please read our full testimony written online. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Just wanted to say I deeply appreciate all of you here, because we know you're providing such essential services on the ground. And of course, I used to be a board member of NAMI New York City. So I definitely appreciate legal services, seniors, and environmental programs. All super important, and things that we are definitely fighting alongside you all on. So, thank you so much for your work, and I know that Maleia left, but I wanted to actually just, for the record, comment that we hear her concerns and her frustrations, and that is why, as we saw in the last panel, we do want to reiterate the importance of our EMS/EMT workers, and that they do need to be paid a salary that is livable.

Does anyone have questions for this panel? Oh, Council Member Morano?

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you to Miss Soomro from NYCLV. Setting aside some of the policy areas where reasonable people can disagree, one thing I think most New Yorkers agree on is that flooding has become a real quality of life issue. It certainly is in my district.

In your testimony, you call for investments in stormwater infrastructure and flood mitigation. If the City had an additional dollar to spend, would you rather see it spent on a new climate initiative or on fixing the kind of chronic neighborhood flooding that residents deal with after almost every major rainstorm? And what are the highest return investments the City could make right now?

ALIA SOOMRO: Thank you for the question. So I think, to answer your question, I think having it seen both ways, climate and having projects that immediately address stormwater flooding, which residents face all the time, is very important. I think that as NYLCV, we try to continue to advocate for more funding for short, medium, and long-term solutions, because these big gray infrastructure

projects won't happen overnight. So, it's really important to have shorter-term.

I will say that NYLCV, along with a few other resiliency groups, is really appreciative that in the executive budget $10.6 million is being allocated to the Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Coastal Resiliency, which is very important. I know that is not an end-all, be-all, but that funding is very important to help DEP staff with coastal resiliency projects.

Again, that's coastal resiliency; we still want to see more funding go toward stormwater and inland flooding. So we continue to advocate for more funding on that front, such as cloudburst projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you.

ALIA SOOMRO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you.

And I didn't formally recognize Council Member Dinowitz, Brooks-Powers, Cabán, Restler, our Deputy Speaker, and also Council Member Maloney, who have also joined us... Oh, and Council Member Krishnan.

Thank you so much to this panel, and thanks for sticking to time.

Next up, we have Mark Dunetz, Sean Kreyling, Julienne Kim, Louis Tsai, Michael Kimmel, and Derry Oliver.

So, if you all can come to the front, that would be great. Mark Dunetz, Sean Kreyling, Julienne Kim, Louis Tsai, Michael Kimmel, and Derry Oliver.

Okay, so as a reminder for folks who came in a little later, we are trying to stick to our two minutes as best as possible. If you hear the buzzer, if you could just summarize your testimony comments, that would be awesome.

So feel free to go in whichever order you all want. We could start on this side or this. Yes. And just identify yourselves.

MARK DUNETZ: Speaker, Chair, Members of the Committee, thank you for having me. My name is Mark Dunetz. I'm the President of New Visions for Public Schools. I'm asking you to restore $ 8.9 million for the New Visions data portal in the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget.

I spent my entire career in New York City education as an ESL teacher, as a social studies teacher, and later as a founder of a career and technical education high school for television and film careers in Queens, and now leading a 37-year-old trusted nonprofit staffed by people who made the same choice to spend their working lives in our public schools.

We didn't come to this work as a technology company. We came to it as educators. That's why we built the portal. The people doing this work—counselors, social workers, teachers, principals, simply did not have the tools they needed. The information to help a student was scattered across systems that didn't talk to each other. So, with input from thousands of educators, we built the tool we all wished we had when we worked in schools.

Today, over 18,000 staff across the system use this software platform to plan for students, catch the ones falling off track before it's too late, and coordinate with people supporting them, all in a single real-time view. It's how districts manage citywide initiatives, and it's the

only mechanism connecting school data to CUNY, ACS, DYCD, DHS shelters, and the hundreds of community providers our most vulnerable students rely on.

Cutting this investment or reducing it by a few million also threatens more than $5 million in annual philanthropic investment that extends every city dollar, and it derails a development roadmap built with scores of partners across city agencies and CBOS.

There's no cheaper path; for-profit vendors would charge many times more than this contract for the same scope, and as we all know, the DOE has no precedent for building software this complex in-house.

Turning our backs on what took a decade to build would be a tremendous setback for our schools, our social service providers, and the students and families they serve. Thank you for your time. (TIMER)

SEAN KREYLING: Good morning and thank you for having me today... Good morning. Thank you for having me today. My name is Sean Kreyling. I'm the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Krayco, Inc.

Between 2023 and 2025, Krayco provided educational services to schools within the New York City Department of Education. I'm here today to provide testimony regarding what I believe to be significant financial malfeasance and systemic failures within the New York City Department of Education.

Based on my experience and the available evidence, I do not believe that these actions were the result of a single individual's conduct. Rather, I believe that they reflect the coordinated actions and omissions of certain officials within the New York City Department of Education, Community School District 3, and the Office of Special Commissioner of Investigation.

In my view, these individuals failed to uphold their responsibilities to students, families, taxpayers, and the public trust. The consequences of these failures extended beyond administrative matters and directly affected the students whom these institutions and individuals were entrusted to serve.

Under the leadership of Superintendent Kamar Samuels, who now serves as chancellor, District 3 contracted for world language services for two

school years—each year, using the billing structure that District 3, in essence, Kamar and his team recommended that we use. In essence, we were instructed to bill using two organizations because payments to a single vendor that was not yet approved could not bill more than $25,000.

Both agreements contemplated review through the New York City Department of Education's established approval processes, including review by legal and appropriate governing authorities. At no point did the New York City Department of Education contact Krayco to communicate any objections, request revisions, identify compliance concerns, or otherwise indicate that the agreement or the payment structure was improper.

Early in the 24-25 school year, Krayco raised concerns regarding a substantial pass-through balance and what we believed (TIMER) was the misappropriation of grant funds that had been designated for world language instruction but instead being used for ESL or ENL programming. This coincidentally triggered an SCI (The Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation) investigation

into my organization and me, despite Mr. Samuels direct involvement.

In my view, the failure of the New York City Department of Education, Community School District 3, and the Office of Special Commissioner of Investigation had consequences extending far beyond the treatment of Krayco.

Of particular concern is the case of a New York City Department of Education teacher who was previously investigated by SCI for allegations of inappropriate conduct towards students, including allegations of a sexual nature. Central Office of the Department of Education ultimately entered into a settlement agreement with the individual in 2024. Despite the seriousness of these allegations, the teacher retained his certification and, to my knowledge, remained eligible for benefits associated with his public employment.

It is my belief that the New York City Department of Education, Community School District 3, and the Office of Special Commissioner of Investigation committed willful misconduct defined by their pernicious actions, fiduciary negligence, and

blatant disregard for student learning, well-being, and safety.

I urge this Committee to act accordingly to ensure the stewardship of public schools and funds... to ensure the stewardship of public schools and funds that our students and community deserve. Thank you.

LOUIS TSAI: "Not that I am aware of." These six words, "Not that I'm aware of," are how the DOE's Head of Contract and Purchasing answered on the record this past March when Speaker Menin asked whether they audit consulting contracts.

Good morning, Council Members. My name is Louis Tsai. I serve on Community District Education Council 26 (CEC26).

Hold on to these six words. It sets up a double standard. The Speaker also asked the DOE for copies of 600 contracts. Three months later, she still doesn't have them. They said that in a resource-constrained environment, producing them takes months. Now, compare: on May 8th, the DOE's own CFO told CEC26 that every school filing a budget appeal must be audited. District 26 has 12, eight of

them in your district, Chair Lee, and they've been audited every single year for over a decade.

So, the small schools in the city get treated like they can't be trusted with lunch money. The no-bid consultancy contract doesn't even get looked at.

Here's what that costs: When my son Logan was in fifth grade, P.S. 162 had to cut a teacher: Art, computer, music, gym, or science. Science lost, not from mismanagement, but from a formula that doesn't fund schools like ours.

At a moment when the whole world is arguing over AI, New York City Public Schools couldn't keep a science teacher because DOE funds the small schools like it's the Stone Age.

So, I asked two things:

One, put one question to the DOE on the record: When the school gets appeals money, do you claw it back the next year?

Two, baseline this funding so schools like ours stop losing their science teachers—$12.8 billion dollars of contract budget, no transparency, 12 small schools in District 26 are audited every year like criminals. My son is Logan. He's in sixth

grade now. He should have had a science teacher.

(TIMER)

JULIENNE KIM: Thank you. Hi, my name is Julian Kim. I'm a parent of a student at The Baccalaureate School for Global Education in Astoria, Queens. I'm very moved by your work and also by hearing about all the needs you're called upon to support. So, thank you.

I'm here to continue supporting a recurring need across many of the testimonies I've heard today: commitment to investment in one of the most critical assets of our future, which is our children.

In addition to all of the pressing needs already spoken about today, our children need safe, modern, purpose-built spaces to learn and grow. They need school buildings.

My son's school is a thriving, highly ranked school serving an extremely diverse community in Queens of high-performing students and future leaders. And yet the school is overcrowded in a falling-apart building with no communal space to gather, no gym, no auditorium, and questionable drinking water for the kids.

I ask that you please protect BSGE's promised funding for a new building. The City must keep its promise to ensure BSGE remains fully funded for our relocation, protecting the budget allocation that has already been designated for our new site. I just want to reiterate the need to follow through on that.

But I'm also here to support the broader district. I ask that the Office of Management and Budget officially allocate the funds needed for the School Construction Authority to build the promised 600-seat middle school and two 650-seat elementary schools that I understand were promised to the community but have not been officially allocated in the budget.

There's a growing need in the Queens community; our local Queens North community is rapidly, rapidly growing. There have been wonderful affordable housing initiatives, and I highly support City Council Member Julie Won’s initiatives to support the community.

Without these new seats, schools will face severe overcrowding, breaking a critical

infrastructure promise (TIMER) made to neighborhood families.

A strong community needs fully funded elementary schools and middle schools so students can thrive before they reach high school. And I'm here today to ask for your support. Thank you.

MICHAEL KIMMEL: Members of the Committee, my name is Michael Kimmel, and as a parent of a student in MS 177, I've been deeply troubled by the organization behind awarding our afterschool contract to a new provider after having Manhattan Youth work with us for over 10 years.

I knew very little about the DYCD prior to these events. So, I'd like to take a moment and highlight some of the DYCD's guiding principles on their own website.

1. Opportunities for all. Prioritizing investments to help eliminate disparities in under-resourced communities and to improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

By taking away our provider, the DYCD is doing exactly the opposite. We applaud the implementation of all the new afterschool seats across the city. But no one at the DYCD has explained

why it is necessary to take away from some and give to others.

Shouldn't our goal be that all schools have the provider they prefer?

2. Stewardship—Responsible management of City resources by valuing accountability, integrity, and transparency and delivering impactful results. Where do I even start?

Was it transparent when families in these communities were not consulted in this decision? Was it transparent when principals were forced to sign NDAs so as not to discuss these bids with the families who are affected by all this? Where is the accountability?

To my understanding, the DYCD has not responded to our questions and demands anywhere but in the press. And shouldn't their number one goal be to listen to those they serve?

3. Being a learning organization, fostering professional development, continuing quality improvement, and a culture of excellence and adaptability for ourselves and those we serve.

If this organization is truly about quality improvement and adaptability, then why are they not listening to the parents?

Lastly, community voice. DYCD strives to improve the quality of life of New Yorkers by collaborating with local organizations and investing in the talents and assets of our community.

You are taking away our kids' coaches and mentors, teachers, and friends. You are forcing an organization on our school that has no ties to our community.

Last month, in front of this committee, (TIMER) the Commissioner of DYCD stated that she believed our kids are resilient and will survive this change. And if you were listening, you could hear a collective scream from every parent across the city.

These are the kids who are learning to read and write when COVID hit. Some are still catching up, while many of them, many in our community, still have social and emotional problems stemming. Maybe we should stop hurting our kids intentionally and hope they will come out on top. That seems against the principles of the DYCD that I've laid out here.

But do you know who has come through for MS 177 time and time again? Manhattan Youth. There is no email that goes unanswered, no phone call unanswered, no question left up in the air. They work tirelessly to make sure that not only are our kids safe, but that they thrive.

While the DYCD has many ideas written on their website about the culture they want to create, the organization that truly embodies every one of those principles is Manhattan Youth.

I strongly urge you to reverse this heinous decision. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

I know that a few of our members have questions. We'll start with Council Member Dinowitz.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair Lee.

This council has been clear and consistent. Speaker Menin, under the leadership of Speaker Menin, myself, and the Council, and, particularly, the Committee On Education, which I chair, are deeply concerned with these issues with contracting, including no-bid contracting—the

efficacy of contracts and the lack of oversight in DOE contracting in particular.

I want to ask two of you some questions so we get a better understanding of what it is like in the DOE, the decisions that are made, and how that impacts our children.

Mark, I want to start with you from New Visions. You testified it's an $8.9 million data portal, and you said it leverages how much money in private funding?

MARK DUNETZ: Consistently $5 to $6 million additional a year.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. So the total cost of the portal is $14-15 million, but the DOE pays $8.9 million of that?

MARK DUNETZ: Correct. And we estimate that a private for-profit vendor would probably charge, at minimum, $25 million for this level of personalized software development.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And they had testified at the Executive Budget hearing for my committee that you work with DYCD, DHS, ACS, CUNY, almost every single school. They testified: 1,543

schools. It's almost all of our schools that use the portal.

But what they testified, though, was that much of your data was duplicative and that this would be a savings because the data already exists.

So can you talk about the importance of the portal or why you believe the portal is necessary for data that they say is duplicative?

MARK DUNETZ: Sure.

The challenge that I faced as a principal, a challenge that administrators, teachers, and counselors face across the system, is not that the data exists somewhere, but that the data exists in too many different places. And anytime one wants to do anything with that data, one reverts back to a practice from 20 years ago of downloading spreadsheets onto local machines where the data is stale, where the plans live in multiple places, where it's impossible to collaborate across organizations.

That is the problem that we have solved with the portal. It is not just a one-way reporting tool, as are the tools that are presented as alternatives in-house. It is a complex case management, project management, initiative

management, and student planning tool. Administrators, counselors, and teachers can enter plans into the portal. They can create groupings for reading groups, for afterschool programs, for internships, and then they can track and collaborate to implement those programs and to understand how students are doing against the goals of attendance and graduation outcomes.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And if this contract were cut, what do you predict the impact would be directly on our students?

MARK DUNETZ: It's very predictable. The alternative is a set of one-way reporting tools where data lives fragmented across multiple systems. We would return to a period in which counselors, administrators, and teachers are downloading spreadsheets of sensitive student data endlessly onto local computers and writing formulas and manipulating data in myriad places, unable to collaborate with one another.

It simply will take away the single most important and valuable collaborative tool for student planning.

Furthermore, there is no tool inside the Department of Education's ecosystem that connects in any significant way to all of the other agencies and CBO providers in CUNY that have to collaborate to support students and their families.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And when did this portal open up? When did the DOE first start this portal?

MARK DUNETZ: It launched in 2016. There were four years prior to that in which we developed tools in spreadsheets. So it's about a 13-year project, with this particular tool 10 years at this point.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Kreyling, you have testified about some of the issues with contracting, and I want to be clear that the same thing I said at the committee hearing is that the reports we've seen in the news are deeply troubling. And not just because it deals with one individual. I'm not interested in talking about one individual. That's not what this is about. This is about a system that has flaws. A system... It's $386 million of our city's budget that is spent on these small contracts below $25,000 or $15,000

from individual school budgets. Not a lot for an individual school for each contract, but in the aggregate, it is a serious amount of money.

It was revealed that there are serious lapses in oversight. And now we have more reporting that people in the DOE, you know, engaged or allegedly engaged in conduct that speaks to the need for the oversight that we need in the Council. It speaks to the need for procurement or contract reform.

So I don't want to speculate on an individual's actions or anything like that. But given the apparent lack of deep oversight for these smaller contracts and the number of cases that have been investigated and substantiated, which are all online for anyone to look up. We do want to hear about your experience with the Department of Education and procurement, and your experience navigating this.

So you held a contract with the DOE for placing temporary foreign language teachers within city schools. Can you talk from the beginning about the procurement process that you went through?

SEAN KREYLING: Of course. If I may...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: If you could just get a little closer to the microphone.

SEAN KREYLING: I'm new to this.

If I may, I would just like to apologize first if my testimony seemed a little underprepared or flat.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: It's a lot that I'm asking you. It's okay. I'm just asking you from the start, like the procurement process that you went through. It's okay.

SEAN KREYLING: So our team initially reached out to District 3, as the individual district originally reached out to Mr. Samuels. He then passed it off to another official at the district. And from that point, it was about nine months or so, and Mr. Samuels and the other official said, "We'd like to move forward," and we provided them with a contract.

They conceivably reviewed the contract, signed the contract, and then at that point they realized that we were not an approved vendor, which we didn't know anything about because it was the first time that we were doing business with New York City public schools. And as I'm sure you all know,

New York City Public Schools does business in a different way from most places, even New York State.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I've heard that rumor. Yeah.

SEAN KREYLING: It's quite interesting. So, we had no knowledge of this. And when they found out that we were not an approved vendor, they shared with us, "Well, there's this other way that we can bill. You have another organization, and you could bill from both of these organizations so that you don't go over $25,000." And it was framed in a way that seemed fine, appropriate, business as usual. So, we didn't question it, but we also were not in the position to question it.

So, we moved forward accordingly. And started to bill from both organizations and even interacted with procurement specialists from Central Office, and they knew about this splitting between two organizations and never raised any red flags.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So there wasn't, like, from the beginning, there was no one at the DOE to kind of walk you through the process of how to become a vendor or what the expectations were for non-contracted vendors? Those steps didn't happen?

SEAN KREYLING: So we did have to, I suppose, become a vendor in order to be in the, I think it's F A M I S, in the payment system?

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes, FAMIS.

SEAN KREYLING: So we had to go through some type of approval for that, which we did do for both organizations. But past that, there was no additional approval or anything of the kind from Central Office.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So, you worked with numerous people within this district, and none of those people at any of those points kind of walked you through what the limitations were and why you were discussing splitting between two organizations? Those things didn't happen?

SEAN KREYLING: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

Are there changes you would recommend to the DOE procurement process based on your experience?

SEAN KREYLING: I think that there needs to be a great deal more oversight, and I think that building administrators need to be trained on procurement. It's a large task, and I think that we can't just expect every ordinary administrator to

know how to handle procurement. There are policies. There's a law in place for a reason. But I think with the right type of professional training, and maybe designated individuals, as we have in New Jersey, where I'm from, schools have business...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Welcome to New York.

SEAN KREYLING: Well, I could tell you a thing or two.

(LAUGHTER)

SEAN KREYLING: So, you know, a business administrator is the person who's able to transact on behalf of the district. So, that person is empowered to transact on behalf of the district, but also has credentials and the training to transact, right? So, they know that they have a fiduciary responsibility. They have a license associated with it, and they're expected to exercise great discretion and make decisions that are in the best interest of this district financially, but also in the best interest of students' learning and protection.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, I would note that there is no requirement for principals or school leaders to be trained on procurement

procedures even though they deal with massive budgets. That is not a requirement that the DOE has of these building leaders, and that was again something they testified to at the hearing.

I think one of the things that concerned me most as a teacher, as an educator, as a father, was the reporting that there was a place in one of the classrooms, a teacher who had a problem code in their file for making certain inappropriate remarks to a student. And a problem code means they are not supposed to be hired by the district ever again.

So I'm trying to understand what happened. It was reported that there was a problem code on one of the teachers. To your knowledge, whose responsibility is it to vet the teachers? And are you provided information from the DOE about which professionals have problem codes in their files, such that they would have been barred from entering or teaching in a New York City Public School classroom?

SEAN KREYLING: I think it's a shared responsibility by the district, you know, Central Office, the individual districts, and any vendor to ensure that the individuals we're putting in the classroom are safe adults for our students and have

the requisite education and so forth to be in that classroom.

Unfortunately, as a vendor that wasn't approved, we did not have access to this problem code, which resulted from inappropriate conduct, including touching of some sort....

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

SEAN KREYLING: Just to clarify...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, there were allegations of touching...

SEAN KREYLING: Of touching...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And racial remarks as well.

SEAN KREYLING: Yes. However, interestingly enough, District 3 did run clearance checks on some of our teachers, and I have copies of those, but not on that teacher. I never received the clearance check. So, the teacher arrives at the campus, right? You're going to teach in person; they're going to take your Social Security number, they're going to do their HR functions, and they did so for some teachers, but for this teacher, we never

received anything. It was only months later that we learned that there was a problem.

And unfortunately, when we pushed back to understand the problem, we were met with resistance and basically told it's none of our business.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So I just want to make sure I understand. The district never... You didn’t have access to those files that would have indicated that there was a problem code on the file. You otherwise do background checks on every single teacher that you place in these schools or that you recommend to these schools?

SEAN KREYLING: We do, and we ran an extra background check on this individual because I was in disbelief. I needed to understand, well, how did this get through the cracks? Was this person not reported to the authorities? I mean, if somebody's touching a child, they should be reported to the police, district attorney, something of that sort.

I reached out to our legal counsel and said, "Could you please investigate this further?" And there was nothing.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm?

SEAN KREYLING: But I learned later that it was because it was under a lock and key in a settlement.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

Are there any other recommendations? So, we've heard some recommendations about access to these files or DOE having access to them, training. Are there any other recommendations, as someone who's experienced these contracts, that you would make to make sure that this $386 million that we spend every year, which can, of course, potentially lead to someone with a problem code in their file entering our classrooms, that there's greater oversight over this money that's spent diligently and that our students are safe?

Are there any other recommendations, having experienced it, that you would make to this to the committee?

SEAN KREYLING: Sure. I think that anything related to finance should also be guided by student protection. So if there's any type of spending, we need to make sure the spending is not going to result in exposing students to predators or anybody who could possibly be dangerous. And that

means that Central Office and SCI need to be more forthcoming with this information and need to have more discussions with buildings and with vendors.

And further, I would urge anybody who's able to take action to really look into why it is that the Department of Education can settle with a teacher and not report them to the authorities if the teacher has been accused of touching children or making sexual remarks to children.

Why can a settlement make that go away and allow that teacher to continue to work in other public schools in the state, private schools, and charter schools, just not New York City schools? Why is New York City allowing, uh, passing the trash?

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, thank you so much for your testimony and for answering my questions. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, Speaker Menin?

SPEAKER MENIN: Thank you very much.

Okay, number of questions for the panel. I think I'll go in order.

Mark on New Vision, we are very concerned about this cut. As we said in the Education Hearing,

this is something that we think is wrongheaded and that we absolutely want to get the cut reversed.

Can you talk a little bit about what the implications of this cut mean? I know you had your testimony, but is there anything else you want to add?

MARK DUNETZ: Yeah, I guess I would just reiterate what a unique resource it is for the New York City Department of Education and, more broadly, the social services and education sector to have a long-standing nonprofit doing work at this level.

What it would mean is essentially setting us back 10 years to a time before we had tools to connect the education department to other agencies and to a time when counselors, principals, and district superintendents really don't have the type of modern management tools that are taken for granted in every other sector of the economy.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. All right. Thank you.

Louis, I know you testified about the, and Sean, both of you, in terms of the no-bid contract. So I will say, and I know Chair Dinowitz said that we are very focused on no-bid contracts in

general. The Council passed my bill a number of months ago to eradicate the long-term use of no-bid contracts and to only allow them to be used in a true emergency.

We are very focused on DOE contracts, you know, as you both have referenced, and it's something that we are going to continue to push for and ensure that we receive these contracts. The contracts are about $12.7 billion of the total DOE budget, uh, not the no-bid contracts, but the contracts in general of the DOE budget. This is something of great concern.

So, thank you for your testimony today. I don't know if other members are going to have additional questions for you.

I do also want to say to you, on Manhattan Youth, we are completely in agreement with you. It is unacceptable that DYCD made this change. We have sent a letter to DYCD. We met with the commissioner. I'm deeply concerned about the lack of transparency over the choice to suspend Manhattan Youth, the provider that has been providing afterschool programming for over 25 years to great acclaim in communities not only in my district, but also in Council Member Brewer's District, Council

Member Maloney's District, Council Member Epstein's District, and many other districts.

So, we are on the case, and I can assure you we'll continue to push on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. We have Council Member Morano, Brewer, and Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you. A couple of quick questions for Mr. Kreyling.

Mr. Kreyling, one thing I heard in your testimony struck me, and I just want to make sure I understand it accurately.

You're saying that when DOE determined your company wasn't an approved vendor, the response wasn't to stop the contract, but rather an explanation of another way to structure the billing? And if that's accurate, it suggests the problem may be bigger than any one individual.

Is your testimony that the procurement system is so complicated that administrators are effectively being forced to navigate loopholes rather than follow a straightforward process? And if that's true, how widespread do you think that is?

SEAN KREYLING: Yes, that is accurate. When they determined at District 3 that we were not

an approved vendor, the solution was: Hey, you have another organization. We can split the billing. We can bill from both organizations so that we're not going over the $25,000, and we can also use the funds that come from the Superintendent's Office, which is another $25,000, as I understand it, in order to make this a reality.

And I would imagine it's the result of the difficulty of the procurement process and perhaps, you know, really the inability to work through the bureaucratic mess that we're often faced with in education.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Mr. Kreyling, frankly, while the contracting story is troubling, uh, what concerns me is what Council Member Dinowitz brought up: this issue involving the teacher with the problem code. You testified that neither your company nor other outside vendors necessarily had access to information that would have alerted you to serious prior allegations involving that individual.

Is it your view that DOE's failures in this case weren't just financial failures, but failures that potentially put student safety at risk? And what specific change would you make tomorrow to

ensure that no vendor unknowingly places someone in a classroom who shouldn't be there?

SEAN KREYLING: Yes, that is exactly it. It was more than a financial failure. It is a failure of student protection, which should be our first priority when we work in education: to ensure that our students are safe because when they are safe they can learn.

I would offer, as I offered prior, further access to teachers' backgrounds so that we, as vendors, and as individual districts, are able to access their backgrounds fully—No settlements, no irrevocable retirements that are able to shield these teachers from further scrutiny and able to really conceal their, uh, egregious behavior, sexual misconduct, verbal misconduct, which is exactly what happened here—a settlement and a code of irrevocable retirement allowed this teacher to make his way to our organization, pass a general background check, even one that was run by one of our attorneys. So that's a higher level: no marks, able to get into the school.

And it was only when the district requested an email address that they said, "Oh, this person is not supposed to be in our classrooms."

"But why?"

"Well, they've been retired."

"Pension? So, did someone slip and fall?"

"Oh, no. It's much more serious than that."

Well, if it's much more serious, and a teacher has been accused of touching a child or sexually assaulting in any way, verbally or not, that should be referred to the authorities. It should not be settled so that the teacher continues to benefit financially from a pension and retirement and then continues to work in a private school or a charter school or a school in New York State, because we know that's a separate system, right? Passing the trash, essentially.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: So you raised the concerns about passing the trash, where someone leaves one school system after these allegations but is still able to find work elsewhere.

You believe that's what happened here. Should New York City be advocating for a system where

substantiated misconduct follows an employee rather than disappearing when they move to another school, another district, or another sector of education?

SEAN KREYLING: Of course, if it's in the name of student protection, then it's what we need to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: And finally, are you asking this Committee to conclude that SCI reached the wrong conclusion, or are you asking us to conclude that SCI failed to investigate all of the relevant facts? Because in a lot of ways they are different allegations.

What are you thinking?

SEAN KREYLING: Which investigation? The one into my organization and me, or the one into the teacher in question?

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Well, both.

SEAN KREYLING: Well, I wasn't a party to the first investigation into the teacher. I can only read the investigation as it was written. So I will allow you all to read that for yourselves and draw your own conclusions.

But again, I do know that it was not referred to the district attorney, whereas the

investigation into my organization and me was referred to the district attorney. Why? I do not know. We weren't charged with any type of misconduct of that sort.

I do think, however, the investigation into my organization and me was inaccurate. It had a predetermined conclusion. It had a narrative that it wanted to carry out from start to finish, protecting certain individuals. And ultimately, it allowed my organization and me to be the scapegoats for the very poor decisions of Kamar Samuels.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Mr. Kreyling, for being so forthcoming. Thank you, Chair, for your patience.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Council Member Brewer, followed by Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

I, too, just like the Speaker, have a question about Manhattan Youth, and I have several schools in the same situation.

My question is: in my situation, the group—nothing wrong with them—that got the contract doesn't do competitive sports. And my middle school

students—three schools—they are excellent schools. They don't need, to be honest with you, youth development; they don't need arts education; they have all that they need: competitive sports. And I'm just wondering if that's the same situation that you're in?

MICHAEL KIMMEL: Yes, first I want to just clarify that I'm here today not only as a parent of MS-177, but I'm lucky enough to have the time to be at this meeting to testify. So, I'm representing all parents with children who are facing this situation across the city. I don't want to suggest that it's not just ours, but that it is my community.

Yes, the organization that's currently taking over our afterschool contract currently is the YMCA of Greater New York.

Now, anecdotally, because I don't have access to information, we were told by a number of other schools that they do not offer competitive sports. So I proceeded to try to contact someone at the Greater YMCA of New York to get answers about our school, as well as a continuation of care plan, right? We're taking away caregivers. We're taking

away coaches. We're taking away mentors. I would like to know what your plan is to mitigate that.

And not once since this has been announced, not one time have they (INAUDIBLE). I've called people. I've emailed their entire organization. They have not answered one call or one email to me or anyone else in my community.

Now, I'm not saying that's a problem with the organization. What I am saying is reflective of the lack of transparency and accountability in this process. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you very much. But it is competitive sports that they offer you, and that's what your students want? That's what I'm trying to get across.

MICHAEL KIMMEL: I mean, it's a wide range of programs: It's DND; it's competitive sports. We have a population of around 280-some kids in our school. Do you know how many kids take part in the Manhattan Youth program? Over 230. That's 88% participation. That's going to drop when you lose sports, when you lose book clubs, when you lose e-games. All of that's going to go down.

And essentially what you're going to have to do is have kids basically being herded into a classroom and on their phones for three hours a day.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Kreyling, I have questions for you very quickly. This is a yes-or-no question: I read the *New York Pos*t article written by Susan Edelman. She published an email dated September 5th, 2023, in which Mr. Kamar Samuels, the superintendent of District 3 at that time, wrote to you acknowledging that your company is not an approved vendor, has no MTAC (Multiple Task Award Contract), and could not provide services beyond $25,000 per vendor ID. He then signed a $180,000 contract with you anyway.

SEAN KREYLING: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Is that right?

SEAN KREYLING: Yes, that is correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. That email does not appear anywhere in the SCI's final report.

So my question is, did you provide that email and that signed contract to SCI investigators?

SEAN KREYLING: I provided them with everything that they requested. They've requested very few things. When I offered more, they declined.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: I See. Okay.

Next question. The June 21st, 2024 billing breakdown, the one explaining the invoice splitting scheme across Language Learning Network, LLN, and the Re-Imagine Education Group that was addressed to Deputy Superintendent Graham, but also cc'd directly to Superintendent Samuels.

SCI quoted in that email in his final report, but removed the cc to Samuels. Is that right?

SEAN KREYLING: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Did you point that omission out to SCI investigators?

SEAN KREYLING: I have yet to meaningfully engage with SCI. I did reach out to them on Friday. And on Monday, I followed up with probably 20 PDF files. They have not commented further, and I'm waiting to hear if they will meet with me. They said that it's a possibility that they'll meet with me to discuss further.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay, final question: Superintendent Samuels canceled your contract on March 14, 2025, according to the *New York Post* article. That's two days after SCI investigator Philip Sansone emailed you that he was opening a confidential investigation. Is that right?

SEAN KREYLING: Yes, coincidentally.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. You objected to that cancellation in writing. Three months later, Samuels promoted the Deputy Superintendent that SCI recommended to be fired to serve as a Senior Director of Strategy. Is that right?

SEAN KREYLING: I'm not sure of the date, but I do know that Mariela Graham was surprisingly promoted to that role.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Were you given a reason for the contract cancellation?

SEAN KREYLING: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Did anyone contact you after the SCI news but before the cancellation?

SEAN KREYLING: Before the cancellation, no. And after my interview and production of documents, SCI did not contact me again. I didn't

receive a report. I didn't receive follow-up. No request. They went silent.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Kreyling. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

SEAN KREYLING: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Do any other members have questions? Sorry, we've also been joined by Council Member Brewer, whom I already called, as well as Council Member Gutiérrez.

Does anyone else have any questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Well, I want to say thank you for your advocacy because, with you, you know, sharing your information, helps us, you know, to push, and the children in New York City are very important to all of us. And as a parent of four, I'm here to advocate and do whatever we have to do. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

And to your point about the afterschool programs, that's something that we are definitely fighting for.

And Louis, I have got to give a special shout-out to CEC26.

Thank you so much for your time today.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, next up we have a group of students in the house: Imani Davis-Brown. Gray Burce, sorry, Leair Davenport, Derry Oliver, Gianna Macintosh, Hayla Musa. Is this all one panel? Camilla Spillman, Sophie Mode, and Jalene Mendes.

I don't think we have enough seats, but we're gonna... if you guys can take turns and then swap out, that'd be awesome.

Jalene Mendes, Liam McCarthy, Summer Jera, Najma Abraham, Adam Reyes, Jasmine Cladock, and we have Scott Daly from New York JTL.

Okay, so students, feel free to begin in whichever order you guys feel comfortable. Go ahead. Thank you so much.

SOPHIE MODE: Thank you so much. My name is Sophie Mode. I'm a New York City Public School graduate, class of 2021, and I currently work with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition to expand access to journalism education for every student in our schools.

As people who care about education and young people, it can be hard to know where to start when it comes to addressing the plethora of concerns

facing the largest school system in the nation. And there is no one solution, but we're here to speak about one that checks a lot of boxes: Access to journalism education.

The students speaking after me will testify to the profound impact journalism has had on them, their peers, and their school communities at large. You'll hear from them the urgency for journalism education in this moment; how it fosters a culture of belonging and inclusion when divisiveness is so high; how it builds media literacy when disinformation continues to rise; how it gives their school leadership, the DOE, and you all the opportunity to hear about the issues that students and teachers care about when students have so few outlets to make their concerns heard; and how it generates career pathways that are sorely needed, particularly in building a news industry that is actually representative of our city and country. And that is on top of the reading, writing, research, leadership, critical thinking, creativity, technical, and communication skills it develops, making it a strong answer to an upcoming challenge schools will

face: The new portrait of a graduate framework that will be required.

Journalism education is the answer to the questions of our time. It's a necessity for a true democracy, and it must begin in our classrooms. We urge you to create and fund the Journalism for All Citywide Initiative in the FY27 budget.

Journalism for All is not a short term solution or quick fix. It is a tested wraparound model for total support designed to scale across the city while still ensuring support meets schools where they are instead of forcing them into a one-size-fits-all model.

Currently, very few schools offer any sort of journalism education, as shown by Local Law 27, which the Council passed last year, thanks to Council Member Joseph. It also showed that access is starkly divided along the same equity gaps that plague our school system. We've already seen the impact of Journalism for All in our pilot cohort in schools like many of the students who will speak today. And I'm so excited to introduce you to our student leaders who can tell you firsthand about the impacts of access or lack thereof. Thank you.

LEAIR DAVENPORT: Hey y'all. My name is Lear Davenport. I'm 17. I'm representing a School Without Walls located near Wall Street.

My school has a Journalism for All program, and it's important to me as a photojournalist because I have a lot of opinions and political opinions that I want to put out there. I want to have a medium to put my voice out there. And unlike me, who is here using my voice, there are some students who have trouble finding their voice and finding a place to use it, finding a place to chime in, whether about their local community or bigger communities that go beyond a neighborhood. At the same time, a lot of students also struggle with where to start and where they should chime in and try to help.

So, I feel like youth journalism is what gives people these voices, especially during times of extreme discrimination, extreme climate damage, and extreme silencing. It's also important because, as the younger generation, we will have to pick up the systems left by the older people. And I just have to make that clear.

(LAUGHTER)

LEAIR DAVENPORT: And it's extremely important that we get a say in the systems that we have to pick up. We don't want to be left with too much to do.

So yeah, Journalism for All and youth journalism as a whole have been extremely useful for me, and some funding for it would be nice so that we can get more students like me and like the wonderful people here with me to speak on matters that they find important to them and to have more people up here not only talking about journalism but also about any issues happening in New York City. Love you.

CAMILLA SPILLMAN: Hello, my name is Camilla Spillman. I'm 17, and I go to West End Secondary School. I'm a part of my school's journalism club and an elective through Journalism For All.

So, my school previously had a school paper, but over the years it completely fell apart. Our advisor was really busy, and journalism programs like this require a lot of effort. Also, we didn't have any funding.

Journalism for All this year was able to revitalize it. In the elective, we've learned about

what makes a good story and how to pitch one. We've talked about and practiced interviewing and how to formulate strong questions. We've learned how best to structure an article and written many of our own. We've experimented with photography, thinking about what can make a good photo, who could fit a certain topic, and what could catch readers' attention.

For our first print edition, our adviser was able to get it to English teachers in every grade to share it. We wrote about exam stress, AI in the classroom, the new state phone policy, local politics, and more. One student interviewed a vendor who sells coffee and pastries in the cart next to our school. He's someone that everyone knows of, but no one had ever thought to ask anything of.

I think I speak for everyone here when I say that we are here before you because of a crucial belief that student papers are important. They help us build and develop writing, research, and critical thinking skills that are vital not just for school or future careers, but for people's lives. However, they also provide something just as important. A rare opportunity for those of my age. A formal outlet for students to talk about the world around them, issues

in their community, interests they care about, problems they may see in the world, or even good parts in their community, such as the impact of a local street vendor, and bring light to them. That's something I want to continue to have access to, something I hope more students at my school are able to do, and something that I hope more students across the five bureaus are given access to.

For this reason, I urge you to fund Journalism for All. Thank you.

JALENE MENDES: Good afternoon. My name is Jaylene (phonetic), and I'm a 15-year-old student at Lions Community School. I'm here today to ask you to support funding for Journalism for All so more students across New York City can have opportunities as I've had.

Being a part of journalism has helped me grow in so many ways. I've learned how to research appropriately and interview people, write articles, and communicate effectively. But more importantly, it helped me find my voice.

One of my first assignments was interviewing another student at my school. And I was so nervous beforehand that I kept practicing my

questions over and over again. But when the actual interview started, the students shared personal challenges they had faced. And it made me realize how much it means to people when you take the time to actually listen to them. And when I published their story, it made me feel proud because I was able to tell a story that actually mattered to a person and not one that people just felt like needed to be published.

Through journalism, I've learned how every person has a story worth hearing. And journalism has allowed me to help keep my school community informed, celebrate student achievements, and give students a platform to be heard.

And I hope you will support funding for Journalism for All so more students can find their voice as I did. Thank you.

HALA MUSA: Hello, my name is Hala Musa (phonetic), and I'm a senior at the High School of Telecommunications Arts and Technology.

My school has a journalism program through Journalism for All, and it has had a profound impact on my school community and me.

Through journalism, I've learned how to research, interview, fact check, and tell stories that matter. More importantly, journalism has taught me how to listen to people, understand different perspectives, and use my voice to inform and advocate for my community.

As a student leader who is deeply involved in issues of equity and student engagement, journalism has given me another way to create change. It has helped me develop critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills that I will carry with me throughout college and my future career.

The stories my classmates and I write highlight the experiences, achievements, and concerns of students in our school. Journalism helps ensure that students' voices are heard and that important issues are brought into the conversation. It creates a stronger, more connected school community where students feel informed and represented.

Access to journalism education has empowered students like me to become more engaged in our community and more confident communicators. It

gives us the tools to ask questions, seek the truth, and share stories that might otherwise go untold.

I encourage you to fund Journalism for All citywide initiatives so that more students at my school and across New York City can have access to these valuable opportunities.

Investing in student journalism is an investment in the next generation of informed leaders, storytellers, and community advocates. Thank you so much for your time.

IMANI DAVIS-BROWN: Good afternoon, and thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Imani Davis-Brown. I am 25 years old, and I am a graduate of the YouthBuild program.

YouthBuild has truly changed my life for the better. Before joining the program, I was struggling to find work. I applied to many jobs, but no one would call me back. I also wanted to earn certifications and build a career, but many training programs were expensive, and at the time I simply could not afford them.

Coming into YouthBuild was a rewarding experience for me. Through the program, I earned my CNA/PCT certification along with my CPR certification

from the American Heart Association at no cost. I also gained valuable hands-on experience through my internship and was connected to job placement support after completing the program.

YouthBuild gave me more than certifications. It gave me confidence, guidance, support, and meaningful relationships with both the staff and other young people in the program.

While attending YouthBuild, I also earned my GED, and now I plan to continue my education and become a nurse in the future.

If it were not for YouthBuild, I honestly don't know where I would be today. This program gave me a real opportunity and helped me build a brighter future for myself. This is why I support the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative request to restore and baseline its historical funding level of $2.1 million in the City's FY 2027 budget. This funding will help continue providing education, workforce training, civic engagement, and supportive services to hundreds of young people across New York City who deserve the same opportunity that I was given. Thank you again to YouthBuild and to everyone here for listening.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. Go ahead.

GIANNA MCINTOSH: Good morning. My name is Gianna McIntosh (phonetic), and I'm a sophomore at Millennium Brooklyn High School.

Journalism is important to me because it has become a way for me to build a legacy, to understand my community, to ask better questions, and to tell stories that matter.

My school doesn't offer a journalism class, but we do have a club, and it only meets for one hour. And every week, I leave wishing that we had more time. I want journalism education to be part of everyday learning so that these skills can stay with me and shape the way that I see my world.

By funding Journalism for All, you can show this commitment to students like me and to the future of our city schools.

In our club, we write teacher features, club spotlights, reviews of school plays, student perspectives on political events, and opinion pieces about issues that matter to our generation. But it is difficult to fully invest in journalism when we do not have the time or the resources to grow these

skills. We need space, guidance, and support to make journalism education real.

Learning how to report, to write, to research, and to ask questions has given me confidence and purpose. It has taught me that my perspective matters and that storytelling can create connection, understanding, and change. That is why it is so important for the city council to fund journalism education.

Even if students do not become journalists, these skills still matter. They teach us to think critically, communicate clearly, and better understand the world around us.

Every student deserves the opportunity to learn how to navigate media and information, not just the students who already know how to speak up.

Supporting journalism education means investing in young people's ability to participate, to question, and to contribute to their communities.

In a time when misinformation spreads easily, and young voices are often dismissed, journalism education is not optional; it is essential. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ADAM REYES: Hi, members of the Committee. I'm Adam Reyes. I am asking...

(BACKGROUND NOISE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: If we could keep it quiet, please. Shhhh. Okay, go ahead.

ADAM REYES: Hi, Members of the Committee. I am Adam Reyes. I am part of D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild, and I just wanted to talk about what D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild means to me.

I've got certifications like culinary and construction. I finished my OSHA, and I've also got my NCCR. And we're just asking for $2.1 million so we can get things going for other students like me and others to experience what I experienced, which is a community that helps one another and doesn't let you down. They go head-to-head for you, and they fight for what you need. But not only do they help you as teachers, but they help you on the sidelines with, like, health, getting you a job afterward, you know, finding you a place where you could settle and, like, know what you're doing in the future, basically. They treat you like family.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. Thanks. And you did great. Okay. Are there any other students? Oh,

right here. Oh, sorry. People are swapping in. Oh, got it. Okay, perfect. Go ahead.

DERRY OLIVER: Okay. Good morning. My name is Derry Oliver.

Three years ago, I sat in these same seats as a recent graduate of Cobble Hill High School, advocating for the Journalism for All initiative. Now, I am back as a rising junior at Syracuse University, majoring in Policy Studies and Law, Society, and Policy, with a minor in African Studies, to advocate again.

The Youth Journalism Coalition has given high school students access to opportunities that are hard to find, and I am proof of that.

Growing up low-income, I wasn't lacking drive. I was lacking access. Journalism programs, leadership opportunities, and internships often came with a price tag that my family could not afford. Most of these opportunities also required a network that was non-existent for me.

The Youth Journalism Coalition opened doors I could not open on my own. The organization meant so much to my development that I have written

about the work we have done for Journalism for All in my college application essay for Syracuse University.

As a previous student leader within the organization, I developed leadership skills which I now apply as President of College Democrats at Syracuse University.

Through the Youth Journalism Coalition, I had the opportunity to write for Teen Vogue about my advocacy work within the organization and to publish an article about my experience with mental health in the education system as a Black girl,which led me to write for The Daily Orange (Student newspaper at Syracuse University) today. Just recently, I hosted the MLK Young Changemakers event at the Apollo Theater through connections I built during my time in the organization.

The opportunities and skills I gained through the Youth Journalism Coalition have directly advanced my college career. And these students next to me deserve the same. I ask that the New York City Council continue to fund an initiative that was there for me when other programs were not. Thank you.

GRAY BURCE: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the

Executive Budget. My name is Gray Burce, and I am a senior at School of the Future High School. Today I'm testifying on behalf of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, a group of more than 120 organizations advocating for the resources needed to ensure every student receives a high-quality education with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.

We are pleased that Mayor Mamdani's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget continues funding for several important education programs that previously had funding set to expire this year. However, the Executive Budget leaves out funding for other critical education programs that are currently benefiting thousands of NYC students and their families and are funded only through this June.

Unless funding is restored in the final budget this year, thousands of students will lose access to the following programs: Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery, otherwise known as (SEED), which supports students with intensive sensory needs; restorative justice, which helps students stay in school, repair relationships, and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended; the

mental health continuum, which provides expedited mental health care to students at 50 high-need schools; immigrant family communications and outreach, which helps families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access; and Student Success Centers, which allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process.

We appreciate that the City Council called for continued funding for these programs in your response to the Preliminary Budget. But we do urge you to ensure that the final budget restores and baselines funding for these programs so that students and families can continue relying on them next year and beyond.

We also call on the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially these students who have the greatest needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

LIAM MCCARTHY: Good morning, Council Members. My name is Liam McCarthy. I'm a high schooler in the city.

How many of you have been to a zoo? I'm here to testify today for the Wildlife Conservation Society about the impact that increased funding for city zoos and aquariums can have on New York City high schoolers.

As a middle schooler during the pandemic, I obviously did not spend a lot of time outside. And my mother was desperate to get me outside. Unfortunately, I was apathetic to the world outside my phone. But thanks to her, you know, begging, by the end of my summer in middle school, I began volunteering at the Prospect Park Zoo as a Discovery Guide. During my four years and 550+ hours of volunteering, I talked to adults and children; I talked to people of all ages about issues that I myself had only just learned about through the zoo.

My knowledge of climate change, invasive species, and environmental justice went from non-existent to extensive in just four years. But as important as the whole conservation aspect of the WCS Youth Program is, the program is also responsible for

the development of a lot of my social skills, like public speaking. Before the program, I would get nervous, and I would freeze up at the simplest of questions. But by my senior year, I was giving wide-scale narration during sea lion training sessions to hundreds, if not thousands, of people at a time. It's still kind of scary to think about.

My experience is not unique. I've made dozens of friends through this program who have gone from shy kids to passionate, outgoing young adults. While many teenagers today are struggling with real-life social interaction in this increasingly online world, many teenage Discovery Guides have been developing in the opposite direction.

Since they're owned by the WCS, much of the ticket revenue at the city zoos and the New York Aquarium goes toward funding global conservation efforts in more than 50 other countries. So the bulk of these zoos' local operating funds come from outside. This means that programs like the Discovery Guide program really do live and die on the whims of government spending.

The FY 2027 budget proposal for the WCS is down by several thousand dollars this year. I've

heard a lot of big numbers today, so this is not a dramatic change, but it does worry me for the future. By maintaining and expanding this program, more high school students have the opportunity to learn about conservation (TIMER) along with essential life skills to help them develop into engaged, well-educated citizens. Thank you

JASMINE CLADDOCK: Good morning, everyone. Good morning, Chair Lee, and Good morning, Committee Members.

My name is Jasmine Claddock, and I'm 18 years old, and I attend D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild located in Brooklyn, New York.

Before joining this program, I was lost and unsure about my future. D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild gave me the structure, the self-discipline, and the confidence I needed in myself to be who I am today.

Since joining this program, I earned my CPR certification, completed my 30-hour construction safety training, graduated with my high school diploma, and was accepted and enrolled at the University of Maryland Global Campus. I then became a registered behavior technician. I'm continuing my

career and hope to become a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA).

I would love for other young adults who feel as lost and confused about their future to know that there's faith and there's hope for them.

Programs like D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild give young adults and young people the opportunity, the education, encouragement, and support that they need to believe in themselves and in a better future.

There are many young people who need guidance and support and don't have access to the resources, too.

I urge the Committee to support New York City YouthBuild Collaborative's request for $2.1 million so more youth across New York City could continue receiving these opportunities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Are there more students? I don't want to cut any.

I know Scott Daly; you're part of this panel. If you could come up as well.

(PAUSE)

SCOTT DALY: Sorry for the disruption. Chair Lee, thank you very much. Council Members, thank you very much.

My name is Scott Daly. I'm the Senior Director of the New York Junior Tennis and Learning, better known as NYJTL, throughout the city. We provide free tennis lessons for kids throughout the city of New York in all five boroughs and in all 51 council districts. We've been doing this for over 51 years.

Right now, we pay our starting salary to everybody who starts—kids, our own SYEP (Summer Youth Employment) participants who come up to our program—$20 an hour. I'm grateful for the money we've gotten from the City Council in the past. We're asking for an increase this year from $800,000 to $1 million.

What do we do? We get kids off their phones, get them off their screens, and get them outside for physical activity. We know the value, as a Council does, of kids learning by participating in an activity and getting out there. They learn socialization and patience. They learn how to win.

They learn how to lose. They know how to react. They learn how to get involved with one another.

The kids that come up through our programs, we know they can't always get out to the tennis sites that we have. So, in addition to the programs at the parks and at the full-size tennis courts, we bring tennis to kids in the schools through a program called our School Time Tennis Program. We teach any gym teacher/physical education teacher throughout the city of New York. We will train them. We give them free equipment. We want them to bring it into their curriculum during the school day. We send our top staff in there to bring this.

What is it all about? It's giving an opportunity to kids who otherwise would never have that opportunity. Are they all going to turn out to be Serena Williams or Arthur Ashe? No. (TIMER) That's not the point of what we do.

I want to thank the Council for the continued support, and I look forward to seeing you all again. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

We've also been joined by Council Member Joseph. I don't know if you wanted to kick us off with any sort of questions or comments?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. So happy to see you guys here.

Journalism for All, and all the young people. Thank you for showing up, budget hearing after budget hearing, to advocate for what you need. We always say your voice matters. I'm a forever educator, so young people have always been the center of the work that I do. So thank you for being here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Oh, go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I'm just so excited. I'm so grateful to see the youth in New York City. You are the future leaders; you are leaders right now, and take the time to educate one another because you came here to educate us. I have my journalist who even follows me in my office to tell me what I need to do in terms of mental health. And thank you. (LAUGHS) I'm looking at her. I'm so proud of you, young lady.

You're leading, and now you're not shy. You can go around and get others to come out to do the same.

I'm so proud of you all. Thank you. And thank you for your leadership in helping our kids play tennis and do all that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Thank you so much. And of course, we know New York JTL does a lot more than just the lessons, but it's a lot of team building, social-emotional learning, all of those things that you provide with your students. So, thank you. And of course, Journalism for All. Thanks for pointing out the importance of getting outside and not being on your screens, which we know is a big problem in our schools right now with our students, my kids included. You really have stepped up as leaders.

And I remember Derry and others testifying here a few years ago, and it's so amazing to see how y'all have grown and how you're all succeeding. So we love it, and hopefully us older folks won't create too many problems for you all to fix.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: (LAUGHS) So yeah, thank you so much, everyone.

SCOTT DALY: I just want to thank you for putting me in a youthful group.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry, Tiffany Cabán has a couple of questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah. I mean, I just want to start by saying, like, you know, I echo the sentiments of my colleagues who are just deeply grateful and proud and impressed by all of you and the students who have cycled in and out. And also, you know, I want to really stay grounded and rooted while you are here. You are making an ask of us. You are telling us where our dollars need to go. And, you know, one thing that I want to highlight across all of your testimonies is that you have really beautifully articulated the ways that not just these programs have changed you and your trajectory and how you navigate the world, but those of the people around you.

You're talking on behalf of everybody in your organizations. And the other thing that really stands out to me is that you all named numbers that

are... we have an over hundred-billion-dollar budget. We're talking about thousands of dollars that are a drop in the bucket. And to see what that return on investment is, we are here, and we've been doing these Executive Budget hearings for a couple of weeks now—And thank you to the staff who work so damn hard to make these things happen. But we talk about these really big numbers, and they're important things, but, like, my goodness, the transformative things that we can make happen in your lives and the future of our communities, it's the best return on the budget we could possibly get.

And so, thank you for making that point really, really clear so that when we go in, and we're negotiating and fighting for these dollars, we're making really compelling arguments.

I just deeply appreciate you, you know, whether these programs help get you to that job, that union job in a trade that you want to be in, or that graduate program, or whatever it is that allows you to take care of yourselves and the people you love around you, it's all a beautiful path.

I'm a lawyer. I was a public defender before I did this work. And I tell people all the

time, only 5% of lawyers are Latinas. And it's not because we're not smart. It's not because we're not brilliant. It's not because we don't want to be lawyers. It's because we don't get the same damn opportunities and access to programs and resources and experiences that other people get. And then when we get them, we rock with them, and we do big things. And you're already doing big things.

I just want to thank you again.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you all.

Okay. So, next up for the next panel is Kyron Banks, Layla Law-Gisiko, sorry if I'm mispronouncing, Reverend Kevin McCall, Ambur Nicosia, Ramona Ferreyra, Oliver Nicholson Jr., and Sylvia Morse.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think we may need a couple of extra chairs. Turn a little. Okay. Is everyone here? Okay, feel free to begin.

REVEREND KEVIN MCCALL: Good afternoon, Chairpersons and Members of the City Council.

My name is Reverend Kevin McCall, and I'm a civil rights activist. I've been doing this work for a very long time. I'm actually outraged. I'm

outraged because we have to do this budget dance every doggone year to talk about Black and brown New Yorkers, people who live in this community, people who really don't have a say at the table.

The Mayor's proposed budget regarding NYCHA is absurd. He wants to try to keep NYCHA as private as possible. NYCHA is the oldest public housing that we have in this country. It's up to the City Council to oppose it. It's up to the City Council.

Before we had a DSA mayor, we had City Council members who believed in the fight to preserve public housing. Before we had a DSA mayor, we had council members in our district who knew what it was to come to our family days, who knew what it is to be able to knock on doors to ask those individuals for your vote.

You guys were elected to protect it, to invest in it, elected to fight for it. Yet today, under the banner of preservation, you'll be asked to accept a plan that continues to transfer the public access, the public authority, and public control into private hands.

The Mayor needs to understand, and you need to not support his privatization plan regarding NYCHA. He needs to continue to understand what it means to save Section 9 in public housing.

For years, residents have had the same story. (TIMER) There's no money. There's no alternative. There's no choice. But somehow there's always money to keep their private interests. So if you want to do the right thing for New Yorkers in your district, those of you who have public housing, put those things to the side and keep NYCHA public and not private. That's what you can do. Thank you.

SYLVIA MORSE: Thank you, Chair Lee, and fellow Members of the Committee and Council for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm Sylvia Morse of Pratt Center for Community Development, a community-based planning and research organization.

We join our fellow members of the New York City Community Land Initiative, or NYCCLI, you'll hear from today, in urging City Council to advance its support for permanently affordable, community-controlled land and housing by increasing

funding for the Citywide Community Land Trust, or CLT Initiative, to $3 million in this year's budget.

Pratt Center has a long history of researching strategies for affordable and equitable planning and housing in New York City.

Our report on Community Land Trusts gaining ground identified CLTs as an essential tool for advancing neighborhood affordability and fighting displacement, particularly in historically low-and moderate-income communities of color. The report identified policy recommendations to scale and sustain CLTs citywide, including the three we call for here today.

Increasing funding for the City Council CLT Initiative, which has been instrumental to CLT's affordability projects; addressing contract delays; and providing funding for CLT acquisitions.

Funding the Initiative at $3 million for FY27, up from $1.5 million in FY26, will provide essential support to 23 organizations, including 19 active CLTs and four citywide technical assistance organizations, including ours, up from 15 groups last year.

Enhanced funding for the citywide CLT Initiative will enable Pratt Center to expand our data analysis, mapping, community engagement, research, planning, and technical assistance services to CLTs across the city.

Pratt Center has not previously been funded through the Citywide CLT Initiative, but as members of NYCCLI, we've provided assistance on multiple CLT-related projects each year, ranging from research and mapping projects to longer-term community engagement initiatives.

This past year, for example, we partnered with the ReAL Edgemere Community Land Trust to design and facilitate a community engagement to identify priorities, community priorities for commercial and community spaces on two lots on the CLT.

In addition to individual TA, we develop and provide educational materials and programs on City Land Use policies such as City of Yes and Land Use ballot measures and help groups understand what the impact will be for their organizations and communities. We'd be able to expand these services and technical services to more CLTs across the city with additional funding.

We also urge Council to support the creation of a $50 million CLT acquisition fund. Mayor Mamdani's campaign platform included the creation of such a fund, which is essential to enable CLTs to seize opportunities to bring land and housing into permanently affordable community control.

And finally, we echo what you'll hear from other members today about urging the City Council to help address chronic delays in registering discretionary funding contracts, which hamper the impact of this funding.

We thank Council for your support of new strategies to address our city's urgent housing crisis, including expanding community-controlled deeply affordable housing, and thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: All right

KYRON BANKS: Good afternoon, Chair and Council Members.

My name is Kyron Banks, Deputy Political Director for 32BJ—32BJ represents cleaners, maintenance workers, door persons, security officers, and many other property service workers, with

approximately 90,000 members working right here in New York City.

I'm speaking to you today on behalf of approximately 5,000 cleaners and handy persons employed by the New York City School Support Services and represented by 32BJ to urge the City Council to fully fund our city schools' cleaning and maintenance workforce.

These hardworking men and women employed by NYCSSS work under a contract with the DOE to provide school facility cleaning and maintenance services. They are essential in keeping our schools and communities running.

This year, they've ensured schools can reopen safely and quickly after repeated extreme weather events. Our members have cleared ice and snow, sometimes reporting to their school site before the storm starts and staying until the storm ends, ensuring that the parking lot and sidewalks are clear and safe.

They've helped keep buildings open when sites were used as warming centers while the cold got even worse. They've worked up to 16-hour shifts just to return to work the next morning during regular

hours. They are tirelessly dedicated to the students and their communities, and the DOE Budget should reflect that.

The cleanliness and safety of New York City's Public School buildings must be a top priority in this budget. Maintaining our school sites is necessary to facilitate student learning, as it creates a dignified and positive educational setting. Yet every year the school funding budget is left structurally underfunded, often leaving students' learning environments in a state of disrepair.

Simply put, NYCSSS should not be stuck in a perpetual state of facing cuts in hours and positions of the workforce.

This year's Executive Budget slates $734 million for our school janitors and handypersons, despite spending this year already reaching over $830 million. That's a hundred million gap. (TIMER)

We cannot allow our children's learning environment to suffer. We urge the Administration and City Council to come together and fully support and fund our city schools' cleaning workforce. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Kyron. Sorry, I mispronounced your name. It's good to see you again.

LAYLA LAW-GISIKO: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and members of the City Council. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

My name is Layla Law-Gisiko. I am the District Leader representing Chelsea Assembly District 75 Part-A. And I am here to speak about the $1.5 billion in City capital funding currently budgeted for PACT and trust conversion of public housing.

We ask that the City Council reallocate this $ 1.5 billion currently in the HPD Capital Funding and direct it instead to NYCHA Section 9 comprehensive modernization.

Section 8 privatization brings higher eviction risk across RAD/PACT conversions. Public housing residents deserve repairs but not a legal architecture that makes housing instability easier.

The City keeps saying that there is no money for Section 9; actually, beyond the City, many, including our partners in Congress, say the same. Yet here we are staring at a $1.5 billion already in the

budget. It's easy. We're not asking for more money. We're just asking for reallocation.

That money should go to comprehensive modernization for the basic physical repairs NYCHA residents have been demanding for years. Every dollar in this budget should be judged by a plain standard. Does it preserve public housing, improve conditions, and keep residents in their homes with public accountability? If the answer is yes, fund it. If the answer is a 400-page transaction with private partners and footnotes, it's a red flag. Don't fund it. It is really critical for Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses, the developments that are in Chelsea and slated for demolition. It will be 100% cheaper, meaning that it will cost half as much to re renovate the buildings as to demolish them.

Also, I want to flag that the Smart Loan, a new financial instrument created to support demolition, is a fiscal disaster, and I'm happy to elaborate more on that.

(TIMER) It is really urgent and imperative to fund repairs and preserve the homes. Keep public housing public. Thank you.

AMBUR NICOSIA: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Lee and the Members of the Committee.

My name is Ambur Nicosia, and I have the honor of serving as the Board President at Penn South. We're a campus-style limited equity community. We're regulated by HPD. We have 15 buildings spread out over 21 acres, and we're home to more than 5,000 New Yorkers, making us one of the largest affordable cooperatives in New York City. And at a time when there's a housing crisis, we are very proud to be part of the City's housing solution.

But maintaining that affordability is increasingly difficult. Built in 1962, Penn South is aging and already requires significant capital improvements to ensure our residents, the majority of whom are senior citizens, are living in homes that are safe and consistently healthy.

Over the next several years, we'll begin our largest and most expensive capital projects: underground utility piping, boilers, chillers, roofs, elevators, and facade work.

We have found out that, because of a technicality, we may not be eligible for J-51 R,

something we've relied on historically to be able to serve the needs of the residents affordably.

At this time, when we're already struggling financially, we now have to be able to comply with Local Law 97. Just to be clear, make no mistake: we are fully supportive of the City's climate goals, and we want to be able to meet the challenges of Local Law 97. However, with the amount of work that needs to be done on an infrastructure level, including the electrification of a power plant, geothermal, and other improvements, we are saying to you that we could only accomplish this through partnership (TIMER) with the City.

Please, we are willing and able to come to the table to find a solution. Thank you.

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: Hi everyone, my name is Guatu Ke Ini Inaru. My colonial name is Ramona Ferreyra, and I'm the founder of Save Section 9 and a tenant at Mitchell Houses in the South Bronx.

I am here to urge you to oppose Zohran's budget for public housing. This proposed budget should alarm the entire city. It is the largest transfer of public monies and assets in recent

history, and it will destroy the only truly affordable housing we have in New York City that locks your rent to your income, not to AMI.

Zohran wants to transfer management authority, development rights, long-term leaseholds, and revenue opportunities associated with public assets to private entities, many of them slumlords, which he wants to punish on the private market.

In the promise of exchange is the repair for tenants, you guys getting fewer phone calls from constituents complaining about NYCHA, and the supposed lower cost for the public. But in reality, the PACT program fails everyone.

It privatizes public housing. It hands over the units to private management under long-term leases of a 100 years. And it is now going to cost taxpayers $2.8 billion to repair developments slated to be handed over to companies like Wavecrest, which your constituents are already suffering under.

This budget then asks tenants who live in public housing Section 9 to accept privatization. And if you don't, you continue to live in a slum-like condition. That is racist. It is inequitable, and it's unacceptable in New York City.

A privatization strategy is only fiscally justifiable if it lowers costs, preserves affordability, creates public value, and improves outcomes. PACT doesn't do any of these.

This is why the Citywide Council of Presidents, the Residents to Preserve Public Housing, Save Section 9, and Neighbors Helping Neighbors, the largest groups (TIMER) in the city run by tenants, are asking you guys to invest all monies in Section 9 comprehensive modernization and to do an impact study on PACT and RAD. Until that impact study is completed, you should put a moratorium on this harmful program.

(APPLAUSE)

OLIVER NICHOLSON JUNIOR. Hello. My name is Oliver, and I represent the New York Young Communist League.

I was born and raised in the Bronx and currently live close to the Boston Secor Houses, which used to be publicly funded and managed by NYCHA under Section 9. But on September 26, 2024, NYCHA converted the apartment to project-based Section 8, allowing Wavecrest management to take control of the property and receive public funding while doing so.

On January 24th of this year, the Boston Secor Houses experienced a horrific gas explosion that killed one, injured 15, and displaced over 100.

Residents later told PIX 11 they reported an electrical fire and smell of gas a week before the explosion, but Wavecrest did nothing.

The Boston Secor explosion is a cautionary tale of what project-based Section 8 leads to: displacement, injury, and death.

Right now, the City has plans to have $1.5 billion dollars go towards HPD, which fuels project-based Section 8 conversions. One such attempt is the demolition of the Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses in Chelsea.

This demolition is guaranteed to displace the current residents and create luxury towers most New Yorkers will never afford. We must not create or bankroll any more disastrous project-based Section 8 housing.

I, along with my comrades in the Young Communist League, call on the City Council to reallocate the $1.5 billion from HPD's budget towards comprehensive modernization of Section 9; stop handing over public housing to greedy companies who'd

rather see tenants displaced or dead than taken care of; prevent the demolition of Section 9 housing like Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea.

Keep public housing public.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much to this panel. Do any members have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the panel members, particularly on NYCHA. I want you to expound a little on the lease signing. We know that the Administration is a big supporter of RAD/PACT, which is a get-rich scheme and a big giveaway to private developers.

Can you expound a little, particularly on this lease-signing scam that the developers are using to scam the residents into signing this lease and signing their life away?

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: So under the program, NYCHA has to secure new leases from every tenant because, as he said, it's project-based Section 8. So the subsidy doesn't get attached to a family; it gets attached to a unit. And in order for HUD to release the financing, the subsidy has to be demonstrated as going to be

received by that apartment. So it is critically important for the management company and the partners to come in with full units or justified empty units. So that's why you have so many vacant ones being held and being bookmarked, right? Because it makes it easier to get a subsidy for a unit that's been empty than for one where a tenant is fighting.

So at Boston Secor, we actually lost a campaign to stop privatization. And the tenants were holding out and refusing to sign their leases. What happens at that time is that NYCHA and the management company, in this case, Wavecrest, then start a campaign of harassment, and that campaign can range from forcing tenants into rental arrears. I have a family right now at Boston Secor that owes $64,000, and this is a senior, elderly retired woman and her retired daughter. This is something that you see across the city.

Another scam that the developers will run is that they'll try to intimidate the tenants. They'll intimidate the tenants by saying that you're going to get evicted, that you're living in limbo, that NYCHA will not provide repairs. If the tenant has a critical repair like a flood, a fire, or a gas

leak, NYCHA will refuse to address and respond to that family, saying that they need to sign the lease to actually receive the repairs. So, it leaves the tenants unprotected.

And then the newest thing that we're seeing today: former Council Member Diana Ayala, uh, Deputy Speaker in the last session, actually shared on our Twitter page, which is Save Section 9, that there is a management company now offering raffle tickets to tenants that are holding out and refusing to sign their leases.

So, some of these prizes include an Xbox, a flat-screen TV, gaming consoles, and other incentives. And these prizes are Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III. (TIMER) Right?

So what you're seeing now is that even when a tenant tries to hold out to their financial detriment and then to their legal detriment, they lose guaranteed legal representation under NYCHA. When they've tried to evict me, I have counsel, and I am issued a lawyer immediately. The tenants at Boston Secor are now hunting for lawyers for them.

And when they show up at court, they no longer have the protections or the grievance process

that NYCHA actually provides them. So now you're facing eviction without an understanding of the law, without the support of the legal system in a legal court and housing system that you guys know is completely overwhelmed by the slum lords in the private market. Right?

So, it's really ironic that Zohran wants to then throw 500,000 more families, right, into a private market that's proving to you that they can't actually give us affordability, protection, benefits, or rights.

LAYLA LAW-GISIKO: And if I can just add one thing... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: You may, Layla.

LAYLA LAW-GISIKO: As it pertains to Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea, as you know, the developments are slated for demolition and reconstruction. Right now, there's a hold because of a court case, but you know, if NYCHA and, in essence, their partner had their way, then this is the outcome that they're looking for. Although no permit has been secured by them, there has been an aggressive harassment campaign on the tenants with all sorts of tactics, including, you know, harassing seniors very

early in the morning and very late at night, refusing to give the re-certification papers unless they also sign the lease, refusing to replace mailboxes so that mail would not be delivered, and the entire deletion of the intercom name system so that folks who live in the buildings could not actually be buzzed and receive the care that they need. Lots of seniors are in these buildings.

The harassment campaign has been actually documented in a complaint that, it's my understanding, is going to be filed in court. And we see this pattern of behavior that is shared also by Ramona. And what we see at Fulton (INAUDIBLE) Chelsea is actually a large number of tenants who have been incredibly intimidated and who did sign Section 8 leases, but who wish they didn't, and now they don't know how to walk this back for a project once again where the Section 8 subsidy does not even exist. They don't even know if they will have an apartment.

Right now it is only Section 9. Section 8 has not been approved. And yet those leases are being signed by tenants.

So it is incredibly problematic. The information that is being circulated is incredibly

misleading. There is a lot of confusion on the tenants' end because they're given inaccurate information over and over. And this is something that, you know, can be addressed. I understand this is the budget hearing. Once again, $1.5 billion earmarked in the HPD bucket. This needs to be taken out of this bucket and put into the NYCHA bucket for comprehensive modernization... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Comprehensive modernization.

LAYLA LAW-GISIKO: Once again, we present a super easy ask. We're not asking you for more money, just for money that has already been committed. Instead of putting it this way, put it over there. And this will really help save public housing and make sure that public housing remains public.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you for your testimony and your advocacy.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

Council Member Cabán?

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And thank you all for your testimony.

I know that there's a lot of work to be done when it comes to public housing, and it's going to take a lot of different strategies and investments.

I wanted to ask you about a particular thing that the Progressive Caucus is fighting for, and I just want to know if you think that this would be helpful.

We were excited to stand with the Chair of Public Housing and the Speaker on this, but you alluded to this: we have a ton of vacant units across NYCHA. We have a backlog of over 6,000 units, and thank you to Council Member Restler, who's really been doing a lot of work on working with folks in your communities to collect the data. But 6,000 units, that's more than the entirety of Queensbridge and Red Hook Houses together.

And right now one of the things that we are calling for in the budget is a $170 million fund to expedite the vacant unit repairs in NYCHA.

The City, I think, was really impressed by, like, the pothole blitz that we saw. And we liken it to being like, well, why can't we throw money in upfront to do a blitz to be able to turn over these,

you know, fix up and turn over these units as soon as possible to make sure we have families in them, in our Section 9 housing?

Right now, the City is currently preparing apartments at just $390 a month, and you know, if we could increase that rate to $1,000 a month, we could fill all of the vacancies in a year—not two years, three years, five years from now.

So I just would like, because you guys are speaking really knowledgeably about a lot of the issues and what needs to be done, but I want to know if that is also something that could be helpful in this? (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: We actually have... (CROSS-TALK)

LAYLA LAW-GISIKO: Two things very quickly, and Ramona is going to speak more eloquently—but just two points that I would like to make. The first one is, I believe that there are a number of programs, including the City of Yes, that did earmark funds specifically for that. So I think it is really important that we make sure that these commitments that were obtained last year are actually put to work.

The second thing I will say is that this number, 6,000 units, is only the units that are slated to be renovated and rented. Keep in mind that NICHA has been in a pattern of taking units off the rent roll, and they do not show in this number.

At the last hearing on this very topic in 2025, we did get to a sort of accurate count. The number of units is 10,000 units. There are 4,000 units that have been taken off the rent roll, and they're either perfectly suitable or maybe they also just need to be repaired.

But I think it is really important for the City Council to go after those units. They're being warehoused deliberately by NYCHA so that they can be converted to Section 8 through the privatization (TIMER) scheme.

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: So, what I'll add is that we actually, as a coalition, submitted a response to the Progressive Caucus.

We appreciate you guys trying to address this issue, but it's actually misguided because working on empty units means that the unit across the hall from me is going to be rehabilitated and a new

family is going to move in, and I'm still not going to have tiles, right?

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Hmmm...

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: And that's the problem.

So the only way to ensure that NICHA is fiscally responsible and that we have proper oversight over their programs is to put the money into comprehensive modernization.

We sent the email on Thursday to every member of the Progressive Caucus... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Can we do both, I guess, is my question... (CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: No. No.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And can you... Would you be able to bear out why, if we didn't put enough resources towards it and staff up as we have in other areas? Being able... (CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: What you're going to end up doing is you're going to be repairing units for families coming off the waitlist.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah.

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: And those of us already living in units, who are facing unsafe conditions, are going to have to continue to face those unsafe conditions until we identify the revenue streams, which we also have in our testimony, to actually provide comprehensive modernization.

So if you're putting in funding at a level that addresses the needs of an entire development at a time, the way that we propose it be done is that you actually tackle developments based on their Fiscal Needs Assessment.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Mm-hmm.

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: Which is something that NYCHA publishes.

So in the city, development number one is Wagner Houses in East Harlem. You can remodel and provide comprehensive modernization to Wagner with 65 empty units for $670 million. That's half of what Zohran wants to spend.

The next development then becomes Ravenswood, and they have about 112 empty units. So if you do comprehensive modernization, you are going to be addressing empty units, and those empty units will then be used to switch families in and out of

their own units as those are getting comprehensive modernization. And then when the program actually finishes with the development, the empty units are then open to the waitlist.

But I think it's really I don't even know what word to use to describe it—the idea of me having to sit in my apartment and watch someone else get what I have not been getting creates a two-tier system. And that's not something that public monies should be supporting or investing in.

So comprehensive modernization, based on fiscal needs, is the only way to ensure that all public housing tenants get what we have actually paid for the last 25 years.

Because, contrary to popular belief, it's not like I'm sitting in my unit with rent arrears. I pay my rent every month. And every development has at least 10% in that community that's earning 120% AMI. So that means that there is money being paid into NYCHA, and that money needs to start getting reimbursed to the tenants already there.

It shouldn't be a process by which you skip those of us with the biggest needs and the

largest capital deficits to then facilitate a beautiful experience for brand new families.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you. I deeply, deeply appreciate the information and the advocacy that you're bringing to the table. We've got a lot of work to do.

I look forward to continuing to talk, and I hear you on that. My parents grew up in the... Well, first they were in the Millbrook Houses and then the Woodside Houses. I spent a lot of my time in the SCAR (The Small Claims Assessment Review)... (CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: I think Woodside is like number four.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: (INAUDIBLE) Yeah. Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: And when the Tenant Coalition spoke, we agreed that the fairest way to actually do it is to go based on the fiscal needs, which tells you that tenants are so accustomed to having to wait for repairs that we are fine waiting. We've waited 15 years, five, seven, eight more years waiting—knowing that you get to keep Section 9 is worth the wait to all of us.

But what's not worth it is watching band-aids continue to be applied to public housing in New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Right. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: Mm-hmm!

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. And thank you so much to Council Member Banks, who chairs the Committee on Public Housing, for your advocacy as well. Because when we had our roundtable conversation, Ramona, I really appreciate you being here today, and remember, you basically...

(CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: Derailed...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Your advocate. No!

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: (LAUGHS)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: It was so informative, super, super informative. And these are the reasons why we have the roundtables. Because it's very...

(CROSS-TALK)

GUATU KE INI INARU [RAMONA FERREYRA]: In a positive way...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah. (LAUGHS) No, it's very eye-opening.

I want to thank you all for your advocacy. And just on the point, really quickly, that Ambur, you had brought up about Local Law 97—Just so you know, this also significantly impacts my district because we have the most number of co-ops and condos that are very much not the high-rises but garden-style, which are maybe like two stories high but very, you know, flat and wide. And so they have a whole other set of challenges that a lot of the high-rise buildings don't have in terms of compliance.

So I think we're trying to see if we can get a hearing on that. Because I totally agree with you. We agree with the goals that are put in place with Local Law 97, but it's just about how we're going to financially help folks and buildings get there.

So, if we have a hearing, we'd love to have you guys come out then, too.

Okay. Thank you all so much.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

Okay. Are y'all feeling okay? Yeah? This is exciting for me, because I love it. Time flies when you're having fun. (LAUGHS)

And not that this matters or means anything, but my staff and I did bring a bowl of candies that we put outside just to keep your sugar levels up. So if you need... but we're not allowed to eat it in here, so feel free to go outside and eat the candy.

Okay. All right. So next we have Messiah Ramkissoon from Youth Justice Network, Jason Alleyne from Exalt Youth, Anthony Springer from Urban Youth Alliance, Lily Shapiro from Fortune Society, Megan French-Marcelin from ATI, and we also have Kaisha Caraballo from D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild, and Shannon Brown also from D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild.

It's great to see you all. Feel free to start whenever you guys are ready, in whichever order. Just push it so that you see the red button. I mean the red dot. Yeah. All right.

MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN: Thank you, Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Megan French-Marcelin, and I am testifying on behalf of the New York City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition. We are a network of 12 organizations that provide community-based services to justice-involved New Yorkers. In Fiscal Year 2025, our organization served more than 69,000 New York City residents.

We appreciate the Administration's restoration of funding for ATIs and reentry services in the Executive Budget, including increases of $3 million and $5.9 million, respectively.

These investments reflect a commitment to the evidence-based public safety strategies that reduce reliance on incarceration and strengthen communities. However, additional investment is needed, and the fiscal case is clear.

Riker's Island costs over $500,000 per person per year. Meanwhile, a recent fiscal analysis of the programs in our coalition showed that ATIs generate more than $60 million in jail savings each year and more than $70 million in state prison costs each year. Put another way, for every dollar invested in ATIs, the City realizes approximately $4.70 in savings.

We therefore are urging the Administration to add an additional 10 million to ATIs and reentry services, respectively, and the City Council to build on the Administration's commitment by providing an additional $2.4 million in discretionary funding to the Coalition through the ATI and Reentry Programs Initiatives, so we can scale these programs and serve New Yorkers in communities better. Thank you.

JASON ALLEYNE: Good afternoon, Committee Members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

My name is Jason Alleyne, Chief Program Officer at Exalt. Exalt serves justice-impacted youth aged 15 to 19, many of whom are chronically disengaged from their schools, over-aged and under-credited, and reading at a fourth-grade level.

Our powerful model, comprised of tangible skill development classes, paid internships, and a robust alumni network, equips our youth with the tools and experience necessary to not only avoid recidivism but truly experience the best that life has to offer—because that is what our young people deserve.

Utilizing this cross-sector approach, Exalt has achieved remarkable results with young people that, in many ways, society at large has not. We are proud to say that 75% of the young people who come to us with open court cases have their sentences reduced or dismissed; 98% are on track to graduate by age 20; and even two years after graduating from our program, 95% do not recidivate.

This is a huge savings to our city and state, as the estimated cost per year to incarcerate a young person ranges from $266,000 to as high as $892,000. Exalt's model is conservatively 18 to as much as 60 times less expensive than incarceration, providing government billions in savings.

We applaud the restoration of funding for alternatives to incarceration programs and reentry services in the Executive Budget, including increases of $3.03 million and $5.9 million, respectively.

These investments represent an important commitment to community-based public safety strategies that reduce reliance on incarceration and support New Yorkers in building stable and productive lives.

At the same time, additional investment is needed to bring these programs to scale. A recent Fiscal Impact Analysis conducted by the Data Collaborative for Justice found that the Coalition services generated more than $60 million in savings for New York City by reducing reliance on incarceration at Rikers Island, demonstrating that investments in community-based alternatives produce both fiscal and public safety benefits.

We urge the City Council to build on the Administration's commitment to providing an additional (TIMER) $2.4 million in discretionary funding through the Alternative to Incarceration Reentry programs. The investment would enable our 12 coalition organizations to serve more New Yorkers and further expand access to effective community-based alternatives that promote safety, stability, and opportunity.

LILY SHAPIRO: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee on Finance, for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Lily Shapiro, and I am Policy Counsel at the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the Fortune Society.

I submitted written testimony, but I want to amplify three issues:

In Fiscal Year 2025, we served more than 18,000 New Yorkers through our broad array of programs, including more than 1,000 people who participated in our alternative to incarceration programs. That same year, 83% of those participants successfully completed their ATI programming, and 92% successfully completed gun diversion programming.

So, we are proud to be a member of the New York City ATI Reentry Coalition, and we applaud the restoration of funding for ATI and reentry services in the Executive Budget, including increases of $3.03 million and $5.9 million, respectively.

But more is needed to bring these programs to scale and expand our collective reach. The Data Collaborative for Justice recently found that our collective services generated more than $60 million in savings for the City by reducing reliance on incarceration, demonstrating that investments in community-based alternatives produce both fiscal and public safety benefits. So, we urge the Council to build on the Administration's commitment by providing

an additional $2.4 million in discretionary funding through the ATI and Reentry Program Initiative.

And we also urge the Administration and Council to make the following other investments:

Restoring $9.75 million in FY27 for NYC benefits and to baseline that funding through FY32 for this vital partnership between DSS and community-based organizations, including Fortune. This is especially critical for people who are navigating the already vulnerable period of reentry. And as new work requirements and shorter windows for re-certification go into effect under H.R.1, our work will be all the more critical.

And finally, as co-leader of the Fair Chance for Housing Coalition, we are deeply concerned about the proposed $1.5 million in cuts to the New York City Commission on Human Rights. Without robust public education and the enforcement that only CCHR can provide, the (TIMER) Fair Chance for Housing Law will be an empty promise to people with conviction histories.

We urge the Administration and Council to correct course and instead increase funding by $10 million.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today.

ANTHONY SPRINGER: Good afternoon. My name is Anthony Springer. I am the Senior Advocacy Associate for Urban Youth Alliance, or might be better known as Bronx Connect.

Bronx Connect is a Bronx-based juvenile justice organization serving court-involved and at-risk youth. Since 1999, we have served thousands of youth and young adults facing charges in the Bronx.

From its inception, our program has addressed the epidemic of juvenile incarceration among youth in New York City.

Over the past few years, we've expanded to Manhattan and Staten Island.

As a part of New York City's crisis management system and a proud member of the ATI Coalition, we have served the Bronx and the City by providing Cure Violence Services, gun violence school-based prevention, community therapeutic services, and employment services. I could go on and on with all the services that we do provide.

But we have seen what works, and one of the things that we've seen work around the city is providing access to opportunities, because, as we heard the young people say earlier, they didn't have access to opportunities.

And what we believe is that resourcing community-based alternatives is going to be a help towards that. So we applaud the commitment to the restoration of funding for alternatives to incarceration programming and reentry services in the Executive Budget. Those increases are $3 million and $5.9 million, respectively.

We believe that these investments represent an important commitment to community-based public safety strategies and reduce reliance on incarceration and support New Yorkers by building stable, productive lives.

We have already seen that incarceration is not the answer, which is why we're also members of the Closed Rikers Coalition because we understand that resourcing communities is what works. We see through a lot (TIMER) of these organizations that we're looking at 90% to 97% of people who are in the

programs not going back to the lives that they lived before.

Here at Bronx Connect, we have seen that percentage at around 93%. So we know what works, and we thank you for your time.

KAISHA CARABALLO: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee. My name is Kaisha Caraballo, and I'm the Senior Construction Trainer at D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild out in Brooklyn. I've been with the organization for about a year now and intend to be here for much longer.

Working with this organization has given me purpose again. It's afforded me the opportunity to continue practicing in my trade. This time as an instructor, I can pass on the skills and knowledge that I gained through my work experience.

I've built relationships with my students that may very well last a lifetime. I intend to be a mentor for them for as long as they may need. They come to YouthBuild to find purpose, better themselves, and find a safe space.

Many of our students come to us carrying challenges that most people don't see. Some have struggled academically, some have experienced

instability, and many simply need someone to believe in them and give them an opportunity. YouthBuild gives them that opportunity.

Although they may come to us to learn skills, I've learned from them every day. I practice patience, active listening, and empathy daily, and have enhanced these skills since joining D.R.E.A.M.S. I've watched students grow in confidence, learn to work as a team, take pride in their accomplishments, and begin to truly believe in themselves again.

What makes YouthBuild special is that we're not just teaching construction job readiness. We're helping young people build structure, discipline, accountability, and hope for their future. We're helping them see that they're capable of more.

Honoring the Collaborative's request would ensure that future students have the opportunity to find that safe space that YouthBuild provides. It would ensure that programs like ours can continue giving young adults the support, education, training, and mentorship they need to succeed.

An investment in YouthBuild is an investment in young people who are willing to work

hard for a better future. It's an investment in safer communities, stronger neighborhoods, and opportunities that can change the course of someone's life.

I ask that you support the YouthBuild Collaborative's request for $2.1 million in funding so that we can continue doing this important work and continue showing young people that they're worthy of opportunity, (TIMER) support, and success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SHANNON BROWN: Good afternoon, all. My name is Shannon Brown, and I'm the senior manager of youth advocacy at D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild, and I stand before you today not just to speak but to advocate for young people whose stories are often overlooked, misunderstood, and underestimated.

I'm here to urge you to invest $2.1 million into YouthBuild, specifically the D.R.E.A.M.S. YouthBuild program, because what you fund today determines who leads tomorrow.

Our youth are not statistics. They are survivors of systems that were never designed for their success. Many have faced unstable housing,

underserved, under-resourced schools, community violence, and limited access to opportunities. They've been labeled at risk, disconnected, or even the least of these.

But I challenge that narrative today because despite every barrier placed in front of them, they are still showing up. They are still choosing growth over defeat. They are still choosing purpose over pain. They are still choosing to be determined to win. And that's where YouthBuild steps in.

This program does more than educate; it transforms. It creates a pathway where there once was none. It equips young people with job training, academic support, leadership development, and most importantly, belief in themselves.

But let's be clear: programs don't change lives. People do. Behind every success story in YouthBuild are educators, caseworkers like myself, and trainers who pour into these young people daily. They are mentors, advocates, counselors, and sometimes the only consistent support system these youths have ever known. They don't just teach skills;

they rebuild confidence, restore dignity, and remind these young people that their lives matter.

Funding the Youth Build Dreams at $2.1 million is not an expense. It is an investment in reducing recidivism in (TIMER) workforce development and safer, stronger communities, and most importantly, an investment in human potential.

Give them the resources. Give them programs that support them. Give them hope, a real chance to grow. And let history show that when faced with the opportunity to uplift the least of these, you choose to act. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. Council Member Epstein?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Yeah, I just want to be clear about what you're asking for. Is that renewal of existing funding or new money? I just wasn't 100% clear.

SHANNON BROWN: Yeah, renewal of existing...

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Right. Is there anyone who is asking for new funding?

MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN: We are. We're asking for a $2.4 million increase to the ATI and

Reentry Discretionary Fund over our 12 organizations—$200,000 per organization.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So $2.1 million new money?

MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN: $2.4 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So, $2.4 million new. All right. Thank you.

MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN: Of course.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Do any other council members have questions? No, you guys are good. Okay.

I just want to say thank you for all of your work, because I am probably going to sound very repetitive throughout this public hearing, but prevention, prevention, prevention. And we know that these programs are life-saving. And we also know that it saves the city and state dollars. I mean, the cost of your programming that you all do through ATI and YouthBuild versus what it costs to keep someone in Rikers doesn't make any sense. So I just want to thank you all for your work. It's very difficult work, so I appreciate all that you all do in the community, and we're very grateful. So, thank you.

Okay, next up we have Gloria Kim from HSC, Adama Bah, Margaret Martin, Alla Shagalova,

Justin Wood, Kelly Agnew-Barajas, Vladimir, oh, Vladimir from the (INAUDIBLE) Immigration Coalition.

So, if y'all can come up. I feel like, I don't know if I'm dating myself, but I feel like this is Price is Right, where it's like, "Come on down from the balcony." I know it's taking some time for you guys.

Oh, perfect. Okay. And feel free to begin, whichever. I don't know, Gloria, if you want to go first or if you want to start on the other end.

GLORIA KIM: Okay. Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee on Finance.

My name is Gloria Kim. I'm the Director of Policy at the Human Services Council. We're a membership organization representing 180 human services providers in New York.

First, I'd like to thank the Council for its strong support of Intro-0452. The fact that 28 council members have signed on demonstrates a clear commitment to addressing the longstanding wage inequities faced by human services workers. These workers carried our city through the pandemic and continue to serve communities under difficult circumstances. Yet many remain significantly

underpaid compared to their public sector counterparts. They deserve fair compensation for the critical work they do.

We also appreciate the implementation of the final year of the human services cost of living adjustment this July. However, we urge the City to establish a multi-year COLA structure moving forward. Predictable and recurring adjustments would help providers retain staff, manage rising costs, and ensure continuity of care for New Yorkers.

At the same time, these investments can't achieve their full impact unless the City addresses its contracting crisis. Too many nonprofits continue operating programs for months, sometimes more than a year, before contracts are registered and payments are received. Providers are forced to cover payroll, rent, and program expenses while waiting for reimbursement, placing enormous strain on already stretched organizations. Nonprofits need a system that treats them as essential partners, not organizations trapped in administrative delays.

We thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to strengthening both the

human services workforce and the communities they serve. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. And if you guys could just say your name and organization before you start.

CAROLYN CONROY: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Lee, Speaker Menin, and Members of the Finance Committee for convening this hearing.

My name is Carolyn Conroy, and I am the Senior Policy Director at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella organization representing over 200 immigrant-serving members and partner organizations.

Immigrants make up 36% of New Yorkers and nearly half of our workforce. Yet, our communities continue to face unprecedented attacks, from federal overreach to the affordability crisis.

To ensure that New York remains welcoming, inclusive, and resilient, we call on the Council to make bold and smart investments in services that keep our communities safe and our cities running. We urge the Council to protect all

New Yorkers and include the following allocations in the budget:

• For protecting New Yorkers from federal overreach, $188 million for immigration legal services, including $4.5 million for rapid response legal collaboratives

• $40 million for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative

• $40 million for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Program

• $18.5 million for the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative, as well as $80 million in investments in communities directly impacted by immigration enforcement

• To ensure civic and political inclusion, we call for $60 million in investments in the 2030 Census City Counts Campaign, funding for naturalization programs, the Human Rights Commission, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

• We call for an expansion of Promise NYC to $50 million to secure childcare for immigrant families and $50 million for adult literacy.

• For health, expand access health funding to $4.5 million to educate communities about health access coverage and benefits.

• Invest $200 million in NYC Care and $100 million for Community Food Connection.

• Allocate $4 million for the Immigrant Family Communications Initiative

• $8 million for English language learner instructional specialists for high-need schools

• $800 million in the Capital Budget for improving school building quality and conditions.

• We are also calling for a $5.8 million investment in the NYC (TIMER) Community Interpreter Bank. Thank you very much.

ADAMA BAH: Good afternoon. My name is Adama Bah. I'm the Executive Director and Founder of Afrikana.

I'm here today because too many of the communities we serve continue to fall through the cracks of systems that claim to serve all New Yorkers.

New York City spends thousands of dollars on language line services. Yet, despite this

investment, many Black immigrants still cannot access services in a language they understand.

We routinely see Pula speakers offered French interpretation, Soninke speakers expected to communicate in English and Wolof, and Bambara speakers unable to find interpretation at all.

Language access is not simply about translating words. It's about ensuring that people can understand their rights, access health care, enroll their children in school, secure housing, and find employment with dignity.

The current approach is not working. It is easier to approve French because it's viewed as a convenient solution, but French is not the first language for many African immigrants. A person who speaks Pula is not automatically fluent in French.

I understand that public funding cannot be awarded based on race. However, the City can invest in organizations with demonstrated expertise serving communities that speak Pula, Wolof, Soninke, Bambara, and other underrepresented African languages. These organizations already have trusted relationships and cultural knowledge necessary to

reach communities that government systems continue to miss.

We also need dedicated workforce development funding. Too often, immigrant workforce programs are designed around communities that already have significant infrastructure and language support—while Black immigrant communities remain underserved. We need workforce training, licensing assistance, job placement, and career pathways that are accessible in languages our communities actually speak.

I also want to address halal food access. Halal is not an ethnicity. Halal is a religious requirement. Too often, conversations about halal food contracts erase the presence of Black Muslims, despite the fact that Black Muslims have been part of New York City for generations. Black Muslims include African Americans whose families have been here for centuries as well. (TIMER)

I also want to raise an issue about DYCD and 21-year-olds. So once they're in a shelter system and they age out, they're being kicked out into the street with no services. It's unfair.

And lastly, I want to say I will continue to raise these issues until there are committed dollars to Black immigrant-led orgs. Thank you.

ALLA SHAGALOVA: Hello, my name is Alla Shagalova, and I'm the Assistant Vice President of Resettlement Integration Services at Commonpoint Point New York.

My testimony today is in support of the new New York City Immigrant Settlement Initiative (NYC-IRI). Thank you for this opportunity.

NYC-IRI is an initiative of a coalition of five established immigrant-serving and refugee resettlement organizations: Catholic Charities, Community Services, Church World Service, CAMBA, Commonpoint, and the International Rescue Committee.

The Coalition is collectively seeking $5 million, $1 million for each of the five coalition members, to respond to the urgent and evolving needs of at least 4,000 immigrant New Yorkers in a coordinated citywide immigrant resettlement effort.

NYC-IRI is designed to bring resettlement-informed case management and other services not just to refugees but to all immigrants, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, undocumented

immigrants, and mixed-status families. It includes populations that are often unable to access traditional resettlement programs and public benefits.

NYC-IRI focuses on meeting urgent stabilization needs while also supporting integration and self-sufficiency through comprehensive assessment intake, cultural orientation, family strengthening, individualized economic mobility planning, and formal employment services for those authorized to work.

We commend the City Council for supporting immigration legal services at a time of unprecedented changes in immigration policies and increased enforcement, and we want to highlight the importance of wraparound social services that will allow immigrants to focus on their legal challenges while NYCCLI addresses their basic needs such as access to food, housing, medical care, and other important needs. (TIMER)

It is a critical and simultaneously opportune time to support the NYCCLI Initiative, while the coalition member organizations still have highly experienced linguistically and culturally

competent staff, many with lived immigrant or refugee experience like myself.

In light of massive federal funding cuts, without NYCCLI, this invaluable resource may be lost. Thank you.

MARGARET MARTIN: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and members of the Committee. Thank you so much for inviting our testimony today.

My name is Margaret Martin. I am a Co-Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities Community Services. I'm joined by my fellow co-director, who will also be testifying.

First, I want to thank the City Council for its investments in New York's immigrant communities. Across our programs at Catholic Charities, we serve tens of thousands of New York City's immigrants every year, and the increased investment last year has been critical to our ability to continue providing those services.

We have submitted written testimony detailing a number of discretionary requests to City Council. I'm going to highlight just some of those today, regarding immigration legal services.

First, we have submitted, together with coalition members, a request for sustained and increased ICARE funding through the UMFI Initiative funded by City Council. City Council increased the funding significantly last year for Catholic Charities; it was almost $3.7 million.

We are requesting this year for Catholic Charities alone $3.725 million. And our other six coalition members, as well as the separate ICARE nonprofit, have their own requests.

Together, the Coalition members work diligently to serve as many children, both unaccompanied and with families, in New York City as we possibly can.

And just to give you some sense of what this funding has achieved:

As a federal contractor serving unaccompanied children, we were at risk of orphaning hundreds of cases last year when the federal funding became so unstable, and we lost a lot of it. Because of the New York City Council, we were able to keep all of those cases. We are representing those children today, and we continue to accept new cases, which is particularly critical at this time when

immigration judges are ordering children removed even when they have approved SIJS before USCIS.

We are filing appeals for those children, and without us to represent them, they would have removal orders, and they would be subject to deportation.

And I refer you to our written testimony for my other discretionary request. Thank you so much for your support.

KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee. I am Kelly Agnew-Barajas. I'm the other Co-Director of our Immigrant and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities. Thank you for your commitment and for this hearing today.

We at Catholic Charities have been working to serve immigrant New Yorkers for over 75 years with access to legal services, resettlement support, workforce programs, and critical resources that promote stability, safety, and self-sufficiency. We're grateful for your support.

As the need for services continues to grow, the City turns to nonprofit providers to provide these critical supports. We urge the Council

to invest not only in immigrant communities but also to think about the infrastructure that nonprofits need to make these services possible. It's critical to adjust funding levels to keep pace with rising costs, and in particular, since MOIA has to work with other city agencies to contract with our agency as well as all others—In particular, the indirect cost rate is capped at only 10%, putting us in a very challenging position to further subsidize the work of the City's investments.

In specific program areas, our counsel asked for continued investment in our adult literacy and workforce development areas. So, more than 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency, but according to NYCCAL (New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy), only two to three percent have access to the classes that they want to take. So, maintaining support for adult literacy initiatives and adult literacy forward is critical.

In addition, Catholic Charities requests $5 million, as my colleague Alla with Commonpoint New York explained, for our New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative, NYC-IRI. This is a collaborative effort among the City's five

resettlement agencies to serve 4,000 vulnerable immigrants with social services and employment services. (TIMER)

Lastly, our day labor workforce initiative requests $4.97 million across our coalition to continue our important work with worker safety, safety training, outreach, and worker protection—at a time when our immigrant enforcement is making folks feel as vulnerable and exposed as ever. So, thank you very much.

JUSTIN WOOD: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair and Members of the Council, for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Justin Wood. I'm the Director of Policy at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, or NYLPI.

As you know, New York's immigrant communities, disability community, community-based nonprofit organizations, and environmental justice communities have been under huge strain in the past year. We have a federal administration that has marginalized all of these groups with political attacks, revocation of funding, and other hostile tactics intended to chill advocacy and cut services

to people in need. We are therefore very grateful for the Council's support of our work and our colleagues' work on immigrant health, on nonprofit defense, on mental health peer support and other initiatives, and we respectfully request enhancements of these initiatives in the next fiscal year.

We share your deep concern that life-saving services and infrastructure are under threat from federal cuts to Medicaid, education, renewable energy programs, and infrastructure, all enacted in H.R.1 of 2025.

In that spirit, we'll submit a written statement with a number of substantive budget priorities grouped by City Council Committee. I'll just read off 10 of them now.

These recommendations include:

• First, fully funding the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

• Number two, strengthening special education services and investing in staffing and support for students with disabilities.

• Third, fully funding home resiliency and sewer infrastructure upgrades in disadvantaged, flood-prone communities.

• Fourth, ensuring that DCAS can create a detailed plan for the redevelopment of Riker's Island for sustainability and resiliency purposes.

• Fifth, expanding the City's successful energy demand response program. It's also a DCAS recommendation.

• Sixth, ensuring the City can electrify public and publicly contracted fleets and meet the mandates of Local Law 140 of 2023.

(TIMER) Just four more:

• Seventh is transforming mental health crisis response, and we think major improvements are needed to the B-HEARD program.

• Eighth is continuing citywide implementation of the commercial waste zone system; this is sanitation and launching a pilot program to accept commercial waste at city-owned facilities, the marine transfer stations.

• Ninth is extending the Fair Fares program to include Access-A-Ride users over the age of 65.

• And, finally, restoring the accessible dispatch program at the Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: All very good recommendations. And, yes, I think for the most part on the Council, as you all know, and thanks to your advocacy, these are many of the issues that we're trying to fight for. New York City Benefits, we know, is a huge one that is going to potentially cause a lot of issues with the services that our community receives and that you all provide. Also, pay parity, the indirect cost rates, all of the things. Legal services are also top of mind, and the roundtable conversations have been super helpful.

I just want to again say thank you all for the work you do on the ground as well as your advocacy.

I don't know if any council members have questions? Okay, thank you all so much. Thank you.

Okay. And next up we have Sol Simbana, Prakhar Verma, Michael Sasy, Harman Kaur, Shirley Penafiel, Ali Goldfarb, Felix Emerson-Simpson. Oh, wait, no, I think they went already.

I love it when our youth speak and come and testify. So, thank you all. Okay. Do you want to start first? Go ahead.

ALI GOLDFARB: Hi, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Ali Goldfarb, and I am the Trails Program Manager for Trust Republic Land in New York. Trust Republic Land's mission is to connect people to nature, ensuring that everyone, regardless of zip code, has access to the outdoors.

Across New York City, we work to expand access to parks, trails, and green space, particularly in neighborhoods that have historically lacked this critical infrastructure. We transform asphalt schoolyards into neighborhood parks, repurpose underutilized land, and conserve land, as we did in Staten Island when we protected Pouch Camp.

Today, I want to thank the City of New York for its continued commitment to advancing the QueensWay, particularly the first section of the project, the Metropolitan Hub. The planned groundbreaking of the Met Hub represents a major milestone after years of planning, advocacy, and community engagement. We are grateful to the city, New York City Parks, NYC EDC, elected officials, and community partners for their leadership in moving this transformative project toward construction.

Once complete, the Met Hub will provide new opportunities for recreation, outdoor learning, active transportation, and community gathering while serving as the first tangible step toward the larger vision of the QueensWay—a three-and-a-half-mile linear park and trail connecting neighborhoods in Queens.

For many residents, especially in communities with limited access to parks and open space, this investment will create safer connections to nature, recreation, and local businesses.

At Trust for Public Land, we remain deeply committed to engaging communities along the corridor. Community input shaped the original QueensWay plan through hundreds of stakeholder meetings, and that commitment continues today through public tours, cleanups, school programs, volunteer events, and partnerships with local organizations.

As the project moves forward, we will continue working to ensure residents are informed, involved, and have meaningful opportunities to help shape the future of the QueensWay.

While we celebrate the progress of the Met Hub, we also encourage the City to continue

advancing future sections of the QueensWay. Completing additional phases (TIMER) will improve access to Forest Park, strengthen connections between neighborhoods, and bring the full benefits of the project to hundreds of thousands of Queens residents.

Thank you again for your leadership and investment in the QueensWay.

PRAKHAR VERMA: Hello, Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Prakhar Verma, and I am a student at Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School in Forest Hills, Queens.

I wanted to thank the City of New York for supporting the QueensWay project, which will benefit my school and my community.

This QueensWay will change the underutilized corridor of the abandoned rail line into a fun and fully accessible public space. The public space will advance environmental sustainability, strengthen community ties through meeting, and preserve biodiversity by revitalizing native plant species.

Through conversations with stakeholders and case studies in my classes and research, I have

learned the importance of civic participation and how quality planning, environmental shifts, and community involvement can create positive impacts on the lives of future generations for years to come. Our ecosystem will thrive, and that will spread awareness.

We can also engage in activities such as gardening and taking long walks, which is one of my personal favorite hobbies. The cool thing is that the Metropolitan Expeditionary Campus is connected right to the QueensWay. So students wouldn't need permission slips to enter. This means that we can create advancements in education, such as creating outdoor classes and, you know, creating fieldwork, and this creates a huge benefit and allows students to have more opportunities.

I'm super excited for the QueensWay, as I will finally have a park that is near my house, have an efficient way to meet up with my best friend who lives farther away, and have a safer way to get to school.

At the same time, it will also reduce the traffic that leads to a substantial amount of

pollution, creating a safer environment and a breath of fresh air.

Thank you, New York City, for its commitment to building the first section of the QueensWay, the Metropolitan Hub. I look forward to continued City investment in sections of QueensWay to create more safe, accessible green space for all to use. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

MICHAEL SASY: INAUDIBLE) and Members of the Committee. Thank you for giving me the chance to speak today.

My name is Michael Sasy, and I'm a student at Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School in Forest Hills. I'm here today to share why the QueensWay is important to me, my school, and my community.

My school is located right next to where the first section of the QueensWay, the Metro Hub, is being built. So, this project is important to me and many other students.

Right now, there are three and a half miles of abandoned railway that are not being used. The QueensWay would turn the space into something that students, families, and community members can

enjoy every day. It would create a place where people can walk, run, bike, and spend time outdoors.

As a track athlete, I know how important it is to have a safe place to train and stay active. The QueensWay would give students like me a safe, car-free place to run outside of school practices. It could be used for training, recovery runs, walking, or just staying active on weekends and during school breaks. Not every student has access to athletic facilities outside of school. So, having a free public space where anyone can exercise would make a big difference.

Running is also about more than just fitness. It helps people manage stress and clear their minds. Having more green spaces near our school would give students a place to relax, enjoy nature, and take a break from the pressures of school. It could also bring the community together through events, fitness programs, and activities for people of all ages.

I appreciate the City's investment in building the first phase of the QueensWay, the Metro Hub. I believe the QueensWay will make our community healthier, greener, and more connected.

I respectfully ask the City Council to continue supporting funding for this project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HARMAN KAUR: Good afternoon, Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Harman Kaur, and I am a student at MELS. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Last week, I co-hosted a town hall at my school where panelists talked about the impact that the QueensWay could have on the community, showing my peers what the abandoned railway track could turn into: a great park.

As a student and community member, I care about having safe and welcoming spaces where people can walk, exercise, and socialize with one another. My classmates said that they were excited about a place where they can hang out, meet people, and play sports.

In my neighborhood, there are not enough green spaces where families or students can safely enjoy the outdoors. If we have access to parks and walking paths, it can support our physical health and our mental well-being. This can also strengthen community connections.

I love to go for walks while listening to music or going for walks with my friends to admire flowers or to bond. These activities make me feel super calm and peaceful. And when you see other people doing the same thing, it proves you're not alone. The QueensWay could also provide opportunities for learning, volunteering, exercise, and exploring new hobbies.

Funding is important because it will help turn this vision into a reality for future generations. I politely ask our City leaders to support funding for the QueensWay project. Thank you for your time.

SOL SIMBANA: Hello, Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Sol Simbana, and I'm a student of MELS in Forest Hills, Queens.

I am here to thank the City of New York for their support of the QueensWay, a project that will directly benefit my school and my community.

I think QueensWay is important because of the health benefits, giving people a place to socialize, walk, and play sports. Also important are

the environmental benefits for plants and wildlife, supporting biodiversity.

I am excited about QueensWay because students and other community members can socialize, connect, and share ideas.

Also, it will be a safe path for MELS students and others in Queens Metropolitan to get to school.

I would like to thank New York City for building the first section of the QueensWay. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

SHIRLEY PENAFIEL: Hello, Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Shirley Penfield, and I am a student at Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School in Forest Hills, Queens.

I am here today to thank the City of New York for their support of the QueensWay, a project that will directly benefit my school and my community.

I think the QueensWay is important because, as a student, the amount of work I get is stressful. But whenever I feel overwhelmed, I go to a

park. Seeing the birds and flowers and spending time with my friends and family there decreases my stress because for a couple of hours I forget about it.

I am excited about the QueensWay because it's going to be a place where I, my friends, family, and people I care about can spend time together.

This park can help me stay active outdoors instead of being inside on my phone all day. It will also bring joy to our community by providing a place where families, friends, and neighbors can come together to have a fun time.

I would like to thank New York City for its commitment to building the first section of the QueensWay, the Metropolitan Hub.

I hope the City will continue investing in future sections so that even more people can benefit from safe, accessible green space. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you all so much for taking time out, especially from your school day. And thank you so much; we love Trust for Public Land and all the work that you guys do to improve our schools and playgrounds and public spaces.

So, thank you all so much for your advocacy, and this is what it means to participate and have a... Oh, I didn't see you there. Go ahead, Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have a question: we have a bill that passed that said a lot of the school playgrounds that are closed should be open in the summer and on weekends. Do you think that's a good idea? Some of them are already. We just want more. So, I want to hear what you have to say. Don't be shy.

HARMAN KAUR: That sounds really good.

(LAUGHTER)

HARMAN KAUR: But the reason we are here is for QueensWay. And I feel like QueensWay is a way better because people in our school already know about this project, and we're here to advocate so we can get this project done. Well, we have the project already, like, section--already, like some--but I think it would be really good if we, as you, the City, as you guys, could continue building it because I think this would be very beneficial for the school and the community. So even though there are other parks and other places for the summer and the school,

I think the QueensWay will be very beneficial for our school.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Awesome. Okay. Thank you all so much for coming in to testify. Yay!

Okay. Great. So next panel we have Tito Delgado, Grace Lord, Chloe Jacobs, Diego Figueroa, Lydia Andre, Metin Sarci, and Sandy Reiburn.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You have one of my former interns testifying. I just want to let you know.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Nice. I feel like everyone's your former intern.

Perfect. So, I'm just going to say again: Tito Delgado, Grace Lord, Chloe Jacobs, Diego Figueroa, Lydia Andre, Metin Sarci, and Sandy Reiburn. Yes, go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED: Hi, I'm here as a long-term resident of Chelsea, a member of the Chelsea Public Housing Coalition, and a taxpayer who expects accountability and transparency from city government, as I'm sure we all do.

I'm also here to ask the city council to reallocate the $ 1.5 billion in the Executive Budget that is currently going to HPD to fund RAD/PACT

privatization of public housing, and to change that and instead put it into Section 9 housing and to NYCHA for comprehensive renovation and to immediately improve the lives of Section 9 tenants who have been waiting years for the safe, decent housing they deserve.

This administration sees RAD/PACT as a solution to the deferred maintenance that NYCHA residents have suffered. But I and many others see it as an extraction mechanism for the profit-seeking, private-sector developers.

Make no mistake about it, Section 8 project-based housing is profitable. Project-based Section 8 developers like Related (phonetic) and others extract maximum taxpayer dollars from HUD because they set their own rents for the prices that they receive subsidies for.

In Chelsea, they will set the rent for a one-bedroom close to $5,000, and they will get that spread directly from the federal government.

They extract bonding opportunities from city and state governments again using taxpayer dollars.

And at FBC in Chelsea, they are undergoing the ultimate extraction con, because they are taking 60 to 70% of public land on which they plan to develop market-rate and luxury housing, while they put all of the public housing residents into tall high-rise buildings—— an approach to public (TIMER) housing that has failed over and over again.

I must ask you, as a taxpayer who cares about public housing, why are we using our tax dollars to line the pockets of private developers instead of helping public housing tenants now? Thank you.

CHLOE JACOBS: Good afternoon. My name is Chloe Jacobs, and I'm here to ask you to reject the current proposal in the budget that would allocate $1.5 billion for the Section 8 and RAD/PACT conversions and instead fund Section 9 and comprehensive modernization of NYCHA units.

I am a third-generation resident of the Chelsea neighborhood in Manhattan and grew up across the street from the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses public housing complex. Over the years, I have formed incredibly close bonds with the tenants. We are one united community in Chelsea, and those of us not

living in NYCHA housing care deeply about the future of the tenants.

Currently, Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses are slated for demolition, and in their place, a massive luxury housing compound built by the same billionaire developers of Hudson Yards will take its place.

This proposal is the clear mass displacement of the only predominantly Black and Latino community in District 3. The residents of Elliot-Chelsea are currently under Section 9 funding, which is the main guarantee of housing protection for these tenants as well as close to 400,000 NYCHA residents throughout the city. If the demolition goes through, the residents of Elliot-Chelsea will be forced to be put under Section 8 housing, which has far, far less protection for tenants who are already incredibly vulnerable.

There is currently around $ 1.5 billion allocated for what is known as the RAD/PACT conversion, which would facilitate the forced transfer of NYCHA tenants from Section 9 to Section 8 housing. That money should instead be going towards funding Section 9 housing. The money is there, but it

is on you guys, our elected officials, to make the principal decision to fund Section 9 and keep public housing public.

I am proud to call myself a New Yorker, but if this demolition and privatization of public housing goes through (TIMER), that pride will diminish. I don't want to live in a city that allocates $ 1.5 billion to a privatization scheme that harms people of color while still touting itself as quote unquote "prioritizing affordability".

As New Yorkers, we are all in this together, and that means protecting the most vulnerable among us, and that is NYCHA tenants. The demand is clear: Fund Section 9 and save public housing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. And really quickly, before we go on to the next speaker, Lexi Petersen. Are you here? Because I think you're... Okay, perfect. You're also part of this panel. Go ahead. Sorry about that.

DIEGO FIGUEROA: Good afternoon. My name is Diego Figueroa, and I'm a college student and former Gale[Brewer] intern.

I've lived on the west side of Manhattan my entire life, and I've been heavily involved in the fight to stop the demolition of the Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses, a project that the Mayor seeks to accelerate through this budget.

Rather than investing in comprehensive modernization for NYCHA tenants, this administration has opted to use taxpayer dollars to fund the privatization of around 62,000 units of genuinely affordable Section 9 housing and convert them to Section 8. There's about $1.5 billion earmarked in the budget for the next two years that will fund the RAD/PACT conversion.

I testify before you today, urging this committee and the Council at large to divert this funding from HPD to Section 9 for comprehensive modernization.

Public housing is the true bastion of affordability in this city. For too long, developers have lined their pockets off the backs of working-class people and communities of color. They preach a desperate urge to build as much new housing as humanly possible with no regard for the people who live in neighborhoods that they seek to topple.

Thousands of tenants live at Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses. They are real people with real voices with real stories. Their community is sacred to them and remains one of the last bits of authentic New York on the West Side. I refuse to sit by while wealthy transplants, gentrifiers, and yuppies tell them that their homes are not worth saving, especially when we have money to fund Section 9. This plan is not about creating more affordable housing. It is about gentrifying the neighborhood and turning Chelsea and, therein, the entire city into the next Dubai.

Stop the displacement. Stop the demolition (TIMER) and fund Section 9. Save Section 9 and keep public housing public.

GRACE LORD: Hello, my name is Grace Lord, and I'm a 19-year-old student at NYU testifying on the Fiscal Year 2027 budget.

Growing up, I've witnessed a progressive erasure of culture from the West Village that has gone hand in hand with increased privatization and the closure of community pillars such as beloved pools and recreational centers. I'm now witnessing this continue to happen across the city at the hands

of my own school and with the blessing of New York City officials.

This is not a hearing about numbers. It is a hearing about who gets to remain in New York City. For the amount of vacant housing in this city, there are too many New Yorkers who have been pushed further and further from their homes or, worse, have ended up on the streets or have faced death as a result of displacement. You are now being offered a chance to counteract this with the recommitting of $1.5 billion of taxpayer money from RAD/PACT to Section 9.

I do not consent to my tax money being directed toward the privatization scheme being conjured by NYCHA and their PACT partners, and I demand that the $ 1.5 billion mentioned go toward comprehensive modernization for NYCHA developments where communities have existed for ages.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of true Section 9 housing amid the rampant affordability crisis in this city and the necessity of stopping the demolition of Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses for this very same reason. We want full transparency of where our tax dollars are

going and the dignity of knowing that they are being allocated toward the public good. Thank you.

SANDY REIBURN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair.

I'm here from "the hood" from Brooklyn because I care about public housing and the precedent that this will set. And we see that residents are watching a slow-motion betrayal unfold in real time.

At the exact moment that federal housing policy is being gutted and Section 8 is being restricted by Trump's HUD, New York City instead should be fighting to protect public housing and the people who depend upon it. So the context is really important. Anybody not under a rock knows that HUD constraints and restrictions are being furthered.

An outrageous, as everyone has said, $1.5 billion dollars of public money is being positioned to move NYCHA into private developer hands. Taxpayer dollars are being used to facilitate Section 8 conversions, and I refer you to Budget Code 806 in the FY 2027 Executive Budget.

What appears to be underway is an engineered transfer of public wealth and public housing into private hands.

My demand as a New York City resident of 81 years is simple—And my heart goes out to these people because, but for the grace of God, to have my roof over my head removed if I were disabled, as many of them are, to be absolutely terrorized, and to have the city government abet it is totally unconscionable. We can't let that happen.

Direct Section 8 funding currently sitting in the HPD budget back into NYCHA for desperately needed repairs. Invest in... I don't want to say the same thing over and over again, but I reinforce and reiterate everything that people have already said.

NYCHA residents are not asking for real estate experiments. (TIMER) They are asking for funding for functioning elevators, safe apartments, reliable heat, working plumbing, and dignity. Last sentence: Protect Section 9. Stop diverting Section 8 funds. Stop balancing the budgets on the backs of NYCHA and the Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Houses residents. Don't do it.

METIN SARCI: Good afternoon, Chairs and Members of the Committee. My name is Metin Sarci, and I serve as Co-Chair of the Housing, Land Use, and

Zoning Committee for Manhattan Community Board 9. I am also an employee of the New York City Housing Authority. However, I am testifying today in my personal capacity, and my views do not necessarily represent any official policy or position.

Public housing exists because the private sector will never profit from housing low-income families. Its true purpose is to solve the challenge of housing, not to recycle failed private sector delusions.

Instead of gifting billions to private investors, this Council must invest directly in sustainable public funding sources and public social partnerships. We do not need top-down agency road shows like NYCHA in your neighborhood that treat systemic failure as a public relations issue. Instead, NYCHA must expand its programmatic footprint across the city agencies to close operational gaps. For example, graffiti remains on first houses because the city excludes NYCHA from free removal services, and NYCHA lacks the landmark-specific experience to hire specialized vendors that could easily be supplied through DCAS.

While Mayor Mamdani's block-by-block housing plan injects critical capital into physical assets, budget mandates are quietly hollowing out the social safety net inside those exact same properties.

Physical modernization is not a victory if the daycares, senior centers, and community hubs built into these developments are starved of operational staff and resources.

The block-by-block plan outlines $256 million to turn over vacant units and evaluate offline spaces for childcare. However, evaluation without immediate capital allocation is just paperwork. Many of these spaces require deep environmental remediation and severe structural repairs. Habitability does not stop at the apartment doorway. When a community space suffers a plumbing failure, an entire community loses essential services.

Finally, accountability and community trust require a shift in strategy. The administration sounds the alarm on abysmal voter turnout with resident associations, yet proposes deploying central bureaucracy behind folding tables.

I'm urging this Council to allocate baseline funding to pilot a resident management corporation program, turning resident leadership into a permanent fixture of public housing stabilization. Thank you.

LEXI PETERSEN: Hello, my name is Lexi. I moved to New York City two years ago, in August, more specifically, East Harlem, where I live in the center of the Jefferson Houses NYCHA community. And that's what it is: a community. For generations, those old brick towers have been home to residents, many of whom are older and/or retirees who hear the latest buzz on the benches out in the courtyards, connecting neighbor to neighbor. Many of them have disabilities or major medical concerns. Many are also families with children who grow up on those playgrounds. And many are everyday hardworking adults pinching pennies just to survive, relying on their community for support. These people have become my community, and as I have spent time with them, I understand that public housing is the bedrock of stability.

By choosing to let Section 9 slip away, to take public housing and sell it to the highest bidder, you are pulling the rug out from under more

people: mothers, fathers, children, sisters and brothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, families—sending them tumbling further into the crisis of poverty where our affordability crisis looks more like a choice of the rich over the working class. I shudder to think what would happen if my community were subject to the same cruel fate that you have for Fulton-Chelsea—tearing apart communities and using their own tax dollars to do it, using public money for private gain.

We are here to say that displacement and disruption do nothing but aid New York City's affordability crisis. Which is why I, along with my comrades in the New York Communist League and partners in the Chelsea Public Housing Coalition, urge you, the Council, to reallocate the $1.5 billion from HPD RAD/PACT conversion to NYCHA Section 9 capital repairs for the comprehensive modernization program.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you so much to this panel for coming out and testifying, and obviously you are all very embedded in your neighborhoods. And we appreciate you coming out and advocating on behalf of not just yourselves, but your

neighbors and folks that live in the housing. So thank you so much,

Council Member Chris Banks and I have already started having, like, side conversations about this whole thing. So we really appreciate you coming out and testifying and also educating us as well. So thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE) Demolition

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes.

Next, we have Joe Puleo, Jeremy Davis, Laura Ensler, Coleen Stevens Porcher, and Rose Kob

Okay. I don't know if you wanted to begin on this end or this end. Doesn't matter.

JOE PULEO: All right. I guess I'll start. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Good afternoon, City Council, Chair.

Today, I would like to begin by thanking the Mayor for funding the 50 urban park rangers. They've been in job jeopardy for the last eight years. We congratulate him for that, but we still need a whole lot more.

We're asking for 200 Parks Enforcement Officers. These are the officers that enforce our city parks—All 20,000 acres of parkland, including

beaches and pools throughout the city of New York, which they prioritize during the summer months.

We have never had this many PEP Officers and rangers, for that matter, in deficit. We only have a total of 300 PEPs and Rangers. So, we're at an all-time low.

So again, the rangers primarily educate the public. They do tours, they educate children, you know, and the Parks Enforcement Officers are the ones that do the actual enforcement in our parks. And we'd rather it be accomplished through education, but unfortunately, we need our Parks Enforcement. They're the front line of defense in our city parks. They're 24-hour peace officers, which means that they could issue summonses and make arrests.

Although the Police Department does a great job, the parks are not their primary responsibility. They're more reactive than proactive. Our Parks Enforcement Officers are the ones on the front line, and they also assist EMS. Whenever there's an aided or injured person, they are the ones who provide the coordinates; they coordinate with them to get to the specific area of the aided individuals.

(TIMER) Again, we're asking for 200, and I just want to mention that 100 of them will lose their jobs if this funding does not go through. So, they're in total job jeopardy. Thank you.

JEREMY DAVIS: Good afternoon, Honorable Speaker Menin, Financial Chair Lee, and distinguished Members of the New York City Council. Thank you for the privilege of appearing before you today. I would also like to thank the Mayor and the Members of this Council for your continued commitment to New York City Parks and the communities it serves.

My name is Jeremy Davis, and I proudly serve as an Associate Urban Park Ranger with the New York City Parks Enforcement Patrol.

For most of my three-year career, I was assigned to Washington Square Park, where I built relationships with the people who use that park every day.

I want to first thank the Mayor for the baseline of 50 UPR Urban Park Ranger positions, but more is needed.

Today, I respectfully request that the Council maintain our current staffing levels while funding 200 additional Parks Enforcement Patrol

Officers, including 100 permanent baseline positions, and 50 additional Urban Park Rangers dedicated to education and interpretation.

The people who use my park knew me by my name, and I knew many of them by name. They came to us with concerns, asked questions, and sought help because they trusted us. That trust is one of the greatest tools we have in keeping our parks safe.

Our work extends far beyond enforcement, though. In my career, I've administered Narcan to individuals suffering drug overdoses, helping save lives until EMS has arrived. I've also responded to violent incidents, including being among the first on scene to a stabbing, which ultimately became a homicide investigation.

Our officers also connect the vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness with outreach services and reunite lost children with their families. I myself have also assisted elderly individuals living with dementia who become lost in our parks.

We've also worked alongside our federal, local, and state partners in protecting our public shores and our waterfronts.

As the use of our parks continues to grow, so do the demands placed on those who protect them. Maintaining our current staffing levels while investing in additional Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers and UPRS is an investment in safer parks, stronger communities, and a better quality of life for every New Yorker. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ROSE KHAN: Hello, my name is Rose Khan, and I'm the Senior Policy Analyst at the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, otherwise known as The Alliance. Our mission is to prevent sexual violence and reduce the harm it causes through public education, prevention programming, advocacy for survivors, and the pursuit of legal and policy changes.

The Alliance is a member of the Sexual Assault Initiative (SAI), a citywide coalition through which the City Council supports survivor services through trainings, programming, and advocacy. We are asking for an increase in funding from the current amount of $2.07 million to $2.5 million to meet the increased need for our services.

SAI is composed of five city-based sexual violence intervention programs. In 2025 alone, we served over 5,000 survivors across all of the boroughs. We trained over 33,000 professionals, offered over 22,000 free counseling sessions, and provided 77,000 other support responses for survivors.

Sexual violence affects New Yorkers of all identities, with marginalized communities being disproportionately impacted. Demand for SAI services remains high and has continued to increase over the past year, resulting in the need for additional resources.

With increased funding, we will have the capacity to expand therapeutic and hospital services, increase stipends for safe and volunteer advocates, and expand our trainings into more communities and hospitals.

SAI's funding supports The Alliance's Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Training Institute, otherwise known as SAFETI, one of the largest New York State Department of Health-certified training programing programs for emergency departments and medical professionals in the state. SAFETI trains

doctors, nurses, and physician assistants to provide competent, compassionate, and prompt care to survivors and to conduct sexual assault forensic evidence collection and preservation. The training regarding the unique needs of survivors is not part of standard medical education, leaving many survivors without access to properly trained medical professionals. Of the 49 emergency rooms across all five boroughs, only 22 are SAFE-designated (TIMER), with the likelihood of a survivor being treated by a SAFE-trained medical professional decreasing the further away they are from Manhattan, as well as few SAFE examiners being trained to support pediatric survivors.

ROSE KOB: Chair and Committee Members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Rose Kob; I live in Brooklyn with my husband and my two children. I'm a volunteer member of the board of directors of Power of Two, a nonprofit organization that harnesses the power of the foundational parent-child bond to help children thrive and lead healthy, productive, and successful

lives. Our Executive Director, Coleen Stevens Porche, is also testifying today.

Our organization has been informed that Power of Two's Administration of Children's Services contract is proposed for complete elimination. I am devastated by this decision, and I wanted to come here today to tell you one reason why:

Power of Two provides many, many benefits to the families we serve. But I wanted to talk today about our proven record of improving the lives of mothers and caregivers of young children. One in five mothers experience some form of pregnancy-related depression or anxiety. Black and Latino mothers experience these mental health challenges at twice that rate.

Since 2015, our work with Power of Two has been demonstrated to eliminate depressive symptoms in 64% of the caregivers we serve, a result that is both meaningful and life-changing.

A mother's mental health directly shapes her child's development. When a mother is struggling, her child is affected. Caregiver depression is associated with delays in language and cognitive development, increased behavioral problems, and

deficits in social and emotional skills that follow children into the classroom and beyond. The health and well-being of mother and child are inseparable. When we invest in mothers, we invest in their children.

At a time when parents and caregivers across NYC are contending with unaffordable housing, reductions in federal food assistance, economic instability, and growing stress on family systems, our program is often one of the few consistent relationship-based supports available to families with very young children.

Without Power of Two's preventative services, families who lose access will not be redirected to equivalent care. They will go without.

At Power of Two, we can say with confidence and with evidence (TIMER) that prevention cuts will reverse the progress New York City has made to improve outcomes for New York City families. It is imperative that current prevention funding be maintained, whether through ACS or the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at $3.1 million, and modestly expanded over the next several years as the

Administration and City Council continue shaping the City's long-term strategy. Thank you.

COLEEN STEVENS PORCHER: Good afternoon. My name is Coleen Stevens Porcher. Madam Chair and City Council Members, I appreciate you giving us an audience.

I'm the Executive Director of Power of Two. Since 2015, we've partnered with more than 6,500 children and 6,000 caregivers across New York City through Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC), a highly effective, evidence-based home visiting program that strengthens caregiver-child relationships during the most important years of development.

ABC is an approved model by the Family First Prevention Services Act, Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the California Evidence-Based Clearing House for Child Welfare because the evidence demonstrates that it works.

Seventy percent of caregivers improve parental sensitivity. 64%, as you heard Rose say, experience reductions in depressive symptoms. Almost

50% of children demonstrate improvements in social-emotional well-being. And yet, we've been informed that Power of Two's contract is proposed for elimination.

I want to be clear about what this means. This is not simply a budget line being reduced. It is the dismantling of part of the prevention infrastructure that keeps families stable before crises occur.

Prevention is what happens before the emergency room visit, before the child welfare investigation, before the foster care placement, before a child enters preschool or kindergarten already struggling.

The organizations facing these cuts are not duplicating one another's work. Together, we form the first line of defense for vulnerable families across New York City.

What concerns me most is the contradiction. New York City has invested heavily in (TIMER) early childhood education and childcare and family well-being at the very same moment we're considering cuts to programs that help families benefit from investments in the first place.

There's an old saying that resonates, I'm closing, deeply, and it is appropriate to share it with you now: "You do not plant a tree for yourself. You plant it for the children who will one day sit in its shade."

We've been partners with the City for years, and we've planted wonderful trees together, and I respectfully and strongly ask that you restore prevention funding for Power of Two through either ACS or the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Once a mature tree is cut down, it takes years for another to grow. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Again, prevention, prevention, prevention.

And as you know, on the Council, we've done a lot around maternal health and maternal mental health. And there's a bill that I just introduced recently looking at postpartum depression as an actual... because there are a lot of folks who, if they are facing the criminal justice system, postpartum depression is not looked at before they actually enter. And so, I think that's a critical point that we need to look at.

I really want to thank you all for the work you're doing...And especially, of course, with SAI, that's a big initiative that the Council has been pushing as well.

Then, for Joe and Jeremy, I had a quick question for you because, as you know, we've been such a big supporter of trying to baseline the rest of the Parks funding with the PEP and Park Rangers. You had mentioned... so I know currently there are 300 total PEP Officers and Rangers. Is that correct?

JOE PULEO: I just got the numbers this morning: For UPR, we have 34 Urban Park Rangers, and we have the supervisors; AUPR's 13 of them; with UPS, those would be the PEP Officers; we have 233 officers and 51 supervisors. So, the total altogether is 267 for PEP and Ranger Officers and a total of 64 supervisors.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And then you were mentioning that it's the lowest that it's at right now, but what would you say would be a sufficient number to actually cover all the parks?

JOE PULEO: In a perfect world, we'd have thousands. Again, we have 28,000 acres, but a minimum of 450 would scratch the surface.

Right now, what you're going to have is parks with no PEP at all, primarily due to the beaches and pools. Beaches and pools get prioritized. The bulk of our forces go to those locations. So, you can have a park as big as Flushing Meadows Park with one person, just to give you an idea.

So, yeah, we're very much in very dire need of these people, and we need them now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Perfect. Thank you so much. Thank you all for your work. Thank you.

COLEEN STEVENS PORCHER: All right. Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry. Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just on that same topic, how long does it take to train? In other words, if we were another 200 in a class, how long does it take to recruit and train approximately?

JOE PULEO: It takes a few months, but usually what happens in situations like when there's an emergency, we put them out there sooner.

I'll have Jeremy explain because he's in the field right now.

JEREMY DAVIS: Council Member Brewer, from my knowledge, the training academy is about four months, but normally, in the event of an emergency funding, the Department will employ the individual as a member of the Department and then put him in a recreation center or some type of administrative role until the next academy class commences.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you very much.

JOE PULEO: And we need a pound in Manhattan. Those are our other members.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I am very aware of them. I mentioned it this morning, if you weren't over at the hearing at 250 Broadway, over and over again. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Perfect. Thank you. Thank you all.

COLEEN STEVENS PORCHER: Thank you. I hope you get a chance to go to the bathroom or eat something.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, yes. (LAUGHS)

COLEEN STEVENS PORCHER: One of our values is humanity, and I haven’t seen you leave. So, now

that my official testimony is over, I am concerned about your well-being.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: (LAUGHS) This is how we do community.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

COLEEN STEVENS PORCHER: Thank you all very much.

Next, we have, from CIDNY, we have Warren Shaw, Jennifer Choi, Molly Senack, Marilyn Galfin, Laura Jean Hawkins, and Anna Krill. I feel like Debra Markel should be part of this group, too.

I was wondering, Mike, where your card was, because you filled one out, right? Okay. Can we have... Yeah, we'll find your card, but you should join this panel, Mike Schweinsburg.

Okay, New York City of Teens with Disabilities, yes. This is a bit of a large panel. So, we're going to try to pull up some chairs.

Great. So once everyone gets settled. Hey everyone. I love this panel. Okay. I love all the panels, but yes, you want to start?

Okay. So, we're going to feel free to start on this side and then work our way down this way.

MBACKE THIAM: Yes. Hello everyone. Thank you, Chair Lee. Thank you, Chair Brewer. My name is Mbacke Thiam. I am the Housing & Health Community Organizer at the Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY). We advocate for people with disabilities in the five boroughs of New York City.

Over the last 12 months, we have served over 75,000 consumers. Our consumers rely on MOPD, the Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities, Services to live their daily lives.

New Yorkers with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers to securing stable housing and accessing healthcare. These barriers are not isolated issues. They are interconnected and directly affect independence, economic participation, and quality of life. MOPD plays a critical role in coordinating solutions across city agencies and ensuring disability inclusion is not treated as an afterthought. Housing accessibility must be a priority, not an exception.

People with disabilities encounter major challenges finding affordable, physically accessible, and supportive housing. Even when affordable units exist, many remain inaccessible or difficult to obtain due to complex application processes, limited outreach, and inadequate enforcement of accessibility standards.

Ten million in funding for MOPD would support expansion of rent freeze programs like SCRIE (Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption) and DRIE Disability Rent Increase Exemption. Many tenants do not know that these programs exist—strong coordination across housing agencies to expand accessible housing opportunities for people with mobility impairment, improved assistance for disabled people navigating the application of the NYC Housing Connect lottery, and a request-for-accommodation outreach program to ensure people with disabilities know about (TIMER) available housing resources and homelessness prevention programs.

Also, disability inclusion strengthens the entire healthcare system. Healthcare access extends beyond insurance coverage. People with disabilities often face health insurance barriers,

inaccessible facilities, provider shortages, communication obstacles, and a fragmented care system.

Funding MOPD in health initiatives would help improve coordination between disability services and healthcare providers; help consumers navigate Medicaid, SNAP, and cash assistance; expand public education on disability rights and accommodations; develop disability specific patient advocates in healthcare facilities; strengthen emergency preparedness and continuity of care; promote community-based services that support independent living; invest in disability centers, health policies, and registries; reduce avoidable emergency visits, improve health outcomes, and support long-term cost savings.

I will submit my whole written testimony. But I really believe that the future of MOPD should be funded because it's a smart investment. Thank you.

MARILYN GALFIN: Marilyn Galfin, Voices for Shelter Animals.

Today, at the New York City Animal Care Centers, there are 26 dogs and 13 cats on the At-Risk List. Any of them can be killed at any moment.

In 2025, 1,555 dogs and cats were euthanized. And in the first four months of 2026, 539 dogs and cats are already gone.

We're in the midst of a severe shelter overcapacity and homeless animal crisis. Abandonments are out of control, euthanasia is escalating, and up to a million community cats are struggling to survive on our streets.

Many pet guardians are already facing an affordability crisis. With changes to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility requirements, struggling families may lose benefits and face heartbreaking decisions about whether to go hungry to feed their pets, forego medical care for a sick animal, or, with no other option, make the devastating decision to surrender them to the ACC. There, it's more like a processing machine. Dogs are heavily drugged, and many animals do not receive adequate care. They experience confusion, fear, and trauma in a chaotic shelter environment and are then needlessly killed.

This is unacceptable and inhumane. Animals are not expendable, and the killing of adoptable, treatable animals should never be the solution.

New York City's investment in animal welfare remains shockingly inadequate. An ask of $15 million within a proposed $124.7 billion budget is minimal, barely more than 0.01% (one hundredth of one percent). Yet it would fund critically needed prevention programs that keep people and pets together, and for many, pets are family. It will keep animals out of the overwhelmed shelter system. An investment now reduces cost in the long term.

We need pet food pantries; low-cost veterinary care; spay/neuter services; emergency services; microchipping; humane care; foster outreach; and more, as well as a dedicated animal protection and enforcement unit; an animal abandonment unit; and shelter reform.

Our city has a moral and ethical responsibility to act now and invest in animal welfare. Animals deserve protection, compassion, and the right to live. (TIMER) Animals' lives do matter.

MOLLY SENACK: Good afternoon. My name is Molly Senack. I am also here representing the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, as their Education, Employment, and Climate Community Organizer.

According to the New York State Department of Health, there are approximately two million people with disabilities living in New York City. We describe in more detail in our written testimony, but there are a number of interconnected barriers that are specifically impacting this community, including far higher rates of unemployment and part-time employment than the non-disabled community, a reduced likelihood of graduating high school, and a disproportionate vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

To address these issues, CIDNY urges the New York City Council to include the following recommendations in the final FY27 Budget, including an increased financial investment in NYC: ATWORK in order for the program to double its staff from six to 12 people; an increased investment in expanding access to climate assistance programs and services for the disability community; additional investments

in K through special education, including a minimum of a $100 million investment to address the shortage of service providers; a $2 million investment to expand the travel training program; expanded investments in school-based mental health clinics, as well as other mental health resources and supports.

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for several essential education programs.

And we would also like to see an allocation in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan of at least an additional $450 million for a total investment of $1.25 billion in school accessibility projects.

Once again, I am reiterating how interconnected all of these barriers are. In addition to the above recommendations and the others listed in our submitted testimony, we would also like to ask for a baseline investment of at least $10 million for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities in the budget—given that this office is meant to look at the bigger picture (TIMER), and it is currently very inadequately funded, and I will... (CROSS-TALK)

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE) $704,000.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Good afternoon, Madame Chair and Council Members—Gale.

My name is Mike Schweinsburg, and I'm the President of the 504 Democratic Club, the nation's first and largest organization advocating for the civil rights of people with disabilities.

I've had to stop and change my testimony because so many members of our community had to drop out. They couldn't wait this long. They had endurance problems. So, forgive the choppy nature of my testimony.

I wanted to let all y'all know, and all the people here know, about the situation facing the disability community. Oh, I didn't start by giving a visual description. I'm sorry. I'm an old man with graying brown hair, brown glasses, wearing a green suit, and a lavender shirt.

Okay. In April, we convened two forums, one virtual and one hybrid, on the future of MOPD, where we hosted hundreds of disabled people and listened carefully to their perspectives on MOPD.

As I testified at the budget hearing in March, we have long believed that MOPD requires a minimal funding level of $10 million in order to

begin to address the myriad crises plaguing the disabled in New York. All of this is just the tip of the iceberg. (INAUDIBLE) (TIMER) Can I... I thank you kindly.

So I simply want to state that the disability community is the largest minority by far. Don't be misled by the Decennial Census, which traditionally undercounts us because they ask the wrong questions or not enough questions. The CDC's more accurate annual surveys show that 28.7% of adults have a disability. That doesn't include our kids, and when you do, we're nearer to a third of the population of New York City. We're totally intersectional. We're found in every single segment of society, and 60% of our community comes from communities of color. We are also the poorest minority and the one most discriminated against. Because of our disabilities, the number of us who were intending to speak, I said that earlier, so we ask your Committee, Council, and analysts to please examine the reports that we send you. And I invite you to reach out to me for any clarifications you may need.

In essence, the report shows that our employment rate is less than half that of the non-disabled workforce. Only 1% of New York City housing is fully accessible. Our children's graduation rate from secondary and post-secondary schools is a scandal, and the school-to-prison pipeline is largely fueled by our young people.

It is well known that people with mental health issues are targeted, harassed, bullied, institutionalized, and incarcerated rather than being recognized as simply someone with a health issue.

What other minority would accept being told, "You can't enter here." "You can only enter there." "You cannot exit your subway where you need to, only where we tell you to." No others would do it.

How can we properly register our issues and show the power of the disability vote when inaccessibility of our poll sites and adequately maintained equipment doesn't exist?

And all of this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of discrimination and inequities experienced by well over two million New Yorkers. Yet there is very little coordinated City response, which

should be the responsibility of a well-funded, well-populated city.

We're calling for 40 staff members, not the five or six that they have now, to begin to adequately address the myriad problems of our community. Thank you very much for the extra time.

Good to see you. I know we have champions here in the room, and I'm happy you listen. Thank you kindly.

WARREN SHAW: To the honorable Members of the New York City Council, I come before you today with respect to the Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities, or MOPD, in support of raising the annual allocation for that office from the present roughly $74,000 to the sum of $10 million a year.

I am an historian of the City's disability rights movement. My parents, Mollie and Julius Shaw, were among the leaders of the push to create MOPD's ancestor back in the 60s. And my father, Julius, went on to serve as the second director of what was then known as the Mayor's Office for the Handicapped. He was sworn in in this very room 48 years ago.

During the 1990s, MOPD had a staff of more than 40 people, some two-thirds of whom were involved in constituent services. In recent years, however, MOPD's resources and capacities have substantially diminished. MOPD's headcount is now five to seven people, and instead of providing constituent services, MOPD has increasingly turned to referring out such matters.

A 2022 study by the Center for an Urban Future found that on a per capita basis, New York City's MOPD was by a huge percentage the lowest funded out of comparable agencies in six major urban areas. The study found, for example, that Washington, D.C.'s agency was funded at more than 32 times New York City's level.

A few months ago, my colleagues and I, including Mike Schweenberg and other people at this table, convened a two-part public forum on the future of MOPD. Our report on the forum's findings has been submitted to the Mayor, the City Council Speaker, Julie Menin, and the chair of the Council's Disabilities Committee, Shahana Hanif, among others, and the Honorable Linda Lee.

I was the principal drafter of that report. In brief, we view the present state of MOPD's funding as a derogation of the City's responsibilities (TIMER) under the Executive Orders applicable to that agency.

One more point, if I may.

Paradoxically, the Agency's present underfunded state is extremely costly to the City. The employment rate of people with disabilities is half that of the non-disabled population. The recommendations set forth in our report would greatly enhance MOPD's role in the progress of the disability rights movement and would correspondingly further the economic ascent of the disability population.

Leveraging upward, even fractionally, the employment rate for disabled New Yorkers would mean economic activity that greatly outweighs the comparatively small cost of our budget request. Our budget request then is not only in the interests of the City's disability population, but it is also a long-term cost-avoiding investment that is in the fiscal interest of the City, and we urge that it be adopted. Thank you very much.

JENNIFER CHOI: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and the Finance Committee.

I am Jenn Choi; I am a Special Education Parent Advocate and the Founder of New York City Parents of Teens with Disabilities. We have a membership of 2,300. We are currently co-signing a testimony. It is still being co-signed. I was handed in on Friday to ask you to please——and we're not going to ask you for money today——We're going to ask if you could hold a hearing of Special Education Oversight about the fair student funding formula that is discriminating against students with disabilities.

This formula... and let's have a hearing to figure out if this formula is contributing to the projected $1.5 billion in special education costs that is coming our way. This formula caps how much a school can receive for special education teacher services. Whether it's one-to-one, whether it's with the teacher all day, whether it's a student within a regular general education class that includes honors, AP, IC... no, excuse me, G&F gifted education, it funds all of those things. When a student needs more than that, there is an actual cap.

When a school asks for more money, because there is a system to do that, what happens? Well, the school has asked, "What are your set-aside funds? What are your unscheduled funds?" So, imagine how much a principal wants to file that appeal.

So, what happens? So, maybe something like this will happen. What happened to Kai? Kai, a New York City kid raised by a single mom, can read every word that you put in front of him, but his reading comprehension and his written expression are always two years behind grade level year after year. And he's never pulled out for targeted (TIMER) Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm going to finish. I promise—targeted specialized instruction. He never pulled out for that. And so what happens? Well, after years of slow, slow, slow progress, he is going to be given a pass to a non-public school. And if there's no state-approved private school, because those numbers are diminishing as well, then his mother is going to have to hope that she can find a school that can pay for that, that can front the money for her, be willing to lose money for her, and she's still going to have to pay a lawyer. So that's Kai's story.

We want a Special Education Oversight Hearing to find out if that has anything to do with the fact that New York State is number one, three times surpassing the next state in terms of how many dispute resolutions they have. We are number one that way. And New York City makes us number one because we are 95% of the impartial hearing cases in this state.

So, we want to be number one this way? I'm thinking that we need a Special Education Oversight Hearing to find out the relationship between this funding formula and the relationship between the $1.5 billion.

And Council Member Brewer, I promise I will bring this up to Senator Liu because I know we have to do that, too. Thank you so much for listening.

LAURA JEAN HAWKINS: Good afternoon. My name is Laura Jean Hawkins, and I am the Advisory Board Chair of Astoria/Queens SHAREing & CAREing. I am also a member of Elmhurst Hospital's Community Advisory Board, and I chair the Patient Care Committee.

I'm here today along with my Founder and President, Anna Kril, and our new Executive Director,

Deborah Markel, on behalf of the cancer community of Queens County to urge the Council to increase funding to the Cancer Services Initiative and to support our funding request of $250,000.

As I have testified time and time again, we are currently facing a cancer epidemic. Cancer is occurring in younger and younger adults. No one knows why these early-onset cancers, cancers diagnosed in adults between the ages of 18 and 49, are on the rise. But what I can tell you is that more and more people in our community of Queens County and throughout the city are being diagnosed with cancer, and they are turning to us for help. Help that is getting harder and harder to provide with our limited funding.

Council funding is a critical part of our budget, allowing us to assist cancer survivors and their families in a very significant and meaningful way. Over the course of the past two years, we have provided programming in 26 of the 51 Council Districts, through our high school outreaches and our community wellness workshops at senior centers, public libraries, and other community venues, and

through the provision of direct services to people living with cancer.

While the majority of people we serve reside in Queens County, we do serve cancer patients throughout the five boroughs. No one is ever turned away from our door.

Since 2020, we have seen an increase of over 25% in the need for our services and programming. Unfortunately, our Council funding under the Cancer Services Initiative has stayed flat.

As board chair (TIMER), I know how difficult it is to raise money for private groups. Most of the foundation and private money out there is for cancer research. That's why Council funding is so important. So I urge you, on behalf of my board and all those that we serve, to please increase funding to SHAREing & CAREing to the Cancer Services Initiative. Thank you.

ANNA KRIL: Good afternoon. My name is Anna Kril. I am a two-time breast cancer survivor and Founder and President of SHAREing & CAREing.

I'm not going to read what I had planned to, but I want to share a story with you.

Thirty-three years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer at a very young age. I had two little girls, and at the time, when I was about to encounter very serious surgery, I begged God for life. I also promised I would give back every single day.

Unfortunately, today, 33 years later, cancer hasn't gone away. Breast cancer is as high as it could be. And as I'm reliving those young days of being a mom with two young children and hoping to live, today I had a call from a young mom who is 46 years old and said, "I don't want to die. They're saying it's very, very bad." I had another call yesterday from a young woman, 39 years old, who said, "The pain is excruciating from the treatments, but I will live every day in pain just to see my daughter one more day. And my husband cries when he sees how painful this is." This is what we see every day, and we always encourage them. We sit with them. We go to treatments with them.

I ask that you please, please grant us our funding request of $250,000. It's quite small when you preserve a family, or let a little child know their mother for one more day.

I also, on behalf of myself and the organization I founded, give back every day. I continue to give back. And our organization is probably the only one that many people, and especially our new migrant communities, turn to when they're facing this life-threatening challenge of cancer. When they don't know where to go, we're the ones who help them get to the right place for treatment. (TIMER) So again, thank you for the privilege of testifying before you. And please take my serious request for over $250,000 for an organization that saves and preserves lives. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you all for your testimony. Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Very quickly, because of time, in terms of the disabled community and the Office, what would increased funding help? I'm really concerned about people working, getting to work. That seems to be a huge issue. So I'm just very quickly asking if anybody from the Office wants to say how that would help.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Sure. We've outlined a number of ways. First, re-up the staff to

40 people, as it was during the 90s—Under Giuliani of all people. Retake the office space that they used to enjoy at the mammoth space that once housed 40 people at 100 Gold Street. They've been shifted to a tiny little office on Maiden Lane. They need expanded facilities there. They had lots of office space. They had conferences, you know, a number of conferences.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, keep going. Office space. I got it. Go ahead.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Right. And Space for large numbers of interns and volunteers from the community. Incubator projects that better address all the myriad issues that we face. We also want them to have the capability for grant funding to organizations like CIDNY that were handed 2,500 cases by MOPD last year without any compensation for all the staff time and resources they spent to deal with the issues of our community. This must be handled by qualified constituent services staff who do a proper intake. And if they're referring to a city agency or to CIDNY or anywhere else, get a plan from them on how they're going to address the issue and then follow up. So this takes staff. This takes a lot of work, and that's... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, I got it.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Just part of it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: We need to increase visibility of our community. There are all kinds of projects that can be done through social media...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay...

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: The disability pride parade, arts and culture. So many areas that...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I got it.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: will improve the public's perception of people with disabilities.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Thank you.

WARREN SHAW: If I may, I would add that the City has, over the past several decades, experimented, I'll use that phrase, with distributing the execution of disability policy across the government. In our view, that experiment has not been particularly successful. The dispersion of responsibility has been ineffective.

MOPD needs to play a reinforced role as the supervisor of the execution of policy as well as the formulation of policy. That can only be done with increased staff. And I'll also indicate that the community, over and over again during our forum, indicated that MOPD is too hard to contact. It's too hard to get a response. Its visibility profile is so low that many of the attendees had almost no idea what MOPD actually does. The low responsiveness and low visibility problems are fundamental for this agency.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

WARREN SHAW: Which ministers to two million people, and again, only increased staffing can raise the capacity in those areas.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Warren Shaw: Thank you.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: And $700,000....

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mike, get in trouble. Thank you.

MICHAEL SCHWEINSBURG: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. And to this panel, to your point, though, I think that's

why we, especially on our side on the Council, we really pushed to separate out the disabilities from the Mental Health Substance Use Committee, because we know that that actually deserves an entire committee all of its own.

So, I'm glad we were able to do that. Great idea, Jennifer, on the hearing. So, I'm going to talk to the Education chairs about that. And yes, I'm 46 as well. And a lot of my friends are actually getting cancer. So, it is a very real thing, and it's younger and younger these days.

We started an Animal Caucus on the council. Woohoo! Yes! Which is exciting.

MARILYN GALFIN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Yes. And we will definitely make sure to do that.

And then, nothing about us, without us. So, thank you all so much for testifying today. Thank you.

Next, we have Amy Wilkerson, Krista Larson, and Erica Mitchell.

And I'm going to read a few more names. Lucy Raimes, Gladstone Johnson, and Angela Cummings, if you are here.

Yes. So, as long as the red light's on, you're good. You may begin.

AMY WILKERSON: All right. Good afternoon, Chair, members of the City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Amy Wilkerson. I'm the Chief Program Officer at Forestdale, Inc. Forestdale is a long-standing provider of preventive services in Queens.

I'm here with deep concern and urgency regarding the Administration for Children's Services' proposal to close our Family Support Program in North Queens.

The decision came as a complete surprise. Based on prior communication from the Mayor's Office and social service leadership, we understood that critical social services would not be reduced in this budget. However, this action is not a technical adjustment. It is a direct service cut that will immediately impact at-risk families and weaken the preventive services system.

Forestdale is one of the highest-performing preventive services providers in New York City. We ranked in the top tier for multiple

years, including achieving the number one ranking for family support in both fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

The City has consistently relied on our work to stabilize families, prevent foster care placement, and reduce long-term system involvement. The program slated for closure is not theoretical. It is a lifeline. It serves one of the highest-need areas in Queens, second only to Jamaica in child protective investigations and preventive cases. At this moment, we are working intensively with more than 50 families, approximately 150 individuals. And annually, we serve over 500 families facing crises such as domestic violence, mental health challenges, housing instability, and the risk of child removal.

Forestdale's approach is unique in New York City. Our model is comprehensive, robust, and community-based, and designed not only to stabilize families in crisis, but to strengthen them long-term. Through this program, families receive parenting support, mental health and trauma-informed interventions, access to health care, cash and material assistance, and connections to education and employment resources. This is not a narrow service.

It is a coordinated safety net that surrounds families with the support they need to stay together.

Our results speak for themselves: 98% of families we serve (TIMER) avoid foster care placement. For many, we are the only support system they have.

To make it quick, the financial impact of this closure for us is $1.9 million in FY27, which will directly impact 14 staff, eliminating those positions, destabilizing our broader preventive infrastructure, and jeopardizing support for families across Brooklyn and Queens.

We also have more than 20 skilled people who may be impacted by this as well, who are experts in trauma, domestic violence, and family stabilization.

To put it briefly, the families we serve cannot absorb this loss, and the City cannot afford the consequences. Preventive services are what keep families together and reduce future costs in foster care and crisis systems.

We urge you to partner with us and prevent the closure of this program. The stakes are

simply too high. Thank you for your time and your leadership.

KRISTA LARSON: Good afternoon, Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Krista Larson, and I'm the Assistant Executive Director for Preventive Services at Forestdale.

For many years, Forestdale has provided high-quality preventive services in Queens. Our Family Support Program has consistently been one of the highest-rated in New York City. Yet, our North Queens program is among the programs ACS has proposed eliminating.

Preventive services work because they reach families early, before stress, instability, and unmet needs escalate into deeper crisis or family separation. It's no small thing to invite someone into your home and share the most personal details of your family's life. Families make that choice when they believe the support will be respectful, effective, and grounded in partnership. They do it because they want to protect their children and move through a difficult period with help that builds on their strengths.

Families consistently tell us that their relationship with preventive staff is one of the most important parts of this service. Many of our families experience tremendous isolation. They may be new to New York City, new to the US, or may be separated from their support systems because of ruptured relationships. Families tell us that the staff provides a combination of information, encouragement, a listening ear, and some straight talk. It is these relationships that help families believe that change is possible.

In preventive services, the relationship is not separate from the work; it is what makes the work possible. When a preventive services contract is cut, families experience the loss immediately. They lose continuity, stability, and the momentum that comes from steady relationship-based support. Families lose not only access to services, but also the trusted connection that helps build confidence, progress, and hope. Starting over with a new provider means retelling painful experiences, rebuilding trust from the beginning, and trying to engage all over again at the very moment consistency matters most.

I urge the Council to restore funding for this contract (TIMER) and protect continuity and preventive services for families in Queens. Thank you.

ERICA MITCHELL: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Lee and Members of the Council, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Erica Mitchell. I'm a social worker and Vice President at CAMBA, and a proud daughter of Brooklyn.

Nineteen years ago tomorrow, I started my journey on the front lines as a case planner in a preventive program in the same neighborhood that raised me.

This work is my life's calling. I'm a proud product of immigrant parents. Growing up, my family faced severe challenges, including domestic violence and undiagnosed mental illness. Like many of our families of color in our city, we were told never to trust the system. So, we stayed in the shadows and didn't get help. I became a social worker to break that cycle of fear. And for nearly 50 years, CAMBA has been doing exactly that—Building the unshakable bridge of trust in communities where a system has historically caused harm.

Today, CAMBA serves nearly 80,000 New Yorkers annually across 180 programs, and for 30 years has served in preventive services in Brooklyn.

I am here to convey the devastating impact of terminating CAMBA's family prevention services in Brownsville and Bushwick.

In these neighborhoods, systemic poverty, homelessness, and community violence do not exist in silos. They go hand in hand. When a family is displaced by housing instability, distress fractures the home. When a community is impacted by gun violence, trauma ripples through every household.

True prevention means recognizing that you cannot address a child's safety without addressing the environment the child lives in.

To understand the human cost of these cuts, let me share Miss Evans' story. On February 20th, a devastating fire destroyed her home, and her family lost everything (TIMER), including their beloved cat, Milo. In a matter of absolute trauma, our prevention programs mobilized immediately to step into the ashes and secure clothes, emergency supplies, and housing stability.

If you eliminate this contract, you disrupt fragile trust for countless families who finally felt safe enough to let a provider into their lives.

In fiscal year 25, Brooklyn recorded more than 9,000 child welfare reports, with over 2,100 concentrated right there in Zone C in East Brooklyn. Pulling our team out of high-crisis footprints leaves a vulnerable community exposed to systemic issues of homelessness, gentrification, and economic displacement.

Today, over a dozen full-time staff members are trapped in an agonizing professional limbo without a clear timeline from the City for these frontline professionals who are being asked to absorb the trauma of their community while facing total uncertainty regarding their own jobs, health care, and families.

Defunding preventive programs does not save municipal dollars. It simply exchanges proactive home-based healing for a far more costly traumatic downstream price of foster care and family separation. We need a solution that ensures our

families and our workforce that serves them are protected.

We urge the Council to partner with us to keep families safe in New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

LUCY RAIMES: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Lucy Raimes; I'm the Director Of Strategic Partnerships And Resource Development at Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City.

I'm joined today by leaders from NHS of Brooklyn and Bronx NHS. Together with Brooklyn Neighborhood Services and NHS of Queens, our organizations have spent decades helping homeowners remain stably housed, preserve their homes, and strengthen neighborhoods across New York City.

We are here today to request a million dollars for a citywide property management pilot program. This program is about preserving affordable homeownership and the naturally occurring affordable rental housing that low-income homeowners typically support.

Across the city, low-income homeowners, particularly seniors and people with disabilities, are struggling to maintain aging homes amidst rising costs.

For many homeowners, routine tasks such as snow removal, landscaping, and trash management have become physically difficult or financially out of reach. At the same time, they're managing tenant issues, navigating home repairs as well as code compliance requirements, and being faced with scams such as deed theft.

We know from our work with vulnerable homeowners that small properties, small problems, can quickly become larger ones: financial distress, violations, housing instability, and ultimately the risk of losing one's home. This pilot is designed to intervene before that happens.

As the applicant for this funding, NHS of New York City would serve as the lead organization, providing coordination, training, technical assistance, quality control, and outcome tracking. Our NHS partners would deliver services directly within their communities through the trusted

relationships that they've built over decades of service.

In its first year, the pilot is expected to assist at least 30 (TIMER) homeowners for a total of 95 housing units, with that number growing in future years. Thank you. I'll terminate here.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. And we will read your testimony. I promise.

LUCY RAIMES: Okay.

GLADSTONE JOHNSON: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee. My name is Gladstone Johnson. I serve as the Executive Director of Bronx Neighborhood Housing Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

We respectfully request an allocation of $1 million in City Council funding to support the launch of a citywide property management pilot program designed to stabilize vulnerable homeowners and preserve affordable housing across New York City.

New York City currently has more than 70,000 one- to four-bedroom properties, and over 9,000 in my area in the Bronx, currently at risk of entering the tax lien sale process. These numbers reflect not just properties but families,

generational assets, and the backbone of many of our neighborhoods. Without timely intervention, manageable maintenance and financial challenges can quickly escalate into housing instability, foreclosure risk, and eventual displacement.

Too often, homeowners come to us only after a manageable issue has become a full-blown crisis. What begins as a leaky roof, broken light, overgrown property, or deferred maintenance can rapidly lead to code violations, mounting repair costs, insurance compliance issues, and significant debt, including property tax and water arrears.

Seniors and homeowners living with disabilities are especially vulnerable, often lacking the resources or capacity to address these issues before they spiral. (TIMER) This pilot program would enable trusted community-based organizations like ours to address these issues. By providing proactive property management support, we can help homeowners maintain compliance, address repairs before they worsen, and navigate financial challenges before they lead to tax lien sales.

Thank you for allowing us to speak today.

ANGELA CUMMINGS: Good afternoon, Chairman Lee and others. Thank you again, as my colleague said, for this opportunity. I would just like to say a few words about what we've been doing in NHS Brooklyn.

My name is Angela Cummings. I also serve as Executive Director of Neighborhood Housing Services of Brooklyn. And here are my few words:

In the landscape of New York City's housing crisis, small residential buildings, one to four units, are frequently overlooked, yet they are indispensable. In Brooklyn, these properties form the architectural and social fabric of neighborhoods, providing a significant portion of the borough's unsubsidized affordable housing. These buildings are not owned by corporations. They're owned by families. Many of these families have held their property for generations. Many are low-to-moderate-income individuals who rely on rental income, not to build empires, but to maintain stability, pay taxes, and preserve the homes that anchor their communities.

And yet these small property owners are often left to navigate a complex and unforgiving housing landscape alone.

NHS Brooklyn saw the need to assist this population by creating an affordable property management program. This program was built on the foundational understanding that stabilizing these small landlords is the most effective community center strategy for preventing displacement, preserving affordable housing, and closing the racial wealth gap. It was created to move beyond crisis responses to offer a proactive, holistic model for sustainable ownership.

Our organizations would like to affirm that small homes matter, that small landlords matter, that families who have kept Brooklyn neighborhoods vibrant for generations deserve support, not neglect. Programs like NHS NYC's Affordable Property Management Initiative and NHS's Brooklyn property management program are essential tools in the fight for housing stability, racial equity, and community preservation.

(TIMER) We are requesting the City Council to continue to invest in these owners, uplift these buildings, and protect the affordability that keeps Brooklyn’s heart beating. Thank you.

EBONI STALLINGS: Good afternoon, Chairperson and Members of the Finance Committee.

My name is Eboni Stallings, and I'm a Permanency Specialist with lived experience, speaking on behalf of You Gotta Believe, an adoption agency committed to finding permanent families and lifelong connections for older youth in foster care.

When people think about foster care, they often picture young children. But every day we work with teenagers and young adults who have spent years moving from placement to placement, carrying trauma, loss, and uncertainty about whether anyone would truly choose them.

Many of the youth we serve have been told directly or indirectly that they are too old for permanency. By the time they reach adolescence, the system often shifts from helping them find family to simply preparing them to survive adulthood alone. But no young person should age out of care believing that independence is the same as connection.

At You Gotta Believe, we know permanency changes lives. We see it when a young person finally lets their guard down because an adult consistently shows up for them. We see it when youth who once felt

hopeless begin planning for college, employment, or their future because they finally feel supported and safe.

Permanency is not only life-changing, but it's cost-effective. In 2024 alone, You Gotta Believe's work in New York City generated an estimated $3 million in societal cost savings by helping youth achieve lasting family connections and avoid the costly outcomes often associated with aging out of foster care alone. That is why continued investment in foster youth services is critical.

We urge the City to prioritize and support our discretionary funding requests for permanency programs, mental health support, housing stability, and youth development.

We also ask the City to continue investing in programs that center lived experience and youth voice.

Young people impacted by foster care are experts in what they need, and they deserve to help shape the systems designed to support them.

The reality is that foster youth do not stop needing support when they turn (TIMER) 18 or 21. Healing, connection, and stability take time. With

the right investment, we can ensure more young people leave care not just with resources, but with family, community, and hope.

Thank you for your time and commitment to New York City's youth and families.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. And as we know, when we talk about affordable housing in the city, affordable homeownership is not discussed enough. And so, that is something that I know, especially in the outer boroughs and in Southeast Queens, and with the Council Members there, we talk about that a lot. So, I want to thank you for the work that you're doing.

And of course, to the groups that are here, You Gotta Believe, CAMBA, Forestdale, we love you guys and the services you're doing. Obviously, we're aware of the situation with the program that got cut. We're sort of in conversation right now to see what the outcome can be. But we obviously know the incredible, incredible, wonderful work that you all do, and so we will continue the conversations.

And I'm sure you guys are also doing your advocacy on that front, but obviously we're here to

listen and engage as well. So I just want to thank you all. Thank you.

Okay. Is there still a long line outside? Is it one of those things? I feel like it's one of those things where it's like, what's that line? And it's like the hottest club in town, so you know, people should feel free to come in.

Next, we have Gregory (INAUDIBLE), Matthew Monge, Rick Horan, Michael Scala, Miriam Bensman, and Ben Yee. I'm sorry. Oh, Miriam has to leave. Okay. I know it's a long day. And apologies again if I'm mispronouncing anyone's names. And just as a reminder, if you guys could stick as close to your two minutes as possible, that would be greatly appreciated. And please make sure to submit your written testimony if you have not yet done so.

And if you could just make sure you say your names before you testify. Okay, perfect. Go ahead.

RICK HORAN: I'm Rick Haran, Executive Director of an all-volunteer nonprofit group whose mission is the reactivation of the Rockaway Beach Branch, Queens' only north-south rail corridor.

Queens needs both transit and parks, but they must be designed together, or one will get in the way of the other.

We're asking that the $43 million for the Met Hub project be rescinded, as it's part of a $500 million unfunded Queensway Park. Its needless construction will make reactivation less likely and cost the City and its residents billions in lost economic and environmental benefits.

We agreed that the students who value parks, which make up 33 of the 47 acres of QueensLink, are necessary, but you need transit in order to get there.

The 5-acre Met Hub Park is not in a park-poor area, but actually right next to the underutilized and hard-to-access 540-acre forest park.

The City never bothered to study how this irreplaceable land should be used to deliver the greatest value to the most residents, nor did it ask the residents what they wanted.

QueensLink did ask, and the answer is that transit and parks will deliver the best value, and the residents, by a three-to-one margin, prefer

transit over parks. But the good news is Queens deserves both and can have both.

The MTA warned that building a park on the rail corridor would pose a challenge to reactivation, but the City went ahead anyway and, contrary to its promises, designed a park as a fully developed park that Mayor Mamdani acknowledged would have to be torn up to add transit.

Building anything on this transit right-of-way in the middle of a transit desert is a dumb idea at any cost. The Rockaway Beach Branch is not like the High Line, which faced the wrecking ball, but a viable rail corridor in the middle of a densely populated, transit-poor borough.

It is also the subject of a $500,000 US DOT QueensLink study that will start this fall. The MTA announced that it will evaluate reactivation as part of its 20-year needs assessment in two years. No city that's serious about improving public transit and restoring the rail service that it took away 64 years ago would build a new park on that same corridor. Doing so is equivalent to cutting Queens in half all over again. I don't know about you, but that's not the kind of city I want to live in.

In conclusion, we ask the Mayor and the City Council to remove QueensWay funding from the current budget and work together with the state and MTA to ensure that QueensLink's integrated subway and parks proposal is included in the 2030 to 2034 Capital Plan. Thank you very much.

MATTHEW MONGE: To the Members of the Council and the Finance Committee, my name is Matthew Monge. I've lived here my entire life and currently reside in Middle Village.

I'd like to tell a story: In the 1960s, a large rail line was abandoned due to a decrease in business. A local grassroots organization rose up and submitted a proposition to the Council to revitalize the corridor and bring transit and trails back to the area, serving hundreds of thousands of people in what is otherwise a transit desert.

Now, to some of you, this may sound like a project in New York City called QueensLink, but in actuality, it is describing the current Beltline Project in Atlanta. Even though the Beltline Project was initiated 27 years ago, not a cent was spent, a train built, or an inch of track revitalized. Why? The City decided to build the park first.

This story serves as a cautionary tale for the current council. Currently, $43 million is allocated in the Mayor's Executive Budget for QueensWay, a project that would redesignate the sitting rail line in Queens as parkland.

I'm here to warn not only the Council, but also those around us, that this is a terrible idea. According to New York's interpretation of the public trust doctrine, once a park is built, it becomes increasingly impossible, if not incredibly rare, to do any further development. Any transit addition is delayed and debated indefinitely until effectively becoming canceled.

We need more than promises from the Council or the Mayor to eventually integrate rail because, as history has shown us, it doesn't work this way.

Luckily, a proposed alternative to QueensWay called QueensLink has a fully laid-out plan to revitalize the existing rail and integrate 33 new acres of parkland. The best of both worlds. But it's being ignored by the Mayor and the Council.

Now, I live in Middle Village, but I go to college in downtown Brooklyn. The only reasonable

way to get there is by taking the Q-53 down the crowded Woodhaven Boulevard. And let me tell you, there are 10,000 riders on that bus, 70,000 weekly, 3.64 million yearly. That is 10,000 more weekly riders than the least used subway. The rail is right there. Why aren't we using it?

This last year was the first time I ever voted in a local election. And I am proud to have voted for my representative, Phil Wong, and Mayor Mamdani, but right now (TIMER) it feels as if you're turning your back on the community and depriving transit of the people who need it most. I am urging the Council to learn from the mistakes of their colleagues in Atlanta. Take time and look into the possibility of QueensLink. Block the Mayor. Cut QueensWay from the Executive Budget. Otherwise, you turn your back on the people you promised to improve the city for. Do not make this mistake.

MIKE SCALA: Thank you, Chairperson Lee, Members of the Finance Committee. My name is Mike Scala, and I serve in a volunteer capacity as counsel and legal adviser to QueensLink. I am speaking today in strong support of QueensLink, which would bring both new subway service and new parkland to Queens by

reactivating the former Rockaway Beach branch, and against the current $43 million allocated in the budget for Phase I of the QueensWay, also called the Met Hub project.

I was born and raised in South Queens, but I went to high school in Bayside—Cardozo in the house. My commute to and from school took up to two hours each way. While I was spending four hours in transit every day, my classmates were enjoying their lives.

This ugly reality continues to this day, as a recent survey found that 16% of residents in my assembly district traveled more each way to work. That means thousands of us are commuting over three hours every single day. In the greatest city in the world, this is unacceptable.

Two competing concepts exist for the deactivated Rockaway Beach Branch right-of-way. The park-only QueensWay and the dual-purpose QueensLink, which combines subway and park uses. The QueensWay would be built directly on the former railbed, which would virtually eliminate the possibility of ever restoring transit there.

The MTA itself recognized in its 2023 20-year needs assessment that a linear park along the corridor would create a challenge for any future transit alternatives. Once the right-of-way is converted to other uses, it almost never returns to transit.

The QueensLink would create the first North-South subway line in Queens, extending the M-line south from Rego Park to Ozone Park and then over the A train tracks to the Rockaways, increasing service to the Rockaways by up to 165%. It would also let the G train run all the way to Forest Hills, increasing capacity on the crowded Queens Boulevard local lines by 50% and connecting central Queens with North Queens and Brooklyn.

A study by the Steer Group found that the QueensLink would remove millions of vehicle trips (TIMER) each year, making streets safer and lowering harmful emissions while adding up to 33 acres of new parks and trails integrated with the subway design. Over 20 years, the study concluded the project would more than pay for itself by creating jobs, saving New Yorkers time, and reducing healthcare costs tied to air pollution and traffic crashes.

So, in conclusion, Queens needs parks and trains. The QueensLink would do both. I urge the Committee to preserve this irreplaceable right-of-way for future transit and to support the QueensLink. Thank you.

JASPER VON SEEBURG: Good afternoon, Chair and Committee Members. My name is Jasper. I'm a City employee and a volunteer for the QueensLink.

In the past four years, I've spoken to thousands of Queens residents who overwhelmingly want the same thing—robust public transit and parks they can be proud of. The same amenities other boroughs take for granted.

But we've been waiting so long for change that we are disillusioned by what is possible. Car dependency is stealing our health, our time, and our money. The QueensWay's argument, now echoed by Mayor Mamdani, is that building something now is better than building nothing, and that building a park won't preclude rail reactivation. Atlanta proves otherwise.

The Beltline was a proposed mixed-use light rail and trail project. But in 2004, the Trust for Public Land, the same national nonprofit fighting for the QueensWay, recommended that Atlanta build the

trails first and add the rails later. Atlanta listened, and over 20 years later, the Beltline trails are almost complete and not a single track has been laid. Their current Mayor, Andre Dickens, just walked back support for shovel-ready light rail on the project, capitulating to developers and anti-transit dark money groups. New York is facing the same threat.

The chosen location for the first phase of the QueensWay Park overlaps entirely with future tracks and station infrastructure. According to the MTA's own feasibility study, once a multi-million-dollar park is built, the MTA will be left with no other alternative but to argue for ripping up the park to build the rail, sparking the same opposition we're watching unfold in Atlanta.

Public Advocate Jumaane Williams has called the QueensWay "fiscally foolish and irresponsible". And I couldn't agree more. If the Mayor is as committed to expanding public transit as he says he is, then he shouldn't be prioritizing aesthetics over solutions to the borough's immense transportation needs.

My question for you is this: Is this park worth denying South Queens residents, who already endure the longest commutes in the nation, (TIMER) the right to affordable and convenient mass transit?

Respectfully, I urge this City Council not to allocate any more funding to the QueensWay Project in this or any future City Council budget. Instead, I ask that the Mayor and the Council work with advocates and leadership in the state at the MTA to prioritize rails and trails in the next capital plan. Queens deserve nothing less. Thank you.

BETTY FINK-KORB: Madam Chair, Members of the City Council, my name is Betty Fink-Korb, and I live right where that trail is about to be built. And I can honestly attest to the fact that I live in a transportation desert. I walked 20 minutes to get on the train to come here. It took me over one and a half hours to appear at this meeting.

I have a lot of compassion for the students of MELS. Their school is right next door to my home. And I understand why they would think that was the most important thing in their lives that would help them substantially, keep them off of cell

phones, and give them an outdoor space. And I understand why they want that space.

But I see the future of those children, and I see that there are better jobs out there for them in the future if they have a way to access those jobs. If they have a way to get where they need to go to have higher-paying jobs.

The Mayor said he wants to give us more childcare, but mothers who can't get to a better job are faced with... how does that help them? They're still stuck in the same community, in the same place, at the same jobs that never helped them move up economically to begin with.

All I have to say is I think we need both transportation and green space, and QueensWay doesn't do it for us. It's a waste of a tremendous amount of money that can be put into a future hybrid transportation and (TIMER) green proposal.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Thank you so much.

I'm going to call a few other names that I know are also with QueensLink. Steven Bautista here? Julien Bryzek, Rasheen Peacock, Noah Williams, Tahaman Hidary, Alexei Sanoff, and Willow Monge.

So, if you guys can just come up really quickly. And then we'll have questions from Council Members and comments after this panel is done.

STEVEN GOMEZ BAUTISTA: My name is Steven Gomez Bautista, and I'm a resident of Elmhurst, Queens. And I really want to urge you guys to reconsider funding QueensWay because I think it's a waste of this really great opportunity for QueensLink.

Under Mayor Mamdani's platform, he advocated for public transit that is reliable, safe, and universally accessible. And I think this is a great opportunity to provide transportation to where there's a transit desert.

There's a lot of talk about how QueensWay won't preclude future development, but I want you to imagine if there were a proposal to build an elevated train right through Central Park and if anyone would even consider that as a reliable project.

Additionally, I think that the current transportation options that are available are oriented towards jobs in Manhattan, but in the past few decades, the commuter needs have shifted to staying within the borough of Queens. So, actually,

the largest worker pool for Queens residents is within the borough, yet we have the fewest options for public transportation. And actually, within the borough, for Queens residents who work within Queens, 49% of them drive.

And I feel like we need public transportation options, and this would provide that. Also, in terms of providing more green space to Queens residents, QueensLink is proposing a combination of both trails and rails. So that would already be an option, as well as creating access to other already existing parks such as Forest Park, as was mentioned earlier, and the Rockaways.

Also, as said earlier, it would fund itself because of (TIMER) the fares.

TAHAMAN HIDARY: Good evening. My name is Tahaman Hadary. I am a former New York City resident. I currently reside in central Indiana, specifically around the northeast quadrant of the Indianapolis metropolitan area.

While living in New York City, I was a daily bus and subway rider at one point, and I know what it's like to have the option to choose how you get around for the day.

The rehabilitation of the abandoned Rockaway Beach corridor, a former rail line, long left abandoned and quite untouched for decades in Central Queens Regal Park, Parkside, Woodhaven, and Ozone Park, is essential. The problem with trails before rails, though, which QueensWay brings, is that it often leads to it being much harder to move forward with rail transit in the future.

We've already heard much about the Atlanta Beltline, which has been struggling for the last 20 years. But I want to tell you an example that is more local to me as a central Indiana resident. The Nickel Plate Trail. This connects the cities of Indianapolis, Fishers, and Noblesville. The mindset behind the trail was that we'll build a trail now, and we'll preserve the corridor for later. However, what ended up happening is that the studies for the potential rapid transit that would have gone along that corridor were paused and, to this day, have not yet been continued. It's basically just been stalled for years on end.

I'll give the trail credit that it does see a lot of recreational use, but for essential services such as jobs that I could have accessed,

internships that I could have accessed, and the family that I could have visited more often, those were all basically thrown out because there was no transit along that corridor.

I urge the City Council of New York to go ahead, and please reconsider QueensWay and QueensLink. QueensLink brings what QueensWay offers: park and green space along with the essential transit service. I apologize for taking so much time.

ALEXEI SANOFF: Hi, my name is Alexei Sanoff. There have been a lot of great speeches. So, I just want to touch on a really important thing about the QueensLink project that QueensWay simply cannot do. And that is, QueensLink impacts the area around this corridor, but it also impacts so many more neighborhoods. I'm sad that the council member from the Rockaways isn't here anymore because currently Rockaway riders, aside from a few A trains they have to take the shuttle, which I've taken a few times, and it's pretty horrible.

But with QueensLink, you would now have M service for Rockaway riders to the south. So all Rockaway riders would have direct service to the city.

Also, Queens Boulevard riders would have more local service. They would have the M train also on the weekends. And this is just something that would not happen if we had QueensWay. Thank you.

NOAH WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, Members of the Committee.

My name is Noah Williams, and I'm currently a junior attending high school and a resident of Rosedale.

Fundamentally, as this Council continues debating whether QueensLink is the right path forward, there are clear truths that I urge the Council to acknowledge throughout the course of this discussion.

First and foremost, QueensLink is currently projected to have roughly 75,000 daily riders, primarily from those who formerly utilized congested bus routes such as the Q-52 and Q-53 select bus services.

Additionally, estimates for the QueensLink initial business case have shown that due to combined decreases in transit times, health and quality of life improvements, and reductions in

congestion, for every dollar that goes into QueensLink, $1.10 is returned.

In accounting for these factors, it's evident that QueensLink will serve as a net positive for the city as a whole, especially in communities in the Rockaways and in the Woodhaven neighborhood that not only will see higher business traffic, but will save money on time spent enduring lengthy congestion and traffic along the Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards.

This is especially important to me as a student attending high school student, as people in my class routinely complain about the overcrowding and congestion of the Q-52 and Q-53 select bus services. Many of my friends from the Rockaways, whose parents work in the region, could gain significantly from the increased economic activity and less congestion leading into the Rockaways.

Taking the Q-52 and Q-53 select bus services shouldn't be an experience that makes me yearn for the days of pandemic-era social distancing.

Under the status quo, there is no possibility for QueensWay to coexist with QueensLink, unless QueensWay is diverted off the abandoned rail

line, or we will lose out on a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver rail infrastructure to communities that need transit alternatives.

To many Southeast Queens residents and me, failure to seize this opportunity and to deliver rail infrastructure is failure to advocate for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers to be able to do the main thing that makes us New Yorkers—taking the train to school, work, or wherever we need to be. And I would argue it would be a greater misjudgment than any of the referees' calls made during the last (TIMER) Knicks game. And that's not something that we need. Thank you.

(LAUGHTER)

WILLOW MONGE: Hello, my name is Willow Monge. I'm 16. I go to Brooklyn Technical High School, and I live in Middle Village. I originally didn't want to give a speech today. I came here just to support my brother, who gave a speech on the same topic just a few minutes ago. My inspiration to speak today is from the speech given by the middle schoolers who supported QueensWay because it showcased just how easy it is to fall into the line of thinking that promotes QueensWay.

The Allure of the park is so tempting. However, there is an option for this Administration to change the lives of generations to follow.

On the abandoned Rockaway Beach line, we have the ability to extend the M train to the Rockaways while serving Rego Park, Middle Village, and Forest Park.

QueensLink adds rails and trails. It will not inhibit parks. It will still provide all the benefits that those middle schoolers advocated for. I really wish that Phil Wong was here to hear this because I think it is so important for the representative who represents me to... Oh, hello, he appeared. I just wanted to let you know that the subway system that we're currently using has been around for more than a hundred years. It's been around for a whole century, and it's still serving us as such an important factor in a city, and it's what has made us the greatest city in the world.

And I really want to ask you: do you want to contribute to that legacy, or do you want to intentionally inhibit it? That's the option I'm seeing here. Thank you for your time. Knicks in five!

(LAUGHTER)

JULIEN BRYZEK: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Members of the Committee on Finance. I am Julien Bryzek, a 17-year-old high school senior who has been watching with shock as Mayor Mamdani has switched his electoral campaign's support of QueensLink into attempts to bury the QueensWay Project, which is anti-transit and anti-Queens. Right?

I'm here today to ask a very simple question: Since when does New York City, the transit capital of the world, deliberately throw away an existing rail right-of-way? I urge you to reject the $43 million Executive Budget allocation for QueensWay and protect the QueensLink.

There's a saying that if you tell a lie often enough, it becomes true. For years, QueensWay advocates, and recently the Mayor himself, have repeated the lie that building their park will not preclude future rail. This claim does not survive contact with the real designs. The $43 million in this budget specifically funds the Metropolitan Hub phase. This section is slated to be built right where the QueensLink Tunnel must surface. The current designs put paved paths right over the right-of-way, meaning any future subway expansion would literally

require bulldozing the park that you are funding to build today. This clearly goes against the future transit of New York City.

We know the real goal here. The Trust for Public Land, in a now-retracted statement, originally stated the quiet part out loud on their website. They said, quote unquote, "The residents of Queens don't need another train line." This isn't just a park proposal. It's clearly a transit obstruction scheme that's disguised as a greenway.

As others have pointed out before, we saw a similar scheme played out in the Atlanta Beltline, in which they built the trails first, promised rail, and 20 years later there's been no progress.

QueensLink will serve 75,000 daily riders, bring $4.9 billion of saved productivity time, and $ 8.9 billion of economic activity as a result of construction, while still delivering 33 acres of park space.

Don't permanently pave over New York's transit future and take transit away from the 880,000 local residents. Please reject the $43 million for the QueensWay. Thank you. (TIMER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right on time at the buzzer.

Okay. So, really quickly, and I know that Mike Scala knows this because he knows my district. But you know, I'm in a transit desert myself. I think I'm one of the few council districts, maybe one of two, that has no railways. Like, I don't have any subways or a Long Island Rail Road in my district. So, I totally get that, you know, transit deserts; it's very difficult to get around the city.

I am just wondering—I don't know if I need to bring folks back to the front, but were there conversations, and how have you guys been having conversations with elected officials, advocates? Just wondering how those conversations have been going.

MATTHEW MONGE: Sorry, could you quickly rephrase?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I'm just wondering how conversations have been going because I've been hearing about QueensWay, QueensLink from other elected officials and just wondering how the conversations have been going in terms of trying to find some sort of middle ground.

MATTHEW MONGE: Right. I know that, at least from my perspective, I'm not officially affiliated with QueensLink; I'm merely just someone who lives in the area and wants to express my support. It seems to me that QueensLink is mostly grassroots, and it tends to be ignored or shoved aside by other organizations such as QueensWay or the Mayor simply because we're not mainstream.

I know that QueensLink and QueensWay have tried to work together in the past, and it has resulted in unproductive, uncommunicative debates that led us nowhere.

And so again, I'm not an official representative of QueensLink, but it is my belief that the Council should just cut the QueensWay allocated budget and give more time to bring QueensLink and QueensWay potentially back to the table. Because I feel that racing each other is just not going to get us anywhere. I think we need to work together, and I think we need to collaborate before we screw this up by going too fast.

RICK HORAN: You know, we’re for transit and parks. We know a little bit about both. Personally, I really need transit, and parks are

great, but you need transit no matter what you're doing, whether you're trying to get to school or jobs or education or recreation or healthcare. Parks, you need as well, and we can have both, but that's what QueensLink was designed to provide.

QueensWay and Trust for Public Land can design the park for the right-of-way. We have no interest in needing a specific design other than to try to make it the best possible and to utilize as much of the right-of-way as possible.

In our conversation with the Mayor, we spoke to the Deputy Mayor of Operations, Chief of Staff, and essentially they said that they looked at the initial business case that the Steer Group had put together for us, and they looked at all the data, and their position was that the train line, you know, can go in if and when the MTA ever thought it was necessary. And they implied that, you know, if they have to rip up the park to do that, that wouldn't be a problem.

But we all know better than that. We know it would be a problem. And even if he's willing to sacrifice the $43 million, or even more than that in subsequent phases, people don't want to go through

construction projects more than once or spend twice as much money on the same piece of land for different projects.

There's no reason to build this park now. We should be taking a step back, planning an integrated park and train, and then moving forward with the best plan possible.

The MTA should be taking the lead on the transit side. And that's something we were hoping the Mayor and the City Council could take a lead in.

We need an advocate in Albany for getting this on track, and we haven't had that yet. We were hoping that would be Mayor Mamdani.

MATTHEW MONGE: I would also like to quickly add that under the Public Trust Doctrine, if this park is built, the power to continue to build and alienate this park would be relinquished to Albany. So the City Council would lose a lot of its power and influence in this case.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Thank you for that.

TAHAMAN HIDARY: I'd like to add one more thing if that's okay.

So, what we propose, I mean, I'm not officially with QueensLink or anything, but when you have both, when you have walking access to get to that train station, which may be there, it directly complements each other. There's going to be more people walking because the walking path is right there. You've got your train, rapid transit service there as well, which people can walk to. It really just complements each other in many ways. And I want New York to set the example for that so that other cities can follow suit.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Thank you.

RICK HORAN: Also, it enables the funding of the park. Because park maintenance has been a problem for existing parks, and it would be for this as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Do any colleagues have any questions? No. Okay. Thank you so much for this panel, and we'll continue to follow what's happening, and please be in touch. So, we really appreciate you all coming out today. Thank you.

Okay, next we have David Louridas, Delnar... I'm sorry, I'm trying to read Delnar Zoe Leou? Okay. Paula Segal, Anthony Feliciano, Kevin

Wolfe, Kadisha Davis, and Michelle Villagomez, I think, are also part of this panel.

Oh, you're here. Okay. All right, so feel free to go ahead when you are ready.

KEVIN WOLFE: Good evening, Chair Lee.

(LOUD BACKGROUND NOISE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Shhhh... Sorry.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet down, please!

KEVIN WOLFE: Good evening, Chair Lee. My name is Kevin Wolfe. I'm here on behalf of the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, and we're one of the largest homeowner service organizations in New York City.

Just in order to help you understand the importance of our work, I want to begin by sharing a story of one of our homeowners named Miss V. Miss V. was a first-time homebuyer who purchased a home in East New York, Brooklyn. She's a Black woman and an immigrant. Although she earned a good income, she was denied access to traditional mortgages and steered toward purchasing a home in East New York. What was supposed to be her dream quickly became a nightmare. Her home became entangled in bureaucracy, violations, and lawsuits, and put her at risk of losing it.

Miss V. told us that her property had two deeds with technical issues, and one was invalid. There was also an illegal conversion, and therefore the City took action, so she was unable to live in her home.

Despite this, she had to pay for lawyers, pay to rent someplace else, and pay to repair the property violations, which all led to her financial ruin. She was on the brink of homelessness when she came to us for help.

Miss V's story highlights the challenges many New Yorkers face in buying and keeping their homes. Since 2008, the Center for New York City Neighborhoods has promoted and protected affordable homeownership so that working and middle-class New Yorkers can remain in strong and stable communities.

Throughout our citywide network of housing, counseling, and legal services organizations, we have served 200,000 homeowners. And each year, our network helps to save more than 2,000 homeowners from foreclosure and eviction.

It's time for New York to deliver for homeowners like Miss V. And we commend Mayor Mamdani

for putting forward a housing plan that will do just that: Increasing home repair financing (TIMER).

Just wrapping up.

Funding emergency monetary aid through the MAP Program; supporting ADU financing; basement legalization; Deed theft prevention; property tax reform; and improving access to tax exemptions for our seniors and disabled.

We can help stabilize owner-occupied housing and preserve affordability. Homeowners are facing increasing challenges, from rising foreclosure filings, which grew by 8% this year, to deed theft scams targeting vulnerable residents to unmet home repair needs. That's why we're requesting $9.7 million from the City Council to support our homeowner services. These investments will strengthen our outreach, expand our legal services, our housing counseling, and bring direct support to communities that need it most.

With the Council's support, we can protect homeowners, preserve generational wealth, and ensure that New York City remains a place where working families can stay and thrive. Thank you very much for listening.

PAULA SEGAL: Good afternoon, Council Members. Thank you so much for sticking around and staying engaged. It's been really enlightening to hear.

My name is Paula Segal. I am a Senior Staff Attorney in TakeRoot Justice's Equitable Neighborhoods Unit. I am here today representing the Abolish the Tax Lien Sale Coalition, which has organized and advocated since 2020 to abolish the current lien sale system and replace it with a just and equitable system of city debt collection. TakeRoot, where I work, is a founding member of the Coalition.

I want to address two things in the Executive Budget. One is that it actually includes revenue from a tax lien sale, but it also provides no funding for outreach to owners and residents and lien sale-eligible buildings. Neither of these items is acceptable and should go forward in the final budget at the end of the month. And I encourage the Council to think about them separately.

The Council must pass a budget that includes $3 million in outreach funding for residents of lien-sale-eligible properties, even if the sale is

suspended in 2027. Struggling homeowners will only see their city debt increase if they don't have the support they need to evaluate their options and find a pathway to staying in their homes. Whether or not those liens are about to be sold to a third party, those services are necessary. Tenants in buildings with outstanding debt need to be informed of their rights and connected with groups that can help them improve their living conditions. They need that whether or not the City is planning to sell their debt to a third party. Tax-lien sale-eligible buildings are in greater physical distress than comparable buildings without debt. That outreach funding is crucial, and we saw a real hiccup in the current year, the year that's ending. The budget for Fiscal 26 did include $2 million for outreach, but the funding was delayed. It was then cut in half when the lien sale was canceled in 2026. And as a result, the Coalition members (TIMER), may I have a little indulgence?

So, in addition to making sure there's outreach funding in the budget, we also need to make sure that the Fiscal 27 lien sale is not relied on as a revenue generator. It generates a very small amount

of revenue in relation to the amount of harm that it causes.

I submitted our testimony in writing with a brief from a report we just published two weeks ago that looks at the first and only lien sale that has happened with the reforms that were put in place in 2024. And what we learned on the ground and from the data is that the 2025 lien sale was basically the same in its impact as all of the lien sales that have happened since Rudy Giuliani put that system into place in 1996.

We do not want to see the City pass a budget that includes reliance on a lien sale, and we look forward to working with the Council and the Administration on a land bank getting that up and running as quickly as possible so we can have an equitable system in place. Thank you so much.

MICHELLE VILLAGOMEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Villagomez, and I'm the Senior Director of Municipal Affairs for the ASPCA. I recognize the many critical needs before the Council today, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of animals and the people who care for them.

Today, we urge the City Council to prioritize four key investments:

First, we support the recommendation of $1.5 million in funding for affordable spay, neuter, and veterinary care services.

The ASPCA has heavily invested in affordable veterinary care through our clinics across New York City, but demand continues to far exceed available appointments. Access to affordable vet care is one of the most effective ways to keep pets healthy, reduce shelter intake, and keep families together.

Secondly, we support the recommendation of $2 million in funding for community-based pet food distribution programs.

Every day, we hear from pet owners struggling to afford food for their pets. Pet food assistance is one of the most immediate and cost-effective ways to prevent unnecessary surrenders.

Third, we ask for continued support for animal care centers of New York City. ACC is the foundation of New York City's animal welfare system and will need sufficient resources as new

full-service shelters open in the Bronx and Brooklyn in the coming years.

We also encourage continued investment in ACC's community pets program, which helps families access support before surrender becomes their only option.

Finally, we ask for the restoration and expansion of funding for pet-inclusive sheltering and co-sheltering programs.

Survivors of domestic violence and individuals experiencing homelessness should never have to choose between their safety and their pet. We're proud to partner with the Urban Resource Institute, whose groundbreaking work has made New York City a national leader in pet-inclusive sheltering. Magnolia Gardens is an excellent example of what is possible when we invest in keeping families together, providing safe housing where people and their pets can (TIMER)remain together during times of crisis. We encourage the city to build on URI's success and help create more pet-inclusive housing and shelter options across New York City.

As you negotiate the FY27 Budget, we respectfully ask you to support these investments. Together, we can help keep families together, reduce strain on the shelter system, and strengthen communities across New York City. We look forward to working with you to make these possible. Thank you.

DAVID LOURIDAS: Hello. My name is David Louridas. I'm also with the ASPCA. I'm a member of the Community Engagement Team.

Our team works directly with community members in neighborhoods across New York City to connect pet owners with resources that help them keep their pets healthy, safe, and at home. We partner with community-based organizations, domestic violence programs, senior centers, and others to provide pet food supplies, information, and support to families facing hardship.

Every day we see firsthand that supporting pets means supporting the families that care for them. When pet owners have access to pet food and other support services, they are more likely to keep their pets and avoid the heartbreaking decision to surrender a beloved companion animal.

I'm here today to urge the Council to support two critical investments: Funding for community-based pet food distribution and funding for pet-inclusive sheltering and co-sheltering programs.

Through my work, I regularly meet New Yorkers who are struggling to make ends meet. Many are facing difficult choices between paying rent, buying groceries, or caring for their pets. There have been too many instances where this has resulted in a pet owner going hungry themselves instead of allowing their pets to do so. We have noticed that this situation is especially prevalent among our elderly population that sometimes is living alone. This is simply not a decision they should be forced to make.

Pet food assistance is one of the simplest and most effective ways to keep families together. That's why investing in pet food distribution programs is so important. It would help community organizations reach more families before a temporary hardship becomes a permanent separation. As highlighted, it would also prevent malnutrition for the pet and their owner.

We also urge the Council to support funding for pet-inclusive sheltering and co-sheltering programs. For survivors of domestic violence and individuals experiencing homelessness, the inability to find a safe place for a beloved pet can be a significant barrier to seeking help. (TIMER)

During what might be the most difficult period in their lives, a pet owner should never have to choose between living on the street or in their car instead of a safe bed indoors because they have no other way of staying together with their pet. The sad reality is all too common in our city.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you for helping us all to take a step towards the primary goal of our community engagement program, which is safely keeping pets and their owners together.

DEL MAR LEON: Hi, Finance Committee, City Council Finance Committee. Thank you for having us today. My name is Del Mar Leon, and I am from K9 Rescue NYC.

As one of the few independent rescues that mostly networks animals on their last 24-hours in four different states, mostly in California and

New York City, K9 Rescue NYC, I have observed very unprofessional operations in a cult-like manner from NYCACC (Animal Care Centers of NYC).

Take this headline from the *New York Post* on July 21st, 2025, that reads, "Problem-plagued NYC Animal Shelters Suspend Intake of Dogs and Cats Due to Overcrowding,—GOP's Sliwa calls to end $1.4B 'mismanaged' contract.'"

I fully support a spay/neuter program, considering the fact that we need to have a moratorium on breeding. I think they need to go hand in hand.

In addition, I'd like to add that New York City Animal Care Center claims to have 300 New York partners, but only 50 of them, if at all, are pulled from the list. Fosters denied, as there are not enough rescues to pull. ASPCA, as a matter of fact, has only pulled two of these animals out of the 500 they have killed since the beginning of the year.

It's one of the largest institutions nationwide and only a few blocks away from New York City ACC, with only two dogs pulled, which deserves a lot of concern.

It is my understanding, from looking at the job openings from the ACC list, that they are understaffed. In addition, ACC uses a lot of retaliatory practices against their volunteers who speak against them or actually speak about what is (TIMER)...

I'd like to add that their animals are being overmedicated with Trazodone, and I would like to ask for them to stop the overmedication of our animals because they're making them unadoptable, and it is not fair to them.

Just to conclude, I would like for the whole shelter system to be really looked at and reconsidered as to what is being funded and what is actually happening with ACC. I would like to actually request that the New York City Council put back on their calendars the oversight committee hearing that has been postponed since September of 2024. They're not being held accountable for their practices. They have no one to answer to, and they actually need to respond to many of the kinds of practices they're using against the animals that are adoptable, healthy, and being killed unnecessarily. Thank you so

much for your time, and I can answer any questions. Thank you.

ANTHONY FELICIANO: Good afternoon. My name is Anthony Feliciano. I am Vice President for Housing Works Advocacy. I'm also here on behalf of the NA New York Community Coalition.

New York City has made historic progress, but the progress is now at risk. In 2024, over 1,700 New Yorkers were newly diagnosed with HIV. At the same time, 86% of new diagnoses are among Black and Latino/Latina/Latinx New Yorkers, and nearly half are in high-poverty neighborhoods. These disparities are unacceptable and preventable.

We know what works. New York's ending the epidemic strategy, driven by community and backed by City Council investment, has saved lives and reduced transmission. But today we face a new reality. A massive federal disinvestment, including proposed federal cuts, will eliminate HIV prevention funding and housing supports while Medicaid rollbacks threaten coverage for thousands of New Yorkers, including people living with HIV. That means the City must step up now or risk losing decades of progress.

We're calling on the Council to act in four key areas:

First, increase Pathways to Care to $15 million to sustain prevention, treatment, and outreach. The New York State budget has failed to meaningfully increase funding for HIV services, placing even greater pressure on the City to act. That is why Pathway to Care is so critical. This initiative funds the community-based organizations and faith-based partners that are on the front lines delivering culturally competent outreach, linkage to care, and reaching communities that healthcare systems too often miss.

Secondly, invest $10 million in sexual health clinics to strengthen staffing and rebuild the infrastructure capacity across existing clinics so they can meet the demand for HIV and STI testing, treatment, and prevention.

Third, fund HIV peer specialists to reach communities most impacted. Last year, this Council made a critical investment (TIMER) in The Peer Specialist Initiative, committing $4.5 million to expand the mental health peer workforce. That

leadership recognizes what we know to be true—peers are the most effective way to engage people in care.

Today, we're not asking to take anything from the investments. We're asking you to build on it by adding $1.2 million to support HIV peer specialists.

Finally, invest $4 million in PrEP Equity. Too many Black and Latinx New Yorkers make up a vast majority of New York diagnoses, but represent only a fraction of those accepting PrEP. So, it's critical that we address the root causes: housing, poverty, access, ending the epidemics within reach, but only if we invest accordingly.

Now is not the time to pull back. It is the time to finish the job.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Any Council Members have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: A couple briefly for Ms. Segal and then a couple for Ms. Villagomez.

Great job, everybody, by the way, and I appreciate your patience on a long day; it rivals Chair Lee's.

Ms. Segal, obviously your testimony really resonated with me, representing a lot of

homeowners who have been on the receiving end of unfair liens and things of that nature.

From a budgetary perspective, though, you're asking taxpayers to spend another $3 million on outreach. What specific metrics should we use to determine whether that money was successful? How many homeowners should be reached? How many exemptions should be secured? And how many properties should be kept out of lien sale eligibility?

PAULA SEGAL: Okay, I just want to check in with my colleague here because actually the Center for New York City Neighborhoods manages that contract. We are counsel to the Coalition that is on the advocacy side, but they're actually doing that work.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Well, I don't mind the team... (CROSS-TALK)

PAULA SEGAL: I'll pass it to... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: response...

PAULA SEGAL: In a moment, if you don't mind.

But that is a really small expenditure to keep maybe 100,000 New Yorkers in their homes. When

we look at the tenants impacted by the lien sale who are not being reached at all by the homeownership programs, those folks are cycling through one slumlord after another slumlord after another slumlord. And what's facilitating that is the post-lien sale auctions. So it's kind of hard for us to get a handle on real numbers, though I think, Mr. Wolfe, we'll answer some of your very specific questions about homeowners in a moment. But the impact of just having organizers be able to go door to door and talk to people living in buildings that have signs of distress is huge. We're hearing about that now in the news. We're hearing about the Pinnacle Portfolio. We're hearing about Emerald Equities. We're hearing these slumlords actually get displaced and replaced with better landlords. And those are the impacts we're really going for. But we also want to make sure that we're protecting generational wealth and protecting and getting folks exemptions who need them.

I'll pass that to Mr. Wolfe.

KEVIN WOLFE: Thank you, Council Member, for that question.

I'm just pulling up our district profiles where we go through the homeowners on the lien sale. If we look at 2026, we did see about 23 in what's called tax class one. So, that's the small homes, one-to three-family homeowners that are on the list. We saw about 2,300 that were kind of on that 30-day list where their lien was about to be sold, but for the outreach.

And so, it’s outreach and services. So, this is basically providing those homeowners access to an attorney, providing those homeowners access to a financial counselor, and then going out to them directly because we have their address and saying, "Hey, here are your options for getting off the lien sale." So, for those 23, you know, that cost we're looking at is how much tax revenue those properties would bring in, but then also there's a cost to foreclosure. There's a cost to those homeowners being evicted and then having nowhere to go or being a burden on the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: One last question for you guys, if I may.

If the City abolishes the lien sale entirely, what do you propose we do about the

property owner who can pay but simply chooses not to pay taxes, water bill, or municipal charges year after year while their neighbors do?

PAULA SEGAL: Absolutely. That's a very on-the-nose question.

We are not proposing abolishing collections. We just want those collections to be done in a way that's publicly accountable, and that is not a third-party debt collector that has a fiduciary responsibility only to its investors.

We worked with this Council last year to create the framework for a New York City Land Bank that could buy liens and have appointees from the Council and the Administration, hold public hearings, and honestly do much of the same work from the perspective of us here in the Council as the tax trusts have done, except transparently, accountably, and with public oversight.

So, we want that set up as quickly as possible. Please get those appointees, you know, named, and please get that application to the state in as quickly as we can. Please don't wait until 2029.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you very much.

Ms. Villagomez, and if your colleague wants to help answer my question, feel free. The issue that you raised is one that's very important to me. It's very important to the Animal Welfare Caucus that I sit on. And it was one of the first pieces of legislation that I submitted, which is to get affordable spay/neuter to every borough. And lo and behold, when I submitted it, I was told, "Well, the City Council is already supposed to be doing that."

So, the Council created the Animal Population Control Fund years ago, and we've learned that millions of dollars have been collected through dog licensing surcharges. Based on the ASPCA's experience on the ground, is the current level of city-funded spay and neuter services meeting the need, or are there still significant unmet needs despite those funds being collected?

MICHELLE VILLAGOMEZ: That's an excellent question.

So, the ASPCA is the contracted provider of affordable spay/neuter through the Animal Population Control Fund. DOH bids it out. In this

most recent contract, it was assigned fully to the ASPCA. So we provide low-cost spay/neuter, or free through that contract, to owned pets of low-income individuals, which automatically leaves out the rescue community. And we provide services through mobile clinics and three brick-and-mortar clinics.

And I'm going to be very, very honest. In 2025, we provided about 60,000 services, and that was nowhere near enough to fill the need.

There are many people in the city who are upset at the ASPCA because they can't get an appointment. And people joke that it's like trying to get tickets to a Knicks game where it's like you have to call in at a certain time to make it. So the need far exceeds what we're able to provide.

The ASPCA also provides those services free of charge to the rescue community. We also do spay/neuter for the shelter system. So, we're doing beyond what the contract reimburses us for, and it's nowhere near enough.

We see people lining up. We see people calling. The need is very high across the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: I want to try and get in two last questions for you guys quickly.

One last question, one concern that I hear from my constituents is that affordable veterinary and spay/neuter services can be difficult to access, particularly for residents outside Manhattan. Are there geographic gaps in service today, and do boroughs like Staten Island have adequate access to these programs from what you're aware of?

MICHELLE VILLAGOMEZ: Yes, there are gaps in services. The ASPCA does a lot of work in very high-need areas of Brooklyn and the Bronx. We have a clinic in Queens. We will do some in Manhattan. We will go mobile to Staten Island, but Staten Island does not have its own brick-and-mortar spay/neuter clinic or affordable veterinary clinic run by any group. So there are shortages, and in order to get the free/subsidized services to the animal population control fund, you have to meet certain criteria set out by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to qualify. So there is need across all the boroughs,

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: But especially Staten Island, from what it sounds?

MICHELLE VILLAGOMEZ: I'm going to tell you, Staten Island is great. Staten Island has a very

vocal and active rescue community. You have a very involved DA's office that will bring programs in, but yes, there is a high need in Staten Island. Thanks very much.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

MICHELLE VILLAGOMEZ: And thank you, guys, who are members of the Animal Welfare Caucus. We're very excited to continue these conversations with all of you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to thank Mr. Wolfe for your advocacy for Mrs. V. You know, actually, Sandy Nurse and I-- that's our council district, our council districts. I don't know if she's in the East New York that I have or the East New York that Sandy has, but we thank you for your advocacy because we, you know, my district, Sandy's district, we're both leading as far as having those properties that are on the tax sale lien list.

So, we understand the work you do, and the importance of that advocacy is so important, and to continue the support. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. I think that is it, and I agree education is super important, and we were actually talking about that on the Council among some of us about the education on the lien sales. So we appreciate your efforts on that. Anthony, I don't know how many hats you wear, but it's always good to see you in this role, too. So thank you, everyone. Thank you.

Okay. All right. Next, from the ICARE Coalition, we have Sierra Kraft, Tatiana Patricia Vasquez, Leidis Del la Rosa, and Paul Fleck.

And thank you, everyone, for your patience. Feel free to get up and stretch. But I appreciate all of you sticking around and waiting to testify.

Okay. Are there more folks coming, or have they maybe left? I don't know. So I have Paul Fleck, Leidis Del la Rosa, Patricia Vasquez, Tatiana Wolkowitz, and Sierra Kraft.

Okay, feel free to go ahead and start.

SIERRA KRAFT: Good afternoon, Chair Lee, members of the Finance Committee, and Council Finance.

My name is Sierra Kraft, and I'm the executive director of the ICARE Coalition. We're a coalition of legal service providers dedicated to ensuring that unaccompanied immigrant children and youth in New York City have access to free legal representation.

I want to begin by thanking the Council for its leadership and significant investment in immigrant youth through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative and the SIJ Initiative in FY26.

With this funding, seven providers have collectively supported nearly 2,500 unaccompanied children and families in just the first nine months of this fiscal year alone through legal screenings, consultation, and full representation. No single organization can meet this need alone. And through your investment, we built a coordinated citywide network of 13 providers that connect children to legal services, share resources and expertise, and serve as one of the strongest systems of support for immigrant youth in the country at a time when so many other systems are failing them.

But the reality is that what immigrant youth are facing today is very different than it was

just a year ago. Children are being railroaded through an immigration system that's moving faster, becoming more punitive, and increasingly coercing them to take voluntary departure or receive a removal order. And that's just not really a choice a child should have to make.

Additionally, we're seeing judges granting very short continuances of only two weeks rather than three to six months, with no time for youth to obtain counsel or for attorneys to prepare for complex cases.

Providers are having to prepare for both the SIJ Petition and asylum applications for each youth. So each case is taking much more work, and they're having to respond to all these various federal shifting policies.

Unaccompanied kids are now detained for an average of six months or more due to increased scrutiny on the sponsors, and providers are working hard to file habeas petitions (TIMER) to challenge prolonged detention.

The work has become more urgent and more complex. And we urge the City Council to fully invest $18.6 million in the Unaccompanied Minors and

Families Initiative and fully fund the $2.575 million for the SIJ initiative.

We've built a system that's working, and now is not the time to step back from it. Thank you so much for your support.

PATRICIA VASQUEZ: Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Lee, the Committee, and committee staff for holding this hearing.

My name is Patricia Vasquez. I'm a Supervising Attorney with the Immigration Legal Program at the Lutheran Social Services of New York, and I'm here to testify in support of funding for immigration legal services, including renewed funding for our SIJ and our asylum seeker legal assistant network, ASLAN, currently funded by the council. Lutheran is a proud member of ASLAN and the ICARE Collaborative, and we continue to witness the profound effects that our services have on immigrant New Yorkers.

Immigration law has grown more complicated under the current administration as the federal government increasingly relies on new procedures, confusion, and high costs to deny immigration cases that should otherwise be approved.

City Council funding for ASLAN helps us lower or eliminate those barriers for all our immigrant New Yorkers, helping us assist them with immigration applications, application fees, filing for appeals, filing motions to prevent their removal to a third country, and much more.

ASLAN Process Services go far beyond simply filing one application. Recently, we helped a young person file for SIJ less than a week before his 21st birthday. He had accompanied his younger brother to an appointment and did not realize he was eligible for immigration relief. We helped him file his case in family court on an expedited basis. He received his special finding orders just days before his 21st birthday, and we overnighted his application to immigration to arrive before the deadline.

People come to our offices after an immigration judge has denied their asylum case. They haven't had a full hearing, can't explain why, or even the country where they were ordered removed. We help that person figure it out and file an appeal to stand up for the right to have a full and fair hearing.

We need the City Council to stand up for us as we fight for and with our immigrant neighbors. Please help us continue this crucial work. Thank you so much.

PAUL FLECK: Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Paul Fleck, and I serve as Executive Director of Immigration Law and Justice New York. We operate legal clinics in houses of worship in New York City and provide extended representation to low-income and vulnerable immigrants we meet at those clinics. We are also proud members of the ICARE Coalition, serving unaccompanied undocumented youth eligible for special immigrant juvenile status protection.

When I came before the Committee on Immigration months ago, I complained. I complained about the painfully slow process that existed to get a contract in place and registered. I'm here today without a complaint. In fact, I'm here to express the joy and gratitude of an Executive Director whose organization has a contract. It is registered, and the organization has received funding with respect to the SIJS-eligible youth we are representing in the City.

In addition, we have hired an additional staff attorney to represent even more clients. The only way that extraordinary progress could grind to a halt is if the City Council does not elect to fund the SIJS program at the requested level of $2,575 million for Fiscal Year 2027. We would be forced to stop just as we're getting started. Our existing clients need us, and prospective clients need us even more.

I want to end by thanking the folks who have walked us through this process. In particular, Council Finance Staffers Florentine Kabore and Navdeep Bains (phonetic). From the Department of Social Services, there's Cornelia Branzan, and from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, there's Phoebe Lee.

Finally, I want to thank the New York City Council and its members, people like you who stand with unaccompanied immigrant children and provide them with hope for the future. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And this is definitely a program that a lot of us care about on the Council with the unaccompanied minors. Thank you all for coming to the roundtable as well, because that was

actually really helpful too. So thank you all so much for your work. Does anyone have questions? No. Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Okay, and next we have CPC. Yeah, there you go. So, we have, and forgive me if I'm not saying this correctly: Oyber Ochildes, JiMeng Wuli, Alan Wong, Beryl Lau, Jeff Lau, Carlyn Cowen. Okay, sure. If you could just have them fill out the slips and then make sure we have the names. Okay. I don't know where it is, so we'll try to get it again. And if you could just say your name before you testify.

OYBER OCHILDES: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Chair Lee, and Members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Oyber Ochildes, and I'm a Peer Mentor at the Chinese American Planning Council (CPC). I'm here today to ask for increased funding for SYEP, the Summer Youth Employment Program, and continued investment in the future of young people.

As technology and artificial intelligence continue to develop, many entry-level jobs are changing or disappearing. Businesses are increasingly looking for faster and cheaper ways to complete work, making it difficult for young people with little or

no experience to get their first opportunity. This raises an important question. How are young people supposed to gain experience when no one is willing to hire them in the first place? That's where SYEP comes in. SYEP has invested in young people for decades, even when many employers are hesitant to take that first chance on us. It provides real work and work experience, professional development, and an opportunity to build skills that will help us succeed in the future.

SYEP plays a similar role for many young people across New York City, like myself. I'm going into my third year in SYEP, and it has helped me and so many other youth learn workplace expectations, develop confidence, and gain experience that we cannot get in a classroom.

If we want young people to become the future workers, leaders, and community members that our city depends on, then we must invest in them today. I urge the City Council to expand funding for SYEP and continue creating opportunities for the next generation. Thank you for your time.

RICHARD SOOHOO: Thank you, Chair Lee, and Members of the City Council, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Richard Soohoo, and I am the Tenant Services Coordinator at Norfolk Senior Housing at the Chinese American Planning Council, CPC. We serve 115 older adult households, including 28 apartments set aside for formerly unhoused seniors.

I am here today to highlight the critical connection between affordable senior housing, congregate meal programs, and the ability of older New Yorkers to age with dignity in their communities.

For many seniors, housing is more than shelter. It is the foundation for health, stability, and social connection. As residents age, many face growing challenges, including fixed incomes, rising housing costs, food insecurity, mobility limitations, and social isolation.

I would like to share a story about MG. MG is a native New Yorker who spent his childhood in foster homes and has struggled with mental health issues, moving in and out of shelters his whole life. In 2023, MG was informed that he had been selected

for a CityFHEPS voucher at 64 Norfolk Senior Housing. Fast forward to today, MG is now an active member of our 64 Norfolk Community, with the support system of other seniors to lean on for help, strong friendships, and staff assistance just an elevator ride away.

Affordable housing is essential to ensuring that older adults can remain safely housed as they age. We urge the Council to expand and strengthen senior housing support programs, including CityFHEPS, Section 8, and project-based vouchers. These protections are crucial for older adults whose incomes often decline after retirement while living expenses continue to rise.

Equally important, many of our residents rely on congregate meal programs as a primary source of daily nutrition. With the cost of living continuing to rise and federal changes affecting SNAP benefits, access to nutritious, culturally appropriate meals has become even more critical; we are asking for an increase of at least $60 million in congregate meal funding to keep pace with inflation and rising food costs. The City must make these investments and support older (TIMER) adults in

aging safely, independently, and with dignity in their communities.

ASHELY CHEN: Thank you, Chair Lee, and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ashley Chen, and I'm the Policy and Research Manager at the Chinese American Planning Council, CPC.

Every day, human service workers make New York City work by connecting people to food, housing, health care, public benefits, and other essential supports. They sustain families, strengthen communities, and ensure no New Yorker is left behind.

At CPC, our staff, many of whom are here today, go above and beyond every day to meet the needs of the communities we serve. They spend hours distributing food outdoors in extreme heat, bitter cold, and other challenging conditions to ensure that families experiencing food insecurity have access to nutritious meals. They help older adults, immigrants, and other community members navigate complex systems by translating and explaining government notices, bills, and other critical documents that are often not available in their preferred language. They spend countless hours on the phone with government

agencies, advocating on behalf of clients, resolving benefit issues, and helping individuals access essential services.

Yet, despite their commitment, many organizations face persistent staffing shortages and high turnover rates, creating a workforce crisis that threatens the stability of critical programs and services. CBC is a proud to be a member of the #JustPay Campaign, which advocates for fair compensation for the nonprofit human services workforce, and we urge the City to fully fund the promised 3% COLA for city-contracted human service workers in Fiscal Year 2027 and to also pass wage equity legislation Intro 452, which would align nonprofit and government human service job titles and establish a pathway to equitable compensation.

Human service workers have stood on the front lines of every challenge that our city has faced, showing up day after day for their neighbors and communities. They have earned more than our gratitude. They have earned our investment. Now is the time for the City to show up for them. Thank you.

BERYL LAU: First of all, I want to thank Chair Lee and the Members of the City Council

for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Beryl, and I'm a Youth Advocate for the Chinese American Planning Council, and I'm here to urge the Council to invest in the Community Food Connection Program.

Coming from a low-income household, I see the struggle that many New Yorkers face to put food on the table for themselves and their families. Sometimes you just barely miss the income qualifications for SNAP, and SNAP benefits just aren't enough for groceries or, even worse, your SNAP benefits get skimmed. What are we supposed to do then? You still have to eat at the end of the day.

That's where programs such as the Community Food Connection program come in. Through this program, 700 community kitchens and food pantries across the city are able to fill these gaps by providing New Yorkers with nutritious groceries and hot meals during these challenging times. We need to ensure that we fully fund a proven and successful program that has been a lifeline for the communities.

My family personally has had their SNAP benefits skimmed before, and I see the impact that it has, like mine having to find out that you can't rely

on SNAP for that month, and I see the calculations that they make in their heads and the trade-offs they have to make figuring out a way to survive.

As the affordability crisis deepens in our city, we need to step up and invest $100 million into the Community Food Connection Program. Thank you for your time.

JIMENG WULI: Good evening. My name is JiMeng Wuli, and I'm a youth advocate from the Chinese American Planning Council.

Firstly, I would like to thank Chair Lee and Members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify.

I was born in Venezuela, so coming here was a big challenge for me because I didn't speak English. Slowly, as I tried to learn English and make connections with people, I thought I was decent in the language and that I pretty much understood most things until I was testifying for my green card at family court. That's when I realized I barely understood anything, especially in legal settings.

My family's English wasn't as great as mine, and we could only rely on an in-house translator at the time. My family and I were lucky

enough to be able to have a support system. But imagine all the immigrants out there who are facing the same issue, but with no support or knowledge of the complex legal process.

There are about 3.1 million immigrants in New York City. Meaning 3.1 million people are facing the same obstacles just to be able to live a dignified life.

I'm here in front of you as a proud immigrant alongside the Rice Coalition, led by the Asian American Federation, comprising nearly 20 Asian-led organizations, including CPC, which provides case management and legal services.

We urge you to include $3.5 million in the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget to support the Rice Network as well as $15 million for a new LGBTQIA+ Immigrant Fund.

At a time of heightened challenges for immigrant communities, the City has a duty to make intentional and meaningful investments that expand access to legal services, wraparound support, language access, and resource navigation. Thank you, guys, for your time.

ALAN WONG: Hi. Good evening, Chair Lee and City Council Members. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Alan Wong, and I am an Enrollment Specialist at the Chinese American Planning Council, which they call CPC.

I have been working at CPC for the past 20 years, and I work specifically with helping community members apply for housing renewal and public benefits.

On a difficult day, I see about maybe 20 community members, many of whom are older adults who live alone and do not have children or a family member at home to help them with their mail, complete paperwork, or renew their benefits.

Changes in benefit requirements, like SNAP eligibility and work requirements, are becoming more complicated, especially for mixed households we serve. In many cases, one spouse is retired and no longer expected to work, while a younger spouse may suddenly be required to meet work requirements in order to maintain benefits for their household.

Today, rising rents and the increasing cost of living are making it harder than ever for

older adults and low-income families to stay housed and meet their basic needs. The demand for our service continues to grow and can only be sustained when resources are meaningfully allocated to benefit the enrollment assistance program.

NYC benefits are currently left out of the Executive Budget, and we know the life-changing impact that this program has on our community. We are urging the City to (TIMER) fully fund this program at $9.75 million in the Adopted Budget to avoid any potential interruption or delay in advance for providers. Thank you very much.

JEFF LAU: Thank you, Chair Lee and Members of the City Council, for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Jeff Lau. I'm the Director of the Adult Literacy Program at the Chinese American Planning Council.

CPC joins our NYCCAL (New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy) partners by calling on the City Council to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary Initiatives into the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative and increase the funding from $14.5 million to $18 million.

Adult literacy classes are where immigrant students build community and strength in New York City. They teach students necessary language skills to better support their children and their education. Parents learn English so they can confidently join community programs and the PTA. Immigrants learn English so they can finally open their small business, gain employment, or feel confident to pursue that promotion at their jobs. Students come to classes to learn how to navigate the health care system and learn about City resources. And for one particular student at CPC, adult literacy class has meant that she can speak with her son's new girlfriend.

Investing in our communities works, and we've seen it time and time again. However, at this current cost per student rate, adult literacy programs citywide have struggled to maintain the costs of needed services and staffing.

A 2017 council-led report found that the cost to maintain adult literacy programs would be $3,700 per student. And yet the most recent DYCD adult literacy contracts had the rate at only $1,300

per student, almost a third of what it would cost to run a program.

This undercutting of programs means we're not able to provide adequate staffing for the wraparound services and counseling that students need outside of their classroom. It means programs struggle to provide enough classes to meet the 2.2 million New Yorkers and counting of students who need adult literacy and education.

And most importantly, students' lives are put on hold as people wait to achieve their high school equivalency and to enter the workforce, help with their children's homework (TIMER), or even become a US citizen.

So again, I urge the Council to consolidate the discretionary initiatives to be placed on the Adult Literacy Forward at $18 million. If we're serious about providing our community members with meaningful education that will empower them to succeed, we must invest. Thank you for your time.

EDWIN RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Chair Lee and Members Of The City Council, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Edwin Rodriguez, and I'm

the Family Wellness Specialist with Promise NYC at the Chinese American Planning Council.

The Governor and the Mayor have ensured meaningful investments in universal childcare and 2-K, and we are calling for equitable implementation. These investments are important to help families access affordable, high-quality child care, and I urge the City to make sure those resources reach immigrant communities, low-income neighborhoods, and families who have historically faced barriers to access care.

I am also here today to ask the Council to renew and expand funding for Promise NYC, which provides childcare assistance to low-income families who are now eligible for other city-funded childcare programs.

Funding these programs at $50 million is a critical step toward achieving universal child care for all New Yorkers. Right now, there are more than 137 families on the waiting list for childcare assistance at CPC. Many of them have been waiting for over a year. Families call our office every week asking when their turn will come. The current $25 million investment has already helped approximately

1,000 children access high-quality care while parents are working towards economic mobility. Increasing funding to $15 million would allow us to help at least a 1,000 more children and families.

Every day we hear stories from parents who are able to secure stable employment and are working towards moving out of shelters and into permanent housing because finally they have child care.

My ask is simple. Ensure the implementation of universal child care and 2-K, and restore Promise NYC's funding to $50 million so more families can access the care that they need and deserve. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Do any Council Members have questions? No, we're good? Okay.

I just want to thank you all at CPC. I've had the honor and privilege of working alongside you for so many years in the community when I was at KCS. And you guys literally provide services from cradle to grave and are serving some of the most marginalized community members. So thank you for bringing each of these programs to light, which I

know many of the folks in the room can also subscribe to and relate to. So thank you all so much.

And, Oyber, my dim sum buddy, do you remember me? I was sitting with you at the dim sum breakfast. Yes, now you remember that was me. Okay, that was fun. Yes. Okay, thank you all so much.

Okay, next panel: Beth Williams, Emely Paezor, Austyn Smith, Vipassana Vijayarangan, I don't know if I'm saying that right, Nick Buess, Michelle Berney, and Jade Vasquez. Again, I'm so sorry if I'm mispronouncing folks' names. Please correct us when you come up.

Okay. And feel free to begin. I don't know which side you guys want to start on. Doesn't matter. Go ahead.

VIPASSANA VIJAYARANGAN: Good afternoon, Members of the Council and Chair Lee, especially Chair Lee for being here. If I didn't care about libraries as much as I did, I would yield my time so you could take a break.

My name is Vipassana Vijayarangan, and I'm with the New York City Public Library Actions Network. We're asking that the City Council support 0.5% of the Expense Budget for Libraries. There are

11 City Council Members who are already supporting this, including Council Member Epstein, who is present here, and several others.

Before I talk about why 0.5%, I want to note that this ask is the bare minimum. That is, it is the floor and not the ceiling.

Libraries are one of the few public spaces that provide access to books and media, bathrooms, and simply a place to sit indoors in our increasingly unaffordable city that has the highest real estate prices in the entire world.

Library workers are more than just their job description. They fulfill the roles of social worker, language interpreter, and childcare support. And they really should not be doing that.

Library programs support children, undocumented and documented immigrants, seniors, and unhoused patrons, and I'm pretty sure many, many people in this room.

Zero-point-five percent of the Expense Budget is a commitment from the City that it prioritizes and says libraries, library workers, children, seniors, immigrants, and democracy matter.

When I was listening to the earlier testimony of advocates for EMS workers and the crisis in our city with respect to them, I stopped, and I asked myself for a moment why I was still advocating for libraries.

When I testified last year, I showed up with broken bones, and I was able to because an EMS worker had given me lifesaving care. And I know why I'm still here for our libraries. We cannot wait until there is an even bigger crisis for libraries. And so we should, you know, perhaps the federal government finds out how libraries support queer and trans youth or undocumented immigrants or unhoused patrons and comes down on libraries with full force.

The Mayor's budget doesn't even keep up with inflation. And so we're asking the City Council to support 0.5%, and that's just 0.008 or $97 million. And it's essential that the City funds libraries now for New Yorkers and for democracy.

And as one of my fellow panelists said, thank you for your time. Knicks in five!

BETH WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, and thank you for holding this vital hearing today.

My name is Beth Williams, and I'm the New York State Policy Director for Hunger Free America, a national direct service and advocacy nonprofit group headquartered in Manhattan and with a field office in the Bronx. I'm honored to submit this testimony today on behalf of more than 1.2 million city residents who are now struggling against hunger.

We'd like to address Mayor Mamdani's planned municipal grocery store program. Given that the five planned stores will be located within easy shopping distance of only a very small percentage of the city's population, we are urging the City to enact a much broader food affordability agenda.

I want to reiterate that Hunger Free America and our New York City affiliate, Hunger Free NYC, are all in on the Mayor and the Council's Affordability Agenda. We're especially thrilled that the Mayor, Speaker, and the majority of the City Council have shone a spotlight on the food affordability crisis. Yet, we want to stress that while the five municipal grocery stores may help address the problem, they are greatly limited by the following factors, including the limited neighborhood reach of the stores; the travel cost for shoppers to

the stores; the travel time to the stores; and the small impact of five stores on the overall large New York City food retail economy.

We believe the Agenda should focus both on increasing usage of federally funded food benefits such as SNAP, WIC, school breakfast, Summer EBT, and Summer Meals, and on making groceries more affordable in every neighborhood of the city by using the new municipal grocery stores as a home or neighborhood center delivery hubs, testing out mobile markets, and instituting a food voucher program that makes a discounted market basket of food available at perhaps thousands of retail locations instead of just five.

For this reason, we are requesting the following budget items in order to maximize the federal safety net: We're asking for $5 million for citywide and neighborhood nonprofit organizations to enable their clients to meet the new SNAP ABAWD (Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents) work requirements. (TIMER) We're asking to fund and baseline $9.75 million, along with many others, for the New York City Benefits program to keep offering targeted benefit enrollment and support.

For Hunger Free NYC, we're asking $200,000 for SNAP and emergency food assistance, benefit education, and $75,000 to support increased participation in SNAP. And lastly, we're advocating for the $100 million in baseline funding for CFC Community Food Connection. Thank you.

JADE VASQUEZ: Good evening, Chair Lee and Members of the Finance Committee.

My name is Jade Vasquez, Director of Policy and Research at WIN, the city's largest provider of shelter and supportive housing for families with children. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Every night, nearly 7,000 people call Win home, including 3,600 children.

Today, as our city faces its worst affordability crisis, approximately 100,000 New Yorkers, including 31,000 children, are living in New York City shelters.

As federal cuts threaten vital social safety nets, New York City must lead the nation by expanding, not diminishing, local programs and initiatives that serve struggling New Yorkers experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.

To address this crisis, Win urges the city to prioritize funding for the following:

One, implement CityFHEPS reform.

Council must allocate sufficient funds to begin implementing the 2023 reform package that would extend the rental assistance program to low-income households in the community, expand to households earning 50% of the area median income, and remove burdensome work requirements. A recent Win analysis found that if CityFHEPS reforms had been implemented as intended in January 2024, the City could have saved $1 billion in shelter costs alone and cut the family homeless population in half.

Second, invest in supportive housing by allocating $78.3 million to renovate a thousand supportive housing units and permanently preserve an additional 325 units.

This funding includes a $13 million flexible expense pot to allow repairs to HRA and DOHMH units.

Third, fund Local Law 35 by investing $40 million to place clinical mental health professionals in every family shelter.

This is a critical investment in the long-term health and stability of homeless families.

Fourth, support homeless immigrant families by allocating an additional $85 million for immigration legal services.

We must also invest in the ShareNYC (TIMER) program, which provides a pathway to permanent housing for long-term shelter stayers who are ineligible for other subsidies.

Fifth, expand workforce development by increasing funding for shelter-based programs like Win's income-building program.

Finally, uphold the COLA commitment by maintaining the 3% cost of living adjustment for human services workers to ensure that our dedicated workforce can afford to live in the city that they serve. We also urge Council to pass Intro 452 to advance wage equity among the human services workers in the nonprofit sector.

With federal funding uncertain, the City must step up. We urge you to pass a progressive budget that centers the needs of working people and marginalized communities and provides every New

Yorker with a fair shot at financial stability and a permanent home. Thank you.

AUSTYN SMITH: Good evening, Chair Lee, Members of the Committee Council. My name is Austyn Smith. I am a Senior Advocacy Advisor at the International Rescue Committee and a Brooklyn resident.

I'm here on behalf of my organization in the New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative. Five well-established organizations came together during this trying time to ask the Council for a targeted, cost-effective investment in services we already deliver.

Catholic Charities, Community Services, CAMPA, Church World Service, Commonpoint, and the IRC have operated refugee and immigrant case management programs in New York City for decades. The infrastructure, staff, and community relationships are already in place. This funding does not build something new. It sustains and scales proven service delivery at a moment when federal support has disappeared, and demand has surged.

At $5 million across five agencies, the City is purchasing comprehensive case management,

health referrals, housing and benefits navigation, workforce development, crisis intervention, and legal referrals. That's roughly $12.50 per person that we can serve. That is a fraction of the downstream cost to the City when immigrants cycle through emergency services without stable support.

You have five accountable, experienced partners with decades of demonstrated results and a clear, measurable commitment to serve an estimated 4,000 of some of the city's most vulnerable residents across all five boroughs.

In a constrained budget environment, this kind of investment makes fiscal sense. Why? Vastly reduced but existing capacity, proven outcomes, and a concrete return. (TIMER) We can give you that.

And I'm just going to end by saying thank you to you and your staff for countless hours, late nights, and hard work you dedicate to our communities. We recognize your public service. It doesn't go unnoticed. Thank you.

MICHELLE BERNEY: Good evening, Chair Lee and members. My name is Michelle Berney. I'm the Director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center at the Community Service Society.

For 30 years, BPLC has been providing education on public benefits and housing programs to social service providers here in the city.

BPLC is one of three technical assistance providers in the NYC Benefits Initiative, and it's designed to expand access to public benefits across the city. In partnership with DSS, the three team providers train and support staff from 35 CBOs to help low-income New Yorkers obtain benefits that achieve greater stability. Since the start of the program in 2023, we've collectively offered 70 trainings.

NYC Benefits delivers measurable results, and we believe in this. SNAP applications submitted with program support are 45% more likely to be approved than those submitted independently. With an annual program cost of $9.75 million, NYC Benefits more than pays for itself in just the first nine months of this fiscal year. NYC Benefits secured over $20 million in annual SNAP benefits for New Yorkers. These support New York families and strengthen our city's economy.

The program helps keep vulnerable people connected to benefits and reduces administrative costs for the City.

While NYC's Benefits value is crystal clear, it was not included in the Executive Budget. I urge you to restore this funding, baseline it, and expand it. This work is especially essential in the face of rapidly changing benefits policies. We're currently helping caseworkers respond to SNAP ABAWD work requirements, the ending of the emergency housing vouchers, upcoming Medicaid work rules, elimination of Essential Plan 200 to 250, and also the approach we take meets the moment.

At last week's hearing here, Council Member Lee, you, and Council Member Hudson spoke with the DSS Commissioner Dalton about the need for an all-of-government and all-of-community approach. This is the best way to support New Yorkers.

NYC Benefits fosters collaborations between city and nonprofit staff, reaches residents in all 200+ zip codes in the city, and provides compassionate services in 54 languages.

Without NYC Benefits, tens of thousands of New Yorkers will lose trusted local support

(TIMER) from CBO providers who help them secure and maintain life-sustaining benefits.

At a time of major federal changes, the need for this program has never been greater. And I urge you to restore NYC Benefits funding in the Fiscal 2027 Budget, baseline it, and invest in its expansion to help more children and families.

Alongside over 400 nonprofit staff in this program, I thank you for considering this urgent request.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Do any of my colleagues have any questions or comments? No? Okay.

Personally, I just want to say thank you to you all because you guys are championing so many of the issues that are important for the community: housing, CityFHEPS, all the benefits. We know that New York City Benefits is important. Food insecurity is a big one. The CFCs are something that we discussed at length during the roundtable conversations, as well as the need for more diverse types of food, right? And so that is something I know that Julia Haram is actually on our staff, so diligently looked into, because you have some communities that like this type of lentils versus

this type of lentils, right? And so how do we try to be efficient but also, at the same time, respond to the needs of our diverse community? So, I really thank you all.

And of course, Libraries, you know, we love our libraries. They are such essential providers.

So, I just want to thank you all, and again, I'm going to say prevention and investment in our nonprofits and what you all do, it really not only helps our community, but it saves the City dollars, and it makes sense. So, I just want to thank you all for the work you're doing and for staying. So, thank you so much.

Okay, next panel: Jamie Parganos, Jayson Walker, Yalani Joseph, Sika Agoko, Kiley Bernard, Ana Maria Aguarre, Eman Gad, and Adrian Rangel Sosa.

Are you guys here? Okay. Okay. I don't know if they're here. This one. Oh, you guys are here. Okay, perfect. Go for it. Thank you. Thanks for staying. Yes. Oh, and just push the button on the mic. Yes. Okay. Thank you so much.

JAYSON WALKER: All right. In addition to my written testimony, thank you, Council Members, for

the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of my family and my daughter, a seventh grader at MS 167 Robert F. Wagner Middle School.

Please reinstate Manhattan Youth at Wagner Middle School and uphold the CECD2 Resolution Number 299.

My family and I are deeply upset to learn that Manhattan Youth's contract with our daughter's school has been terminated without any input from our school community, and we ask that this decision be reconsidered. This rushed and opaque process that led to this decision shows, at best, a clear lack of understanding or, at worst, a willful ignorance and lack of concern for the vital role these established programs play in a family's plan to provide for their children's safety and growth in the New York City Public School System.

My daughter has grown tremendously as a result of the thoughtful, diverse programming of the dedicated staff at Manhattan Youth. In a school of over 1,000 students, she's found her people and is pursuing her passion in the arts and finding mentorship. She and her friends were devastated to learn that the Manhattan Youth contract at Wagner had

been terminated for unclear reasons and replaced with a tennis program that nobody asked for.

They and other Manhattan Youth participants, their parents, and teachers from across District 2 spoke passionately at the CECD2 meeting, asking for Manhattan Youth to remain and for support of Resolution 299—and it passed unanimously. They also marched in support of this effort, collecting over 5,000 signatures from community members demanding answers and a real role in this decision.

Please consider this youth and community input in lieu of the lack of real outreach performed by the Department of Youth and Community Development.

This established program at Wagner was a major reason why we chose Wagner for my daughter. We both work long hours to afford life here. Their long relationship with diverse programming meant that our daughter was in good hands. We see the staff every day. We talk to them every day. They're an integral part of the school community, and they're not interchangeable budget line items. This decision impacts our quality of life, and our family deserves answers. The DYCD and NYC have an opportunity to rectify this decision. (TIMER) Listen to our voices

now. Please uphold Resolution 299 and reinstate Manhattan Youth's contract with Wagner immediately. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. I have to go to a school function now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

JAMIE PARGANOS: Good afternoon. My name is Jamie Parganos. I'm here to testify about DYCD's Afterschool awards and the decision to remove Manhattan Youth.

I'm a single mother of two children with special needs, a member of the PTA at Manhattan New School. And my son, Alex, who's autistic and twice exceptional, will be attending Wagner. I'm also a Youth Development Professional. I worked with every provider involved in this issue—Manhattan Youth, NYJTL, the Y, and Imogen Foundation. I've also worked with DYCD. They asked me to sit on a panel of the City's strongest directors to help shape what programming would look like. So, I helped build this ecosystem. And with all that experience, I was not sure I would make it here this morning, although I had no idea I was still going to be here at this time, because my son refused to eat his toast. Why? Because it was cut into a triangle instead of a

square. That is parenting an autistic child. That is what routine means.

The wrong transition disrupts the day. For a child in a wheelchair, everyone understands removing the ramp is an access issue. For autistic children, routine is the ramp. The trusted adult is the ramp. Routine is access for them. And DYCD is removing those ramps like it's ripping off a band-aid while telling us students with disabilities were part of their equity analysis.

Do not count my child in your formula and then leave him unprotected. Wagner mattered to me because it was a screened program. My son is twice exceptional, gifted and disabled. That's specific. Without a safe afterschool transition, the right school is half a bridge. Access is not just getting into the right school. It's about the whole day.

I chose Wagner because of its afterschool program, and because Marilyn was there, and she had been the Program Director for years.

For a parent of an autistic child, trust is survival. (TIMER) If I had known Wagner was going to lose Manhattan Youth and be handed to a new provider, I would have made a different choice. But

DYCD took away my ability to make that choice because they did it after I chose that school.

The problem is not that DYCD rebid contracts. It's how it was done. My question is simple: What specifically will become better for students because of this? If they cannot answer that, then the Council should not fund and register six-year contracts through an opaque process.

DYCD is acting like this is its money. It's public money. It's our money. Manhattan Youth was an ecosystem of cross-school events, leagues, and relationships. It was a community. If Manhattan Youth builds something families trust, the answer is to replicate that model in other districts. That's what equity should mean. They should have looked at Manhattan Youth and asked, "How do we replicate this across the city?" Instead, it said, "These kids are having steak. No one gets steak. Everyone gets McDonald's." That is not equity. That's leveling down. Equity means building more ladders, not kicking them away.

Our frontline workers—can you imagine dedicating 10 years of your life and then finding out through a rushed process that you're going to lose

your job with no time to find a new one? DYCD... I'm almost done. Sorry. I've been here a long time, so please bear with me.

DYCD accused Manhattan Youth of owning these programs, but from where I sit, DYCD is the one acting like it owns these programs. DYCD does not own our children's relationships, our school communities, and it does not own the money it's spending. We do.

So, show us the data, school by school. Show us how students with disabilities are protected, the transition, and the access plan.

I'm not here to attack any provider, but the timing is terrible. How can you build a real afterschool program in two months? You cannot. You cannot build community. And where exactly is the community in the Department of Youth and Community Development? We see one large provider, New York Edge, appearing over and over, roughly 88 times. What are they rewarding, someone who could fill out paperwork faster?

This is what bad equity does. Real equity builds capacity. I'm asking the Council to use its budget and oversight power. Don't allow public money to lock schools into disputed six-year contracts.

Prevent harms before families are forced to explore legal remedies to get what should have existed from the beginning.

A vendor change is paper. This is my child. This is about a community. We all know each other. This is something they should be replicating in other schools. Instead, they're trying to break up the districts with different providers so that there's no continuity of community.

Please make it make sense. Show us the data. Do not fund this rushed disruption without evidence. Do not make children prove the value of a system by being harmed when it disappears. Because saying that children are resilient means resilience is only needed when a system fails a child. So DYCD is basically saying it is a failure that has harmed children. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

ADRIAN RANGEL SOSA: Good afternoon. My name is Adrian Rangel Sosa. I am a senior attending the Brooklyn School for Math and Research at the Bushwick campus. I wear different hats in my school community, and one of them is being an R.J. Youth

leader with Make the Road New York. I'm here to talk about my restorative justice experience and its role in my school community.

Restorative justice has made many of my peers more open-minded towards themselves and towards others. It has created a safe space for growth and taught me emotional regulation. Restorative justice has created a community on my school campus. It has given me the opportunity to learn about other students' experiences and their different points of view.

Empathy, the skill to step into another person's shoes and feel their emotions as your own, is a dying art. R.J. has created an alternative to how to respond to harm, create community, and tap into more empathy to connect with more students.

Restorative justice has given me friends across the campus composed of four different high schools. Restorative Justice has done this by giving me the tools to connect with my peers and to be vulnerable with them. It has formed a community where we can share knowledge and give a platform to people's voices.

My R.J. coordinator has been an inspiration and my role model, and is passing down the torch to all the other graduating seniors and me.

R.J. is bigger than our school community. It is about connecting with other people, offering skills to resolve conflict, and understanding the impact of our actions. These are skills that we will take with us as we move forward in our lives.

The young minds are the future. We are the future. R.J. is an investment in our future. If you remove funding for restorative justice, spaces where we can see the humanity in us will cease to exist.

We live in a time when social media takes away from interpersonal connection. We will be in better hands if we provide students with the space to develop empathy, where we can care for other people.

R.J. is a community built through shared experiences. It has contributed to my learning outside of the curriculum. Removing the funding removes not only the community but also the transformative experience that comes from R.J.

This is a direct attack on education and development. (TIMER) Please protect our voices

through the investment in restorative practices in New York City Public Schools. Thank you for your time.

EMAN GAD: Good evening, Chair Lee and members of the committee. My name is Eman, and I'm the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity and a Coalition Member of the Dignity and Schools campaign.

GGE is a small Black, queer, and immigrant-led nonprofit doing critical racial, gender, and sexuality justice work. And in the context of today's hostile world, the funding we receive is imperative to the development and growth of Black girls and gender expansive youth of color in New York City.

We request continued support from the City Council for our Fiscal Year 2027 youth programming so that GGE may continue to address the educational and public safety needs of young people across the city.

In the current political climate and economy, funders have steered away from supporting DEI and gender and racial justice work. And we are here today because at GGE, we face a budget deficit.

This underscores our urgency to secure multi-year funding and a stronger partnership with the City Council to stabilize operations and sustain impact.

The Alliance on Gender Equity, or AGE, is requesting $300,000 in the form of a new City Council initiative to sustain this work.

AGE is a youth-led space for civic engagement, leadership development, and community building. In November 2025, we held a town hall with over 70 young people from all five boroughs, which created the demands of our Girls Demand Campaign. This campaign uplifts the voices of young people and gives them the opportunity to ask their city for what they need.

A few demands that are of high priority for our youth are the need for more restorative justice to stop the school-to-prison pipeline for Black and brown students and the overwhelming need for more mental health resources in their schools.

This is why the AGE Coalition also echoes the demands of the Dignity In Schools Campaign, which calls for the Council to expand school-based restorative justice and mental health access and coordination, including investing $80 million, hiring

school climate coordinators in 500 schools, and continuing to fund the mental health continuum to provide mental health care to students.

GGE is continuing to do the work and expanding its reach despite its financial restraints. With our $300,000 (TIMER), we ask for support of the AGE Initiative and hope to continue equipping young Black girls and gender expansive youth to fight for a New York City that is resilient.

We'll outline these asks further, but ultimately we're asking for $350,000 towards our Young Women's Advisory Council, $200,000 towards our Sister and Strength Program, $100,000 towards our sports training and role models for success, and $250,000 in Alternatives to Incarceration. Thank you so much for your time.

YELANI JOSEPH: Good afternoon. My name is Yelani Joseph. I'm a 16-year-old sophomore from Brooklyn, New York, and an Organizer with the NYCLU's (The New York Civil Liberties Union) Teen Activist Project.

I'm here today to speak about the role of police in schools, and more importantly, how their

presence can shape the way we define safety, including harming students in the long run.

Right now, many schools say that they rely on police presence. But for many students, that presence doesn't feel supportive. It instead feels like surveillance.

When safety is built on control rather than connection, it creates distance. Students become less likely to trust the adults around them or seek help when they need it. As a student, I've seen how quickly that trust can break when young people feel like they're being treated as a problem instead of a person. That's why we need to rethink how we define and invest in student safety.

Through my work in youth programs, I've seen that a different approach is possible. I've particularly seen this through my involvement in a restorative practices program where I participate in peer mediation. In these spaces, students come together to talk through conflict, take accountability, and actually listen to one another. And this experience stands out to me because I know what it feels like when intervention doesn't feel supportive.

I remember when police presence became more visible in my school. The environment totally changed. I felt less focused on support and more focused on monitoring and control. Instead of making students feel more comfortable with asking for help, it created distance. Many students didn't see officers as someone they could go to with problems. And for some, school became a place that they wanted to leave as quickly as possible.

Restorative spaces showed me that safety looks different. When students feel respected and heard, they're more willing to communicate, resolve conflict, and stay engaged within their community. If we truly want students to feel safe, we need to invest in what actually supports us, like mental health resources, counselors, restorative justice programs, and extracurricular opportunities that build connections. Because safety doesn't come from fear. It comes from investment in students.

I urge policymakers to prioritize funding that supports student well-being (TIMER) rather than expanding policing in schools. Students deserve to feel safe, supported, and understood. Thank you.

TRANSLATOR: Can you hear me? Hi. Ana will speak first, and then I'll just translate it into English.

ANA MARIA AGUARRE: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. My name is Ana. I'm a Youth Leader with Make the Road New York. I go to eighth grade at a Queens Middle School. Council Member Thomas-Henry represents where I live and where I go to school.

I left school early today to make sure my voice gets heard. I didn't get a chance to testify against the new buffer zone bill because the hearing ended before I could get there. But I'm here because I want New York City to invest in my education, not school cops.

In my middle school, the school cops literally yell in students' faces and say, "What do you want?" whenever anyone comes up to them. It makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong, and I end up freezing. Since English isn't my first language, I feel intimidated and struggle to respond.

Just two days ago, Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, continued to threaten to send more ICE

agents to New York City just because students like me fought and won protections for schools from immigration enforcement. It's really scary to me that at any point my loved ones could get kidnapped by ICE. Schools should be safe places for students and families. Having school cops and ICE agents around our schools increases the chances for young people like me to get moved into the school to deportation pipeline.

What makes me feel safe is more mental health support in schools. Instead of spending millions of dollars on empty school cop positions and hiring and firing more school cops, let's talk about how we need more psychologists and social workers in our school.

With the increased threats of ICE in our community, we need more adults who are trained to support students and reduce harm. With the increased threats of ICE in our community, we need more adults who are trained... I'm sorry.... My friend ended his life this year. He was just 13 years old. His death is still hard to talk about. I felt so shocked and overwhelmed when I heard the news. There were so many people in my school who were crying the next day, and

we didn't have enough adults to help us deal with this loss. These are real student safety concerns. This is where we need to spend our time and money.

I'm a middle schooler, and I'm telling you, (TIMER) I don't need school cops in my school. School cops do not equal safety. They never have, and they never will.

On behalf of young people, I urge you to invest in us, not school cops. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. Do any of my colleagues have questions? No?

Okay, first of all, thank you so much. I'm getting a little emotional and teary-eyed. Thank you for taking the day to get here to be a voice for your community. It means a lot. Sorry, my emotions are worn down. But anyway, in all honesty, this is what civic participation looks like, and this is what it means to have a voice. And so I urge you to keep doing this and speaking up on behalf of your community, your student body, and yourself. It really does mean a lot. So thank you so much for being here, and for the points well taken.

And for those who are providing services, and the other youth who are here, we really, really

appreciate you taking time out and staying to share your thoughts so eloquently with us, and for all of you doing the work on the ground. So thank you so much.

And Jamie, thank you for your advocacy. We have heard from a lot of parents about the DYCD contracts. Unfortunately, we don't control that funding. It's really all on the Mayor's side. However, what I will say is that you have pretty much every single Manhattan Council Member speaking up about this, as well as other council members in other boroughs who are facing the same issue and speaking up as well.

I am hopeful that there will be some sort of a resolution to what you are talking about with the needs in the DYCD afterschool programming. Because, as you say, the consistency, the staffing, the care is what matters, and we've seen that in so many different spaces across the social service programs in New York City. So I just really want to say thank you for coming here and staying to advocate. So thank you so much.

All right, we're getting through this, and thank you all again for staying.

Okay, so next we have Ophelia Lei, Aaron Calver, Darius Nazario, Vladimir Martinez, Bryan Elliot Cook, Nadia Swanson, and Keriann Pauls.

So, I don't know which side you guys want to start on. Whichever side you want to go. Okay. On this side, he's pointing to you. Okay.

DARIAS NAZARIO: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Darius Nazario, and I'm the Beacon Program Director for New York Edge. I am here today to ask that you prioritize New York Edge's Fiscal Year 2027 funding requests.

New York Edge is the City's oldest and largest provider of afterschool and summer programs. We are also the largest provider of Summer Rising programming in the city. New York Edge serves almost 33,000 students in 134 schools across the city, in 37 out of the 51 council districts, including the four Beacon Community Centers and 21 community schools. We proudly offer culturally responsive programming rooted in academic enrichment, sports, health and wellness, visual and performing arts, STEM, leadership, and college and career readiness, with social-emotional learning intentionally woven throughout everything we do.

This year we are seeking $1.5 million under the City Council's Afterschool Enrichment Initiative and $250,000 under the Council's Social-Emotional Supports for Students Initiative.

For over three decades, the Council has been a vital partner in helping us to fulfill our mission of bridging the opportunity gap among students in underinvested communities.

Council Citywide Funding allows us to enrich our programs to operate when schools are in recess and to offer special trips and events on Saturdays.

Since 2020, we have tripled in size and have significantly increased the number of students served. Our Council Citywide Funding, however, has remained at a flat $1 million. This, combined with the fact that Council contracts are not eligible for COLA increases, has made it increasingly difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality staff and to continue to offer the wide array of programs that we are known for.

New York Edge, its students, and the families are extremely grateful for the Council's past support. The time has come, however, when

increased funding is needed. Increased funding will enable us to keep up with our growth and the demand for our programming, and will enable us to help provide programming for students with the edge they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Please support our request for increased funding. Thank you.

OPHELIA LEI: Good afternoon. My name is Ophelia Lei. I am a student at City-As-School High School. During my time here, I have been a part of the New York Edge Beacon Program. This program gives students many great things to do. I have taken part in a music production, cooking classes, professional internships, gym activities, and a community food pantry. I have also gone on educational trips, toured different college campuses, and helped with neighborhood block parties.

New York Edge has truly helped me grow into a better and more mature person. It has taught me how to talk to all kinds of different people, try new things, and welcome new opportunities. Most importantly, it gave me a chance to work with younger kids. This experience is really important to me

because my dream is to become a child psychologist in the future.

My favorite memories from New York Edge are the times I've spent helping the younger children and working together with the staff to make our events successful.

New York Edge has helped me so much with my education and goals for the future. And the staff really cares about my success. Plus, it gives my parents the peace of mind knowing that I have a safe place to be every afternoon.

Please vote to increase funding for New York Edge in the upcoming City budget. This program does so much to help local families and keep kids right on track. When you invest in New York Edge, you're really investing in the growth and success of students like me. Thank you.

AARON CULVER: Hello everyone. My name is Aaron Culver, and I'm a student of City-As-School. I attend the New York Edge Beacon program as a participant, where I also earn credits for my high school courses.

As a participant, I am also an assistant. I help with community events and support people of

all ages. During my time with New York Edge, I participated in music production, the weight room, open studio, which is a place where people were able to make music, open gym, and more.

Overall, New York Edge has encouraged me to become a more outgoing, patient, and responsible person. In the end, it has helped me step out of my comfort zone and taught me how to be ready for new challenges and opportunities, as well as be able to expect the unexpected no matter how prepared or planned I am, or you are, in general. These experiences have helped shape who I am today.

New York Edge has helped me see the future more clearly and given me confidence to plan for it. It has also helped my parents by giving me a safe and supportive place to go after school. I am very grateful for that, as well as the new opportunities New York Edge has given me.

Please support New Edge in voting to increase our funding in the upcoming City Budget. By doing so, you will be investing in students like me and assisting to create new opportunities for young people across our communities. Thank you.

VLADIMIR MARTINEZ: Good afternoon, Chair Lee, Members of the Committee On Finance, Council Members, and other advocates who are here today. Happy Pride Month.

My name is Vladimir Martinez. I work as Managing Director of Government and Community Affairs at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, known by many New Yorkers as The Center.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the New York City Council's budget for FY2027. I will submit our complete testimony for the record, but this is an abridged version.

The Center's mission is to empower LGBTQ+ people to lead healthy, successful lives, to offer safe spaces for our community to access services and to be in community, and to advocate for the rights of New York's queer communities. More than ever, spaces like The Center are vital for serving and supporting LGBTQ+ New Yorkers. We're grateful to the Council for its continued solidarity with LGBTQ+ New Yorkers and for making important investments in the services that our communities desperately need.

Right now, we are asking for the Council to step up once again to ensure that New York City, the home of Stonewall and the birthplace of the modern queer rights movement in the United States, remains a city where LGBTQ+ people can live and thrive, and that our city continues to lead the nation on the issues that impact the lives of marginalized communities.

I have 30 seconds, so I'm going to skip to the money part: To sum it up quickly, The Center is seeking investments in our expanded work to support LGBTQ+ immigrants, LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence, LGBTQ+ culturally competent mental health services, youth and adult services, behavioral health, and all the rest.

We also echo the budget priorities shared by the New York City Trans and Queer Providers Coalition, which seeks $34.5 million of new initiative spending across four (TIMER) initiatives: $10 million for the Trans Equity Initiative, $15 million for gender affirming care for youth, $15 million for people involved in the Sex Trade Fund, and the creation of a new $15 million initiative to

support LGBTQIA+ immigrants in the legal context. Thank you

NADIA SWANSON: Good afternoon. My name is Nadia Swanson. I'm testifying on behalf of the Ali Forney Center, the world's largest program serving LGBT unhoused youth, and the New York City Trans and Queer Coalition, which are over 50 LGBT missioned nonprofits.

I echo all of our asks for my friend over here and our friend who will be speaking soon, hopefully at the Caribbean Equality Project. We'll go into the ask of our $15 million initiative for LGBTQ immigrants.

I'm going to focus on runaway homeless youth. So, RHY programs are a place of extremes. In one hour, underpaid staff could be assessing someone for suicide, serving lunch, putting a new youth at ease after they're kicked out of their home, having a kiki, breaking up a fight, administering Narcan, caring for youth experiencing psychosis. And at the end of that day, we have to tell all of those youth there is no bed, but you could have a chair in this drop-in center. No one should be on a wait list for safety. No young person should spend six months

trying to sleep in a drop-in center chair where their physical and mental health deteriorate. LGBT unhoused youth are two times more likely to have an early death.

New York City has 913 DYCD-funded beds. AFC alone serves 2,000 young people a year, and we have 400 youth on a waitlist. Last year we had 300 youth on a waitlist. When we had access to vouchers, our waitlist was under a hundred.

The Mayor's Exec cut runaway homeless youth funding by $1.7 million. The State cut runaway and homeless youth funding by $3.5 million. And now, due to the federal and state cuts, the upstate beds will close, and youth will be coming to New York City.

RHY current bed rates are around $50K per bed. And the true cost is about $75 to $80K per bed. To close that gap, it would be an $18 million budget increase. If you could only do one thing, just the crisis beds, which are 293 of them, would cost $6 million to meet the gap.

The system is a bottleneck. Youth can't get in or out as they've lost access to vouchers, and

there are only 80 (TIMER) LGBT supportive housing spots. I'm almost done.

For those youth with serious mental illness, there are no appropriate RHY placements. It is egregious to pay $500K per year at Rikers when youth are criminalized for homelessness instead of $80K to provide youth services, opportunities, and housing. Without raising the bed rates, RHY programs can't afford to take on the new beds that might be offered.

The City must step up. New York can't call itself a sanctuary for LGBTQ youth while hundreds wait for shelter. Youth should not be homeless. This is not hard or expensive. And we don't need pats on the back. We need funding, and we need resources now. Thank you.

BRYAN ELLICOTT-COOK: Good evening, everyone, and Chair Lee, Members of the Council. My name is Bryan Ellicott-Cook, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations at SAGE, the largest and oldest organization dedicated to LGBTQ plus older adults.

For nearly 50 years, SAGE has worked to ensure LGBTQ plus elders can age with dignity,

connection, and security. But today, older New Yorkers, including LGBTQ+ elders, are facing a growing crisis. One in five New Yorkers is already over the age of 60. And that number is going to rise by 25% by 2040. Yet for decades, the City has underfunded the very programs that help older adults remain in their communities. Without new investment, we risk our centers closing and shrinking services at a time when demand is only increasing.

LGBTQ+ older adults face even greater challenges. Many are isolated. Many live alone, less likely to have family support. In fact, one in four SAGE participants reports that the only person they have to call in an emergency is SAGE. At the same time, there is often distrust of mainstream systems due to a lifetime of discrimination, including healthcare, where LGBTQ+ older adults are twice as likely to report mistreatment.

The anti-LGBT administration in Washington is stoking a hostile political climate. Many LGBTQ+ older adults face heightened fear and uncertainty around their healthcare.

And I'm going to skip all that, and we're just going to go down to the bottom.

As a member of the Live On Coalition and the New York City Trans and Queer Coalition, SAGE exists to fill these gaps. Across our centers, we provide meals, benefits, counseling, mental health support, case management, and community for over 5,000 older adults each year.

For many, we are a lifeline, especially as national rhetoric and policies create new fear and uncertainty for LGBTQ+ communities from our youth to our elders. Today, we respectfully ask that the Council restore our funding to the FY26 levels and provide critical enhancements. These investments ensure that New Yorkers are not left behind and that we can age with dignity, safety, and community. And thank you for your continued partnership and commitment, and for staying late. Go Knicks.

(LAUGHTER)

KERIANN PAULS: Hi, good evening, and thank you again to all the Council Members here and Chair Lee for staying so engaged throughout the hearing. Also, shoutout to all the youth who provided such amazing and powerful testimony throughout the day.

So good evening; my name is Keriann Pauls, and I'm the Executive Director at TakeRoot Justice. Our incredible staff provides legal and technical support for more than 70 community-based groups organizing for systemic change. We assist immigrants, low-wage workers, tenants and NYCHA residents, consumers, community land trusts, worker cooperatives, and more.

I'm here today to amplify TakerRoot's budget priorities that align with our value of working in coalition with our community partners and allies.

The need for legal and technical support continues to increase. For the following initiatives, the coalitions we work with seek enhancements to meet this need and address the rising costs that are associated with doing this essential work:

TakeRoot Justice is the coordinating member of Stabilizing NYC, and the Coalition seeks an enhancement to $5.3 million to expand the Coalition and increase the organizing impact against tenant harassment, displacement, and the loss of affordable housing at the hands of predatory equity and speculative investors.

We are in a moment of powerful alignment across leadership in the City Council, the Mayor's Office, and HPD to do portfolio-based tenant organizing, and we need the resources to fuel this work.

TakeRoot is also a member of the Community Land Trust Initiative, and the consortium seeks an enhancement to $3 million for 23 organizations in Fiscal Year 2027. This urgently needed funding will provide essential support for 19 active community land trusts and four citywide organizations providing capacity-building training and tailored legal technical assistance.

We are also members of the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, seeking an enhancement to $5.09 million. This funding will support the WCBDI Coalition's projected work (TIMER) of starting 30 new small businesses, providing pathways to worker ownership for more than 100 New Yorkers.

I've got to get to this one because Council Member Epstein is here, and he was a founding member of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition. TakeRoot is one of the founding members,

along with CAMBA, HCC, MFJ, and NMIC. And this is a life-changing initiative where we can provide legal support for New Yorkers who are just above the poverty line but still cannot afford to pay for private attorneys. And each of these founding members is seeking an enhancement to $600,000 in Fiscal Year 2027.

I am going to turn it over to my colleague for some other initiatives we're part of. But I also just want to amplify the ask for this New York City Commission on Human Rights budget request for Fiscal Year 2027. It's shameful that they had a cut in their budget. We need that $10 million so that all of our work collectively can really lead to better human rights across New York City for all New Yorkers. I'll leave it at that.

EMI MONTENEGRO: Good evening and thank you to Chair Lee and the City Council Committee on Finance for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Emmy Montenegro. I am the CILEC-IOI Coalition Coordinator at TakeRoot Justice. And I'm submitting this testimony today as a member of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative, or CILEC, which is a consortium of

several NYC legal service providers and community-based organizations supporting immigrant workers through the low-wage worker support initiative.

Low-wage worker support is unique in that it is the only dedicated City funding that ensures that the City's low-wage immigrant workers have redress from workplace injustices.

In the last few years, the funding has supported our work in representing immigrant workers with claims of sick leave violations, sick leave retaliation, and wage theft. We request that the Council renew and increase LWWS funding from $2 million in Fiscal Year 2026 to $3 million in Fiscal Year 2027. LWWS funding has remained the same for nearly 10 years, and an increase is needed to cover increasing costs and the escalated demand for services supporting immigrant workers.

Since fiscal year 25, CILEC LSPs have recovered approximately $6.3 million in unpaid wages and damages. We've advised and represented nearly a thousand workers and conducted over 50 Know Your Rights trainings. LWWS funding makes this work possible by providing financial recovery, education, and empowerment for low-wage and immigrant workers.

This crucial funding has lagged behind other priorities, requiring last-minute saves from both workers' rights advocates and the City Council to renew the funding. We respectfully request that the City Council demonstrate its ongoing commitment to the City's low-wage immigrant workers by renewing and expanding the Low-Wage Worker Support Initiative from $2 million to $3 million. This expansion will stabilize the funding so low-wage immigrant workers can continue to receive this essential advocacy through vital civil legal services and community outreach. Failure to renew and expand this funding will have a devastating impact on low-wage immigrant workers, leaving them without high-quality and culturally sensitive representation in their efforts to obtain economic and worker justice.

Now more than ever, in this dangerous time of attacks on immigrant rights and on our democracy, (TIMER) low-wage and immigrant workers need champions from advocates such as TakeRoot Justice and our allied CILEC partners. But our ability to retain and hire staff and maintain and expand crucial administrative infrastructure to

continue this life-sustaining work requires expanded and sustainable funding.

We thank the City Council for your continued support for low-wage immigrant workers through this essential funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much for the important work you're doing. Does anyone have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I do have a question for, I think, Keriann. I think (UNINTELLIGIBLE) should get credit for a lot of those coalitions, by the way, not just one. Is it a checkbox or all?

I want to know the enhancements, as you know, in renewals. I just want to make sure we understand what the enhancements are. So maybe, Bryan, we can just go down and make sure we know what the enhancements are. I think we talked about existing funding. The Chair has a good sense of it, but it'd be great to know what people are asking for in new funding.

BRYAN ELLICOTT-COOK: So, the enhancements for us are attached to both our LGBT Older Adult Centers in every borough. We're seeing an increase in

the need for mental health services and training for our care managers. We're also looking for enhancements because, as we're seeing issues with our LGBTQ+ veterans, we need more. We have an enhancement attached to that contract. Instead of being at 200, it's going to be at 275. And then the funding, which is also part of the Trans Equity Fund: we received $275,000, but the coalition is asking for more.

So, Nadia, we can go down the line.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Yeah. I don't know either of you can... on behalf of the Coalition. I mean, Hendrick-Martin is in my district, so you know, nothing against you, Vlad, but you know, we're neighbors. You're neighbors. That's fair. That's fair.

(LAUGHTER)

NADIA SWANSON: And I'm in your district. I'm going to let Vlad say what the whole Coalition requests, and then I'll talk about runaway homeless youth ones.

VLADIMIR MARTINEZ: Okay. So, quickly, for the asks that Coalition is looking for, currently the Trans Equity Initiative is funded at $6.5 million. We're looking to get it to $10 million. So, that's

$3.5 million. In terms of an enhancement, the Gender Affirming Care Fund, we're looking for $15 million. That would be a new initiative. Correct? The $10 million for the support for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Fund is currently at $3.5 million. So it would be an enhancement of $7.5 million. And the $15 million that we're looking for the LGBTQI+ Immigrant Fund is also a new initiative. So that would be a $15 million initiative. The Center is looking for enhancements or new initiatives across three initiatives in the mental health space. DOVE, and yikes, I'll get back to you on the third one.

NADIA SWANSON: So for Runaway and Homeless Youth, we ultimately would need an $18 million increase to the budget to just meet what the real cost is for what we're doing right now. Not even just to build and add beds, but hopefully then we can use that money for other great stuff.

So crisis beds are the ones that are most in need right now. That's where youth are going first from a drop-in center, and that would be $6 million just to meet the need, the real cost of what those beds are.

There's also our coalition of providers for Peer Navigators and Housing Navigators, both at $1.6 million, are our other major budget asks here.

DARIAS NAZARIO: The enhancement that New York Edge is seeking is a $500,000 portion under the Council's Afterschool Enrichment Initiative. This would help us keep up with our overall growth, impact the budget regarding COLA increases, and attract more qualified employees.

KERIANN PAULS: Great. So for the enhancements that the coalitions we work with are seeking, I can do the rundown.

So for stabilizing New York City, currently the funding level for Fiscal Year 2026 is $3.7 million. The Coalition is seeking an enhancement to 5.3 million (TIMER) in FY27 to bring new groups on board. For the Community Land Trust, the FY26 amount is $1.5 million, and the enhancement the Land Trust Initiative is seeking is to $3 million to bring in additional coalition members as well.

For the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative. I'm going to attach all these one-pagers to my written testimony. I need to double-check on Schedule C what the current level is,

but they're seeking an enhancement to $5.09 million again to bring in additional groups.

And then the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition: each of the original coalition members has had flat funding at $455,000 for, I believe, a decade. And each of these members is seeking enhancements to $600,000 in order to expand on our work and address the rising costs.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Okay. Okay. Thank you all... (CROSS-TALK)

KERIANN PAULS: But we have one more...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry.

EMI MONTENEGRO: Sorry. One more. Low-wage. For the Low-Wage Worker Support, we're asking for an additional million. So, it's 2 million right now, and we're asking for $3 million. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you. And thank you all so much for staying. I know I'm biased, but I think Queens Pride is the best. I know he's looking at me. Like, in terms of all the different pride parades that we're celebrating this month. I think Queens is definitely the best one.

Oh, you have a question? Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: And I'll just add more of a comment. Bryan, as a Staten Islander, you make our borough very proud, and I'm looking forward to seeing you at our Veterans Committee LGBT Oversight Hearing on June 22nd. And I hope all of your organizations have the word about that. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Serving our seniors and our kids. Thank you.

Okay. Next up, we have Carol Meyers, Eustacia Smith, Katie Mui, Maritza Rico, and Edgar Pantoja.

All right, I know everyone has been waiting for a long time. We really appreciate your patience, and so if you guys could stick as close to your two minutes as possible, that'd be great. Awesome. Thank you.

KATIE MUI: Good evening. My name is Katie Mui, and I am the Policy and Programs Manager at the Supportive Housing Network of New York, a membership organization representing nonprofits that develop and operate supportive housing across the state. Two of our members are here with me today.

Last week, the Network was proud to stand with the Council's Progressive Caucus, Speaker Menin, and other housing advocates to call for critical investments through the Rentals Within Reach Campaign.

In addition to supporting our ask of $65.3 million to preserve 325 supportive housing units in FY27, the Progressive Caucus has also proposed a $13 million flexible expense fund for smaller repairs to help speed up the re-rental process.

I guess Council Member Epstein is not here, because I was going to thank him personally, but thank you to the Progressive Caucus for your vision, leadership, and recognition of the need for preservation.

For decades, New York City has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to create supportive housing for New Yorkers in need of stability. These homes have transformed lives and strengthened families and communities. But like any long-term investment, supportive housing requires ongoing care and maintenance to remain a vital part of the City's safety net.

Our nonprofits are struggling due to contract rates that have not caught up with rising costs. They lack the capital and operating support required to make major repairs, improve accessibility for tenants aging in place, and retrofit properties so they meet modern energy efficiency standards. Without these new investments, about 20% of existing supportive housing stock is at risk of going offline and staying vacant longer.

At the same time, New York City stands to lose millions in funding in the coming years as the federal government disinvests in permanent supportive housing through the COC program. Providers rely on this previously guaranteed rental assistance to maintain their buildings and units. Without this, 5,000 formerly homeless New Yorkers, including families and survivors (TIMER), are once again at risk of losing their homes.

When the federal government targets evidence-based housing solutions and criminalizes our most vulnerable, the City must step up. That's why the Network is urging the Council to invest $78.3 million to preserve 325 supporting housing units and

renovate another thousand units this fiscal year. Thank you.

MARITZA RICO: Thank you, Chair. My name is Maritza Rico. I am the Manager of Policy and Advocacy at New Destiny Housing.

As you know, New Destiny is the only organization in New York focused entirely on permanent housing for survivors of domestic violence. We operate the first and largest federally funded rapid rehousing program for survivors in the city, and we are also the biggest provider of supportive housing for New Yorkers impacted by domestic violence.

As you might also know, domestic violence is the leading cause of family homelessness in New York. Only 9% of survivors in DV emergency shelters move to permanent housing, and over half of them cycle to another shelter after the 180-day limit.

I've submitted an extended testimony. So, I'll just go over our priorities:

First and foremost, protect New Yorkers who rely on federally funded housing programs. This includes all the continuum of care programs.

Second, create a CityFHEPS carveout for NYCHA-EHV households. Establish a dedicated carveout so that all 5,200 NYCHA-EHV households can receive CityFHEPS and stay in their homes.

Next, invest $10 million in Home+ to fully fund this critical, life-saving program that helps survivors stay safely in their homes through flexible funding.

Prioritize DV survivors across housing and homelessness plans. Improve our space referrals, expanding NYC 15/15 supportive housing eligibility to include single adult survivors.

Thank you. I will use the last 20 seconds to humbly request that we return to the previous mode of public testimony during the Executive Budget Hearings. This is really tough to get our survivors with lived experience to come to, and I also think it does not work for coalition building since we're all different organizations doing different things.

So thank you. (TIMER)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Just one really quick comment on that. We had to put it all in one day, unfortunately, because of the timeline, because the

budget is late this year. But I hear you totally, trust me.

EUSTACIA SMITH: Good evening. My name is Eustacia Smith. I'm from Westside Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing, or WSFSSH. Thank you to the Finance Committee and Chair Lee for the opportunity to testify.

WSFSSH develops and operates extremely low-income housing and provides supportive services to approximately 2,500 older adults residing in our 32 buildings.

As a 50-year-old organization, WSFSSH has some of New York City's oldest supportive housing buildings. These programs receive only a fraction of the funding when compared to today's supportive housing models. Unfortunately, decades of underfunding have left some of these buildings in disrepair and in need of upgrades and renovation. Meanwhile, operating costs, including necessities such as insurance, have skyrocketed. Without preservation funding, we risk losing some of the city's supportive housing stock.

Our commitment to provide safe and affordable housing where seniors can age in place

with dignity is hampered by the conditions of aging buildings. When a resident stops being able to step into a bathtub, for instance, the budget doesn't allow us to renovate the tubs into showers. This is why we urge you to support the $78.3 million for supportive housing preservation that is included in the Progressive Caucus's Rentals within Reach proposal, which would allow for the permanent preservation of 325 units of supportive housing as well as a flexible fund for smaller repairs.

When older adults are becoming homeless at alarming rates, New York City has a housing crisis, and we are at risk of losing federal dollars for permanent supportive housing through the continuum of care. It makes sense and is imperative that we preserve and maintain the supportive housing stock we already have.

At the same time, the City must find ways to continue funding the SARA Program and the expansion of deeply affordable housing for seniors, even if the federal funds are lacking.

Finally, we urge you to fund the 3% COLA for city-contracted human services workers and pass Intro 0452 sponsored by Council Member Stevens

(CROSS-TALK) requiring that workers be paid a prevailing wage. And we need our contracts to reflect that wage.

Our ability to provide services is dependent wholly on the staff we have. And it's increasingly harder to find staff when our staff themselves struggle to find housing and sometimes become homeless or are forced to leave the organization and work elsewhere to support their families.

EDGAR PANTOJA: Good evening, esteemed Council Members. My name is Edgar Pantoja, and I'm the Board President of Amalgamated Housing Cooperative.

Amalgamated is located in Community Board 8 in the Bronx, and we are the oldest limited equity housing co-op in the country. We will be celebrating our 100th anniversary next year.

Amalgamated has a portfolio of 11 buildings with a combined unit count of 1,486 apartments and a population of approximately 3,000 voting-age cooperators.

Amalgamated's mission is to provide quality housing and a strong community for people of

moderate income, but we simply can no longer do that without financial support from the State and the City.

My co-op and many like it are in a financial crisis right now. I'd like to paint a picture of why the City's capital plan must include support for the preservation of existing affordable cooperatives and not just new developments:

Our biggest challenge is keeping housing affordable while addressing large expense items like capital building repair needs, multiple unfunded mandates, and rising insurance and utility costs. In 2024, Amalgamated suffered a devastating 45% carrying charge increase, which has exacerbated our problem, leading to mounting arrears, increased vacancies, and general hardships for co-op families. An internal analysis has identified that 60% of our households are now considered rent-burdened according to HUD standards. So families are leaving, families are struggling financially, and every time the carrying charge is raised, it just gets worse. Our IPNA has identified a total of 94 needed improvements or end-of-life replacement projects.

The bottom line is our capital needs are estimated at over $100 million. (TIMER) The City's housing plan can help by providing funding that is specifically dedicated to preserving existing affordable housing.

We also urge the Council to include funding in the City's budget for all limited equity co-ops irrespective of whether it is supervised by HPD or HCR. At present, the block-to-block housing plan seems to only include HPD co-ops. But Amalgamated family workers, we also live here. We are also New Yorkers. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: No, thank you so much. Yes, rising insurance costs are definitely impacting a lot of the housing units. And then thank you so much for all the folks that are here on behalf of the Supportive Housing Coalition. We really appreciate the work you do. So, thank you so much for staying.

We have youth in the house, and they have to get out of here soon. So, I'm going to call you guys up. I don't know if it was supposed to be separated by issue area, but I'm going to call you all up at the same time.

We have: Jesus Cano, Holiday Woodside, Yaretzi Valcia, Victoria Avelar, Paula Intriago, Angelike Lopez. We also have Bianey Garcia, Evanna Vasquez, Claudeen Rattray, Maxima Rodez, Norma Simon, and Jacqueline Harrington.

Okay. Can you just fill out the card, and then you can come up now?

Oh, we have more youth. So, what we could do is have one panel go, and then if you guys can let the next group of folks go, that'd be great.

We have Marcel Charles, Chauncy Young, Andrea Ortiz, Janice Chung, Ariana Misha, Michael Castro, and Jackelyn Harrington.

So, if you guys can get ready in the queue, that'd be awesome.

HOLIDAY WOODSIDE: Good afternoon. My name is Holiday, and my pronouns are she/her. I recently graduated from a community school in Brooklyn, and I'm a youth leader with Make the Road New York. I'm here today because our city should be investing in students, not policing us.

As a Black student, I worry about the ways schools can criminalize young people through school police surveillance and harsh discipline

instead of supporting us with restorative justice and mental health resources.

I know what it feels like. I've been searched multiple times while going through the school scanners. I followed every rule and did nothing wrong, but a school cop still pulled me aside. I remember feeling embarrassed, nervous, and singled out in front of everybody in the school. At that moment, I felt less like a student and more like someone who has been treated as a suspect. No young person should have to feel that way at school.

Those experiences make me think about my younger brother, who is currently in high school. More than anything, I want him to be safe when he walks through the school doors each morning. I want him to be surrounded by adults who support him, care about his well-being, and help him succeed. I do not want him to worry about being searched, singled out, and criminalized for simply being a student.

What helped me succeed in high school was never a school cop. It was the counselors, youth leaders, and people who believed in me and supported me. I know how important those resources are because the staff at the Student Success Center helped me

complete my FAFSA and TAP applications, which can be confusing and overwhelming to navigate on our own. Their guidance gave me the support and confidence I needed to take an important step towards my future.

That is why it is frustrating to see funding continue to go towards policing while programs that actually help students succeed are facing cuts. If resources like the Student Success Center are reduced, many students will lose access to critical support with financial aid, college applications, and other opportunities that help make higher education possible.

I am happy to see reductions in vacant school police positions. But that should not be only the beginning. I urge the City Council to stop hiring new school police, eliminate vacant school cop positions, and reinvest those funds into Student Success Centers, Restorative Justice programs, counseling, and other resources that truly make schools safer.

We do not need more policing in our schools. We need support, more opportunity, and more investment in our futures. Thank you.

YARETZI VALCIA: Good afternoon. My name is Yaretzi. I'm 13 years old and a youth leader at Make the Road New York.

I know what it feels like to be overwhelmed, frustrated, and not know where to turn for help. There have been times when I felt unheard and unsupported. No student should have to feel that way at school.

School should be a place where we feel safe, respected, and cared for. When I walk into my school, the first person I see is a school cop. That doesn't make me feel welcome. It doesn't make me feel supported. What would make me feel supported is seeing more counselors, more mental health staff, and more adults trained to help students work through challenges and conflicts.

Students are struggling with stress, anxiety, grief, and problems both inside and outside. We need people who can help us, not more people policing us. Real safety comes from knowing there's someone you could talk to, someone who will listen to you, and someone who wants to help you succeed.

It was good to see the Mayor's Executive Budget reduce the number of school police positions

and cut vacant school cop jobs. That is a step in the right direction. But the $23 million saved should not just disappear into the budget. That money should go directly back into our schools. It should be used to protect and expand restorative justice programs, mental health services, and the support systems that students actually need.

Young people are being told that there isn't enough money for the programs that help us. But somehow there's always money for policing. We are tired of being treated like a problem to be controlled, instead of young people with dreams, hopes, and limitless potential.

The safest schools are not the ones with the most police. The safest schools are the ones where students feel supported.

Take the money saved from the school police and invest in us. Invest in counselors. Invest in mental health. Invest in restorative justice. Invest in our future because we don't just deserve to get through school. We deserve to thrive.

One last thing. I was supposed to testify at two hearings today. This hearing and the public safety hearing. I was picked up early from school so

I could be here and make my voice heard. But both hearings are scheduled at the same time (TIMER), and one ended early. That's a shame. I shouldn't have to choose between opportunities to be heard. Decisions continue to be made about us without us. If the City truly values youth voices, it must make space for us to be heard and to be clear. Buffer zones are not the answer. They will be used as another way to continue to criminalize and watch young people instead of supporting them.

VICTORIA AVELAR: Good afternoon. My name is Victoria, and I'm a youth leader with Make the Road New York. I'm an eighth grader at a middle school in Queens. Council Member Thomas-Henry represents where I live and where I go to school.

Last year I had problems with another girl in my grade, and it went on the whole school year. I felt so overwhelmed, and I didn't know what to do. I was in a very dark place, and what I really needed was for someone to listen and to understand me.

There are more school police than guidance counselors and social workers combined. That's not right. I shouldn't be forced to interact

with school police more often than I get the chance to meet with the counselor. Cops do not make me feel safe. Not in my community and not in my school.

This could have been prevented if there had been a social worker at the school. I was in a conflict with this person, a physical altercation, and they called the police on me instead of a guidance counselor or social worker. That made me feel very attacked and incriminated. School is a place where all young people should feel safe, seen, and supported.

There's no evidence that school police have prevented conflicts in schools. In reality, school cops usually escalate any conflict, which makes the situation worse.

Young people like me deal with so many issues at home, and it always impacts us in school. My parents got divorced when I was nine years old, and now it's just my mom, my sister, and me. Since then, my grades have been dropping. If we invested more money in social workers, guidance counselors, and restorative justice counselors, more students like me would get the help we need and deserve.

With the new Mayor, we have an opportunity to do better. I'm calling on the City Council to stop hiring new cops and cut the current hundreds of vacant school cop positions. If we did that, we could immediately have $ 100 million.

With all that money, our city could invest in things that actually help people feel safe: Fully funded schools, mental health counselors, and afterschool programs.

When we prioritize (TIMER) the education of young people, we build safer and stronger communities for everyone. Invest in young people, not school cops. Thank you.

ANGELIKE LOPEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Angelike, and I'm a youth leader with Make the Road New York. I'm an eighth grader in middle school in Queens. Council Member Thomas Henry represents where I live and where I go to school.

This year was a very hard year for me. I've had two suicide attempts this year, and I've been admitted to the mental hospital. I was depressed, and I had no motivation to do anything. I felt like going to school would just make me feel worse, and I missed a lot of days.

When I'm going through these issues, I want to talk to a mental health professional trained to help me, not a police officer who is trained to arrest me.

New York City employs more school officers than guidance counselors and social workers combined. That's not helpful, and that's not where New York City should spend over $400 million a year.

Last year, a school cop searched my friend without her consent. My friend felt very uncomfortable with the situation and started crying. This situation should have been handled differently. My friend was already going through a hard time, and this just made things worse. It would have been better if a trained mental health professional could have responded to the situation. Then they could have talked about the root of the problem and worked to figure it out. The safest schools have the most resources, not the most police.

We also need afterschool programs that support our mental health. I go to this afterschool program called HANAC Corona Beacon where I do competitive dance. The City usually pays our fees for

the competitions, but recently the City cut our funding, and if we want to go to competitions, we have to pay them ourselves. My family barely makes ends meet, and we cannot afford this. It is really unfair, and I think that instead of money being wasted on school cops, it should fund programs and activities that help us clear our minds.

We need a safe space to be kids and teenagers, not more school cops. We are calling for the Mayor and the City to prioritize young people. We want to secure (TIMER) a hiring freeze on school cops and cut the funding for the empty school cop positions. The City can then invest those millions of dollars in protecting and expanding mental health supports in schools and restorative justice.

School is a place where all young people should be free to learn, grow from mistakes, explore new interests, and be safe. And I know I've made a lot of mistakes, but all I really needed was mental health support.

New York needs to listen to young people when we talk, invest in our education, not school cops. Thank you.

PAULA INTRIAGO: Good afternoon. My name is Paula, and I am a youth leader in Make the Road New York. I am a freshman in high school in Queens. Council Member Thomas-Henry represents where I live, and Council Member Julie Wong represents where I go to school.

Last month, I had the opportunity to sit down with a City Council Member and share with her my experience with school cops.

I see school cops every morning as I pass through the metal detectors. I hate starting my day like this. I have become so anxious about everything I do in the morning because I'm scared that if I do something wrong, I will be labeled as a troublemaker.

Based on how I look or dress, something as small as being late to school or forgetting my ID means I have to interact with school police. I know that any interaction with school cops increases the possibility of escalating the situation and moving into the school-to-prison pipeline.

This year, I got into an argument with another student because they were talking badly about my friends and me. When the school staff heard the argument get louder, they called the school cop, who

moved us aside and said we were going to get detention. Detention is not a way to resolve a problem. But then a social worker started talking to us to resolve our problem. Then the social worker helped us talk to the dean and clear up the situation. The social worker was very helpful, and I wish there were more mental health professionals like her inside my school instead of cops.

In my classes, there have been multiple times when school cops interrupted the teacher to pull students out of the class. It is very distracting because then everyone starts worrying about what is going to happen and starts being curious about the student.

We are treated like we did something wrong. Whenever I get pulled aside for a therapy circle or a meeting with my social worker, that (TIMER) I found when my school started a therapy circle for our mental health. I found this very helpful because I am with the people who really care, listen, and get to know the person I am and why I am this person, instead of assuming something I did wrong based on my background.

School policing is racist and makes me feel unsafe. We are calling for the Mayor and the City to start a hiring freeze on school cops and cut funding for vacant school cop positions. With the millions of dollars they save from taking those actions, I want that money to fund and expand restorative justice practices, counselors, and mental health support that our schools need. These are things that truly keep us safe. Thank you.

MÁXIMA RODAS: I came with my own entourage here. Good afternoon, Madam Chair Lee and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Máxima Rodas, and I'm a trans immigrant woman from Argentina, South America, and I'm also a leader with the Trans Immigrant Project at Make the Road New York.

As a transgender immigrant, I know what it means to experience housing instability and to rely on community support to survive. Having a safe and dignified place to live and call home, a network of people supporting me, a clinic or a hospital where I can have my PCP, care case manager, peer navigator, and support groups for harm reduction and mental

health, guidance on how to navigate the healthcare system, and help and support for legal services. These things matter now more than ever. All of these resources helped me to achieve my own betterment in my life.

To ensure that our communities do not continue to face these challenges, we need New York City to commit to a budget that includes-- and I'm going to just refer to the point here as the same referrals from The Center: $10 million for the Trans Equity Initiative Fund, $15 million for the Gender Affirming Care Youth Fund, and $ 10 million for the Support For People Involved in the Say Sex Trade Fund. And finally, it is critical to allocate $15 million for a new LGBTQI+ (TIMER) immigrant fund. Investing in these funds will provide immediate support to transgender and expansive New Yorkers through housing assistance, healthcare access, employment opportunities, legal services, community support, and emergency resources.

I know firsthand how transformative community support can be during moments of instability. And I want every single TGIC person in

this city to have access to the same opportunity to thrive, not just survive.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge the Council to fully fund this critical investment and to stand with our communities, because we're not going to be erased.

We are here, and we're not going anywhere. Thank you.

JANICE CHUNG: Good evening, esteemed Council Members and Honorable Chair Linda Lee. We've met before. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Janice Chung, and I'm a youth leader at the YA Network. I am also an intern at the Dignity in Schools Campaign of New York.

I was a student in the New York City Public School system from K through 12, and I graduated high school just last year. I am now an incoming sophomore at Georgetown University, but I am still here to fight for the next generation of public school students' well-being.

This year's Executive Budget Proposal threatens to cut important funding towards restorative justice, the mental health continuum,

immigrant family communications, and other essential equity-based services.

These cuts will directly impact students. As a former high school student who didn't have access to restorative justice services in her school, and who only became deeply ingrained in restorative justice practices because of external programs like the YA Network and DSNY, I know firsthand how dangerous it is to not have any restorative justice programs in schools.

Last year, I testified in front of Council Member Rita Joseph and the Committee on Education about an instance when a student at my high school experienced a mental health crisis that involved a knife threat. Instead of seeking a restorative justice or mental health counselor to deescalate the situation, my school's administration decided to go on a shutdown and use police force. The presence of police and the overall shutdown scared my classmates, and it especially scared the young person who was going through a crisis and ended up fleeing the school.

To this day, I believe that if a team of counselors who were trained in trauma-informed

deescalation techniques made contact with the student before the police attempted to, the student would not have felt the need to flee.

This is not the only instance in public schools where restorative justice or mental health access could have helped young people in public schools.

And that is why it's important to fully fund restorative justice, mental health, and immigration protections in schools (TIMER).

By freezing the hiring of school police, eliminating vacancies, and reinvesting approximately $90 million in savings into restorative justice, mental health supports, and immigrant protections, the City will be positively impacting every student and young New Yorker.

If empowering the youth is your goal, then funding restorative justice, the mental health continuum, and immigrant protections will be your priority. Thank you.

JACQUELINE HARRINGTON: Good afternoon or good evening now. So, my name is Jacqueline Harrington, the real Jacqueline Harrington. I just

want to state that for the record. I've only been here seven months.

So, I'm the real Jacqueline Harrington. I was made a mockery of through the federal court system here in New York as well, probably in Arizona soon. And I was impersonated, and there was a settlement from my human trafficking trauma that I have had happen, but it was disguised as a business here, and the settlement was stolen from me, along with my trust fund, my probate, and two businesses that I currently made in the last year and a half.

So, let's talk about finance and the oversight here in New York City. The judicial system was weaponized against me in multiple countries and states to defraud the state and federal government of active currency, causing huge inflation and deficits through life insurance policy scams, false wills and testaments, false marriages, false birth certificates, impersonations for child support, guardianships, power of attorney, and other family surrogate court hearings and more.

Let's continue talking about the misappropriation of funds that I have already observed from coming here and listening to some of

these hearings. For example, the federal funds are being defrauded in the Department of Social Services because there are repeated identities and Social Security numbers for false cases, false people. And that gets into the public assistance for housing vouchers, food and cash assistance, emergency assistance, medical records, and it confuses people who (TIMER) need medical assistance. So that's taken out of the state funds, but it's federally funded, right? We also have federally funded programs like nonprofit organizations such as MOYA. I have gone to a lot of these nonprofit organizations (TIMER), and they unfortunately are not using the funds properly.

I will be done soon. Thank you so much. We also have homeless shelters that are participating in mail fraud and stealing settlement checks, which is causing issues for the homeless who are actually trying to get back on their feet, like me, who has become homeless because of the system that you guys are continuing to uphold incorrectly.

(TIMER) There are federal grants that are misappropriated, like for the City University of New York (CUNY). I won't even talk about that, and like these wonderful little women over here said, yes, the

New York Police Department is overfunded, heavily overfunded.

One last thing before I am done.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sure, if you can wrap up.

JACQUELINE HARRINGTON: We can actually do something with those funds instead of having New York police at traffic lights that are already working. Why do we have to have police there when we already have working lights? But anyway, redistribute funds to the Department of Transportation to reduce MetroCard and OMNY prices for some people who use transportation. It would reduce pollution and excessive emissions. It would be more affordable for people who are jobless, homeless, and students (TIMER) so that they can find work, they can find housing, they can find school....

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Ms. Harrington... (CROSS-TALK)

JACQUELINE HARRINGTON: And in turn, it'll keep people mobile and maintain paying taxpayer dollars for your guys' jobs and contributing financially to society to pay the federal government so that we can lower the deficit. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. And thank you to our panel that came up today, and especially for youth programming. Youth definitely need to be at the table when we're talking about a lot of these policies.

So I want to thank you. Thank you to the folks at Make the Road New York and Dignity in Schools Campaign, along with the staff, for being here tonight and for waiting so long; your voices have been heard. So, continue to fight for your communities.

Next up, we have Brad Wayne, Alan Avichaval (phonetic), Richard Kostenev (phonetic), Michelle Gadsner, Andy Jao, and Riyaj Uddin. I think it says (UNINTELLIGIBLE). You guys can come up.

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: So, no, I have you guys in the queue. Don't worry. Oh, wait. Oh, do you guys have more of the workers who are here? Okay? Yeah, if you could come up.

I am going to call up a couple more names: Alicia Arana, Meetu Dhar, Corinna Svarcien, Maiber Solarte, and Bethany Dill.

MEETU DHAR: Good evening. Thank you, Chair Lee, and Honorable Members of the Finance Committee. My name is Meetu Dhar, Managing Attorney for the City Council Program at CUNY Citizenship Now! I'm here on behalf of our Executive Director, Monique Francis, and our dedicated team to advocate for continued funding for immigration services.

I'm joined by my colleague, Alicia Arana, who will speak about our supplemental asylum services program.

Now, more than ever, immigrants in the city need our leaders to stand up for their rights. Increased ICE activity, visa bans, prolonged processing times, and constant policy changes have created widespread fear and uncertainty.

A recent policy memo has significantly restricted access to green cards, while DACA recipients are waiting up to eight months or more for work authorization renewals, causing many to lose their jobs, health insurance, and stability through no fault of their own.

CUNY’s Citizenship Now! is a lifeline providing free, trusted, pro se legal immigration services at a time when misinformation and fear are

at an all-time high. Founded in 1997 and expanded in 2010 to the City Council, we serve all 51 city council districts and have assisted more than 80,000 immigrants through the City Council program alone.

This fiscal year, we received over 52,000 calls, assisted more than 3,500 individuals, and helped 2,225 New Yorkers with their citizenship applications.

We are working closely with council members to rebuild trust in communities facing fear and uncertainty in today's immigration landscape. In addition to our one-on-one services that we provide at council members' offices and designated locations each month, we also hold Saturday citizenship events sponsored by council members, along with an annual spring citizenship drive that served nearly 3,000 participants in one day.

This year, we also introduced monthly council member-sponsored virtual consultation days and expanded evening hours to better serve New Yorkers who cannot access services during regular business hours. We've partnered with council members on (TIMER) 44 community engagement initiatives, including tablelings, presentations, and Know Your

Rights webinars. We've also had council members featured in videos and public information campaigns within our program.

The work is powered by a dedicated team of more than 50 attorneys, paralegals, and administrators, along with 300 trained volunteers, many of whom have gone through the process themselves and want to know how to give back to the community.

Without sustained funding, thousands of immigrants will be left without vital legal support. For FY27, we respectfully urge the Council to restore our $4.6 million allocation through the City Council program. Thank you for your leadership and your partnership in supporting immigrant New Yorkers.

ALICIA ARANA: Thank you, Chairperson Lee and Honorable Members of the Finance Committee. My name is Alicia Arana, supervising attorney at CUNY Citizenship Now!

I am here on behalf of our Executive Director, Monique Francis.

The ASLAN Supplemental Asylum Services Program, known as the SAS Program, provides review, correction, and strengthening of existing asylum applications, procedural guidance to prepare

participants for asylum interviews and immigration court hearings, and critical support aimed at preventing detention and removal for vulnerable individuals.

In just five months, the program has served 240 New Yorkers and delivered 562 units of service.

For Fiscal Year 2027, for the ASLAN Supplemental Asylum Services Program, we respectfully request the restoration of $845,951 to ensure the continuation of this essential work.

We work in partnership with faith-based organizations and nonprofit groups serving African and South American communities. These communities are among the most vulnerable and most underserved.

We partner with Afri-kana Community Partnership based in Harlem, where we provide on-site legal services and language access support for African and Black migrants. Volunteers provide interpretation and translation in French, Arabic, Soninke, Pulaar, Wolof, and other commonly spoken languages.

We partner with the Bronx Observatory program based at Lehman College, where CUNY students

and community liaisons identify asylum seekers in the Bronx and refer them to available legal services.

We assisted in two of their legal clinics hosted by Los Amigos de Tolentino, a faith-based group from the parish of St. Nicholas of Tolentine in the Bronx. Through these clinics, asylum seekers have expanded access to free legal screenings and consultations.

Through our partnership with the American Immigration Council, we addressed the lack of affordable legal representation by connecting eligible participants with (TIMER) pro bono attorneys. To date, we helped 12 participants secure full legal representation through this partnership.

More than 90% of the individuals we serve fall below 400% of the federal poverty level. With this in mind, we allocated $60,000 of our Council funds to support asylum-related filing fees and work authorization application fees.

The SAS program is staffed by seven team members: a supervising attorney, two attorneys, two paralegals, a program operations manager, and a project coordinator.

Thank you for your leadership, commitment, and partnership in supporting immigrant New Yorkers. We look forward to building on this work together to ensure that every immigrant in our city has access to high-quality legal services and the opportunity to live with stability, dignity, and full participation in their communities.

CORINNA SVARLIEN: Hi, good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Corinna Svarlien. I'm a Workplace Justice Staff Attorney at Make the Road New York.

Make the Road is the largest immigrant member organization in the state, and we serve 30,000 immigrant and working-class New Yorkers per year, the majority of them here in the city.

Thank you, Chair Lee, and the council for supporting our legal, health, and educational services. We heard powerful testimony from our youth leaders earlier, and today I'd also like to add testimony about the legal services that we provide from our community centers located in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. We support New Yorkers to keep their families together, know their rights,

fight landlord harassment, win back stolen wages, access health care and education, and more.

These services have never been more urgent. Immigrant New Yorkers are being profiled and arrested without warning as they walk down the street. Many are separated from their families and detained in far away states. But New Yorkers are not facing this alone. As a core member of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, Make the Road was among the first to take ICE to court to win our clients' freedom from detention. Our attorneys are still working around the clock, including by filing habeas petitions to free New Yorkers who are unlawfully detained.

Thank you to the council for its support for our immigration legal services. For fiscal year 2027, we are requesting the following: The City must increase baseline funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative to $4.5 million to support deportation defense services at Make the Road, NYLAG, and Unlocal. We asked the Council to contribute $1.8 million to support this expansion to meet the massive need.

The City must also invest $39.6 6 million in funding for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project to serve detainees and removal cases.

As working families struggle to afford our city, the immigrant workers I represent have faced increased harassment from employers, including increased threats to call ICE when they demand their wages.

The City must maintain strong worker protections and do the following: Renew and expand the low-wage worker support, renew the legal services for low-income and working-class New Yorkers, renew funding for the Job Training and Placement Initiative, fully fund the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, and I'll echo the request of my colleagues to fully fund the New York City Commission on Human Rights. Thank you.

LIGIA GUALLPA: Chairwoman Lee, and also the Council Members, for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Ligia Guallpa, and I'm a little sick, so I apologize for all the coughing.

I'm here today to urge the Council to continue to invest in workers who keep New York City running every day—day laborers, domestic workers,

street vendors, and many other workers who run the city of New York. These workers do some of the most essential jobs and too often are underpaid, are exploited, and are excluded from economic opportunities.

With the Council's support, this year we have connected more than 800 day laborers and domestic workers to jobs. More than 400 delivery workers were returned to work after we filed unjust deactivation cases, and we have also recovered more than $20 million in stolen wages for thousands of delivery workers.

This week, we proudly launched the first Deliverista Hub in the nation of its kind, dedicated to supporting Deliveristas who work in this district not only with legal services and case management but also to educate them about street safety. And we actually invite you to stop by and visit us.

And the reason I'm here is that we want to be able to continue to do the work that we do. So, I'm here directly to advocate for the restoration of $500,000 for legal services for day laborers and domestic workers, which was a one-time funding that was granted last year. And we're hoping that the

Council will restore it, especially because this critical funding has allowed us to staff most of the programming that is dedicated to supporting delivery workers.

We are also asking for $5 million for the Worker Rights Organizing and Education Initiative, not just for WJB, but also for other worker organizations like Street Vendors DRUM, for the implementation of a package of laws that City Council championed last year for expanding minimum pay and other protections. (TIMER)

So, we look forward to working with you and the entire Council to make sure that the laws you all passed last year become a reality for thousands of New Yorkers. Thank you.

RIYAJ UDDIN: Good evening, Chair and Council Members. My name is Riyaj Uddin. I am a delivery worker, organizer, and leader at Worker Justice Project and Los Deliveristas Unidos. I am originally from Bangladesh.

Today, I am here to call on the City Council to invest in workers, the people who work and keep the city running. We are asking the City Council

to fund a $5 million Worker Rights Organization and Education Initiative.

Led by Worker Justice Project, Project (INAUDIBLE), DRUM, and the Liberty Worker Center. The initiative will help workers like me learn our rights, organize without fear, and connect with the resources and support we need. We will also strengthen our partnership with the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to ensure that the new rights owed to delivery workers are fully implemented and enforced.

The City Council has passed the historic protections for delivery workers, including minimum pay standards, Just (INAUDIBLE) protection against unfair deactivation, and great pay with tips transparency. Those victories are important, but (INAUDIBLE) only because real (INAUDIBLE) workers know about them and have the support they need to come forward when those rights are violated.

Over the past few months, Los Deliveristas Unidos and Worker Justice Project have heard from more than 3,000 delivery workers reporting unfair deactivation, wage theft, and other violations. Workers come to us because they trust us

and because we meet them where they are: in the street, at restaurants, and at the Deliverista Hub. (TIMER) That's why funding this initiative is so important: it will help ensure the workers know their rights, trust the government can work for them, and not feel alone when standing up against powerful delivery app companies.

We urge the Council to invest $5 million into the Worker Rights Organization and Education Initiative so that every worker can know their rights and live and work with dignity. Thank you so much.

MAIBER SOLARTE: Good evening. My name is Maiber Solarte, Director of Adult Literacy at Make The Road New York. On behalf of our 30,000 members, I thank Chair Lee and the Committee for the chance to share about our health access and adult literacy services.

Immigrant New Yorkers are facing unprecedented federal attacks, including new restrictions on access to health care. It is so important for the Council to keep supporting health access and adult education initiatives that help bridge deep health and economic disparities in our city.

Make the Road's health services are helping immigrant New Yorkers navigate the loss of health insurance and other benefits due to H.R.1. We ask the Council to: expand funding for the Access Health Initiative to $4.5 million to help us reach more people in the midst of major policy changes; maintain funding for the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program at $2.01 million; maintain funding for the HIV/AIDS Pathways to Care Initiative and the Immigrant Health Initiative; push to restore and baseline the NYC benefits program at $9.75 million; push to expand funding for the NYC Cares Program to $120 million for an expansion to health care facilities outside of NYC Health + Hospitals network.

Immigrant New Yorkers are also relying on our adult literacy classes to advance their careers, pass their citizenship exam, and more. We ask the Council to: expand the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative to $18 million and put all discretionary funding for adult literacy under that initiative; renew $449,637 for Make the Road under the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative, a nationally recognized innovative model (TIMER) of funding that has improved

outcomes for students and families. Thank you for your support.

BETHANY DILL: Good afternoon, Chair Lee and Committee Members, and thank you for leading this hearing in such a thoughtful and human way.

My name is Bethany Dill. I'm a Community Engagement Coordinator with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and I'm grateful to be here on behalf of IRC and the New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative, or NYC-IRI, which you heard from earlier, and a few of our partners.

We believe our services for refugee and immigrant communities can be strongest and most effective, not only by working closely together as the City's resettlement agencies, but also, and importantly, by reflecting our clients' experience in conversations with leaders.

I want to focus on what we're seeing daily and why access to case management, which we as a coalition of resettlement agencies are working to protect and strengthen, is so critical to newcomers in our city at this moment.

Across the city, we're increasingly working with individuals and families who are

eligible for services, but facing many complex barriers to accessing and navigating them in a meaningful way.

This is where our model is particularly important—not duplicating existing services, but making them work. Case management ensures that individuals and families in refugee and immigrant communities can move through systems efficiently, access what they're already eligible for, find the stability they seek, and thrive as part of our city's community.

From our experience responding to displacement in New York and across the country, this kind of early, responsive, and strategic support is one of the most effective ways to reduce long-term costs and improve outcomes.

When case management is strong, systems function as they're designed to. When it's absent, costs rise across the board and cause avoidable strain on city systems.

The $5 million investment proposed is a strategic way to strengthen the city's existing infrastructure, ensuring that services already funded translate into real stability and well-being for new

New Yorkers and the opportunity to share skills, (TIMER) cultures, and dreams that shape our city. Thank you for your time and leadership.

ANDREA ORTIZ: Thank you. Hello, my name is Andrea, and I'm with Dignity in Schools New York.

We are gravely concerned that Mayor Mamdani's Executive Budget proposal cuts critical education services that students and families rely on, including restorative justice, the mental health continuum, and immigrant family communications.

New York City is facing a youth mental health crisis where nearly half of students report symptoms of depression, and up to a quarter experience anxiety.

At the same time, long-standing disciplinary disparities persist. Research shows that Black students made up less than 20% of the overall enrollment, but received 45% of superintendent suspensions and 52% of school police interventions. And we are living in a fascist, xenophobic federal police state.

Public schools should be places where young people feel safe, supported, and able to learn. Yet, we continue to see investments in policies that

prioritize policing and surveillance over care and prevention despite overwhelming evidence that these approaches harm students' well-being and create barriers to learning, particularly for Black, brown, immigrant, transgender, and gender non-conforming students and students with disabilities.

We urge the City Council to freeze hiring for school police, eliminate vacancies, and reinvest approximately $90 million in savings into restorative justice, the mental health continuum, and immigrant protections; protect restorative justice and mental health access by baselining $6 million expiring in restorative justice funding, and $5 million for mental health continuum that's currently serving f 50 high-need schools; protect immigrant families by baselining $4 million for outreach and communications; and pass Intro 798 to eliminate the New York City Police Gang Database; and oppose the proposed bill on security perimeters around educational facilities and amended to instead require the NYPD to publish and report on their current policies and procedures for responding to protests around schools in order to better protect young people and protesters in New York City.

Real school safety is not built through policing or surveillance. It is built through care, trust, and investment.

We urge the Council to stand with students and families by protecting these critical programs in the final budget and rejecting policies that expand policing in our schools.

We heard today of a young woman who told us that she had personally tried to commit suicide, and we cannot (TIMER) continue going in the same direction. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, thank you so much, and thank you all for being such fierce advocates for our immigrants and our immigrant communities through legal services, deliverista advocacy, education, everything, especially health too, access to health. Thank you so much. Thank you for staying.

Okay, so for the next group, I'm going to call out a bunch of names, because I know that some of these folks are not here anymore:

Elsie Soto, Jessica Sechrist, Laurel Leckert, Spike Appel, Leslie Gomez Rivera, Isidore Douglas Skinner, Victoria Dearborn, Dale Henderson, Saman Mahmood, Adam Gansner. I don't think he's here

anymore. Elizabeth Mackey, we're gonna bring you up, Andrew Manoo, Ahmed Lashuel, Corey Hannigan, Henry Mei, Gray D'Orazio, Eleni DeSiervo, and Kimberly Olsen.

I just have to read the following names for the record, although I don't think they're here: David Freudenthal, Ximena Peña, and Melody Capote.

So, Elizabeth, feel free to start.

ELIZABETH MACKEY: Hello, good evening, everyone. Thank you. A long day. So let me begin.

My name is Elizabeth Mackey, and I'm just going to be speaking independently, even though I'm connected with several organizations. I'm just going to be talking independently on my own.

So I am a resident of Brooklyn, New York. I'm a community leader. I'm an advocate, and I recently became an organizer because I completed several courses at City College this past June. And I'm with several nonprofit organizations throughout the city and the state of New York.

So, as I was looking all day, it says, "A government of the people, by the people, for the people," by Abraham Lincoln. So, the reason why I'm here to testify is that three years ago I became

homeless. I used to work for this city for 29 years with the Administration of Children's Services, and I fell short, and I became homeless. So my compassion is to work with several organizations when it comes to homelessness, and here I am compassionately working with different organizations.

So three years ago, I began dealing with the shelter system, and I received the CityFHEPS voucher, which helped because the rent became very high, very expensive, and I was no longer good for the rent.

So, the basis of my testimony is dealing with CityFHEPS and the high cost of rent out here.

So, we have a mayor that wants the affordability (TIMER) of rent, the affordability of a city. And I know that many of us are depending on these vouchers, and a lot of the testimony that I heard was that we're talking about housing, housing, housing, and the affordability of having housing that a lot of organizations want people to live in affordable housing.

However, there's an issue with our voucher program, and if you go down to the main office regarding the voucher program, I want people

to realize that the voucher is controlled by HRA. I want HRA to personally pay my landlord. *I want HRA to pay my landlord.* I do not want to go back to living in the disgraceful shelter, on the understanding that shelters are temporary, understanding that it gave me coverage. But there's nothing like having your own. There's nothing like having your own key. And there are hundreds, *hundreds* of people like me for whom a system that is supposed to help you is failing us. Failing us so much that so many people are in housing court because of a system. People are turning back into the shelter system because they failed to pay the landlord.

So when we have Mr. Mamdani, the Mayor, talking about bad landlords, the City is a bad landlord, too. There's a bad landlord in the state of New York City that is failing us very, very badly. It's a revolving door that needs to get fixed because we're failing ourselves to be in a city that is the richest. That's what they say. New York City, New York State, is the richest, *richest*. And they're failing us so badly. So badly that it's so hard for us as a people to literally live in a city that is failing us.

So I'm asking for a city that is so rich to stop failing us. I was born and raised... came up to a place where I needed to be dependent on a voucher that is failing me and others. And it shouldn't be that I have to be in court to deal with a city that fails me every month. Here I am advocating for others, and I have my own situation that I have to advocate for myself because of a failed system. I have to sit here to try to plead with a government system to say, "Pay my landlord, despite my landlord doing wrong to me; still pay my landlord his fair due." He deserves to get his rent despite (INAUDIBLE) what he does. But at the end of the day, we live in a society that says a government of the people, by the people, for the people; then who are we? Because I live by what the Word says: if we're supposed to, Isaiah 58 says that we are supposed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and also shelter the wandering. Then what are we doing? Because sooner or later, this world that we are temporarily living in is not going to be here anymore. Then we have to be judged by someone to say, what have we been doing since we've been living here? Because we don't have that much time. All of us are

coming to an age that we're supposed to live to see a higher beginning, a higher up to say, what have we been doing, and what have we been doing to us in this climate.

We have to do better, and the better is we sit here day in and day out. (TIMER) But I just want the City to do better for our people, because the change has to come, and the change has to come within us. Do right. I'm not asking for anything. Everybody's been asking for billions, millions, and millions of dollars. I just want them to pay my landlord the thousands of dollars. I don't want to be homeless again. Because if you look at me, do I look like I was homeless? No. I served this city 29 years. Just do right. Pay my landlord, please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Elizabeth. I saw you at the hearing the other day, by the way, and that is a concern that we're trying to figure out with the voucher system because, to your point, the last thing we want is for people to lose their housing. So, thank you so much.

XIMENA PENA: Good evening, Chair Lee, Council Member Won. My name is Ximena Pena. I am Director of Business Development LATAM at Renaissance

Economic Development Corporation, an affiliate of Asian Americans for Equality. Thank you so much for allowing me to testify today.

Renaissance is a community development financial institution that provides affordable capital and free training and resources to underserved entrepreneurs. The City Council's City Chamber on the Go Initiative and CDFI, a small business initiative, are both vital to our work.

These are tough times for a small businesses. Business owners are being squeezed by rising interest rates and operating costs. Meanwhile, the U.S. Small Business Administration is now restricting its loan programs to US citizens. Green card holders, lawful permanent residents, are now effectively locked out of federal capital funding.

These new restrictions have caused an unprecedented spike in demand for Renaissance's Services, pushing our resources to the breaking point. We urge the City Council to provide robust funding for small business services. By investing in our capacity today, you are providing a lifeline to the hardworking entrepreneurs who are being left behind.

We also ask for your support for a new version of the New York City Small Business Opportunity Fund, which helped keep many businesses running in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The current crisis facing our small businesses mirrors the darkest days of the pandemic. If our neighborhood mom-and-pops, the backbone of New York City's economy, are to survive, they need immediate, accessible, and affordable capital and technical assistance. A program like this one could be their last hope. (TIMER) Renaissance and AAFE are grateful for your steadfast support through the years, and we are eager to partner with you to make sure small businesses continue to be the lifeblood of our immigrant and working-class neighborhoods. Thank you.

ELSIE SOTO: Good evening, Chair and Council Members. My name is Elsie Soto, and I am the Director of Friends of Hart Island. I also hold degrees in public health, health education, and disability studies. But most importantly, I am an advocate for both my father and brother who are buried on Hart Island.

For those who are unaware, Hart Island is New York City's municipal cemetery located in the Bronx. But this is not just a Bronx issue. Hart Island serves New Yorkers from all five boroughs, and the City's budget needs to reflect that. While we appreciate the progress that has been made since Hart Island was transferred from the Department of Correction to the Parks Department, families are still struggling just to spend meaningful time at loved ones' gravesites.

Right now, graveside visitation is only offered two days a month, on the weekends only, with visits lasting about one and a half hours, while public tours are also offered two days a month, but those tours can last up to two and a half to three hours.

Families should never have less time at their loved ones' grave sites than the general public visiting the island. We are simply asking the City to expand services that already exist: More family visitation days with a weekday visitation option; longer visitation hours; expanded transportation access by extending the existing bus service to the

Pelham train station, which is the closest train station to City Island, where the ferry is.

Transportation remains one of the biggest barriers for families. The Pelham train station is about 3.6 miles from the ferry departure point, and there is only one MTA bus service in City Island that runs every 20 to 25 minutes. Missing that bus could mean missing your visit entirely.

(TIMER) There is already a passenger bus being used for Hart Island visitors, but it currently only drops people off at City Island Avenue, forcing families to wait for another bus that can often be unreliable. And as we all know, MTA on the weekends, if you're taking the G train, you're never going to get there.

So, I think about people who are visiting from Staten Island. That trip sounds like a joke, but they have to take a bus to a ferry, to a train, to another bus, to another ferry. It sounds like a joke, but this is reality for a lot of New Yorkers. And it turns out that families are spending more time traveling to Hart Island versus actually spending time there. (TIMER)

Accessing a loved one's grave site should not be this difficult. The Parks Department held a Hart Island Transportation study and community meeting in 2022, where I did propose this same exact thing—a bus service to the Pelham train station. However, years later, we're in 2026, and nothing has been done. Our island holds over one million New Yorkers, including those lost to pandemics like HIV/AIDS, overdose, poverty, houselessness, and COVID-19.

Our families deserve dignity, compassion, and access. As the Council discusses this year's budget, I ask that you remember that behind every grave on Hart Island is a family still trying to heal. Thank you. (TIMER)

JESSICA SECHRIST: Good evening. My name is Jessica Sechrist, Executive Director for the Hunters Point Parks Conservancy and a Long Island City resident.

Hunters Point Parks Conservancy was deeply disturbed to learn that City Hall does not plan to honor their commitments to the community as part of the OneLIC Rezoning. The Mayor's Proposed Budget pushes several essential improvements to the

neighborhood back five or more years in a neighborhood where City investment is already failing to meet the demand created by the more than 20,000 new units that have been built in our community since 2010.

This is the largest rezoning in New York City's history and will bring in nearly 15,000 additional units, on top of those 20,000, in one of the fastest growing communities in the country.

This housing will bring families and individuals, including those living in the more than 40,000 deeply affordable housing units included in the plan, who deserve access to schools, parks, and safe connections within the neighborhood.

We know how essential parks and community spaces are to the health and well-being of our communities. But by delaying funding for improvements to Queensbridge Park and the reclaiming of Queensbridge Baby Park by more than five years, City Hall is telling residents of the country's largest housing project that their children don't deserve access to safe, clean, green spaces.

Community Board Two, which includes most of Long Island City, is third from the bottom in park

space per capita. Multiple public reviews of the OneLIC Neighborhood Plan acknowledge that the neighborhood's parkland and open space are severely lacking and will worsen with new residences without intervention, which the City has acknowledged.

Despite this, the budget pushes back several commitments to open space: Funding has been delayed for the waterfront esplanade and new open space construction; Queensbridge Baby Park, which is reclaiming parkland seized by the City for parking; and the renewal of Queensbridge Park. It also fails to fund the Parks Department at 1% and does not baseline funding for the 115 Parks workers whose jobs expire in June, provide the 276 new jobs and Parks needed to support our existing public spaces, nor does it provide adequate funding for Green Thumb and the Urban Park Rangers.

Our neighborhood came together to ensure that community voices were heard during a two-year process with 21 major meetings and thousands of submitted comments to ensure this plan (TIMER) wasn't just a giveaway to major developers at the cost of the needs of current and future residents. To learn that City Hall is ignoring these key commitments

after making promises to get the rezoning through the approval process is a betrayal of the community-driven process in favor of developers.

COREY HANNIGAN: Just before I start, I'm also a Queens Community Board 2 resident, and I agree with everything she said.

Good evening, Chair Lee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Corey Hannigan, and I'm the Policy and Government Relations Director for Safe Streets and Transportation Alternatives.

New Yorkers deserve a transportation budget that reflects how they actually move through our city, and one that meets the urgent safety, transit, and accessibility challenges we face today.

The vast majority of New Yorkers walk, bike, or take transit. Yet, our City investments have not always matched that reality. During the previous administration, DOT lacked the support and staffing necessary to meet the goals laid out in key city blueprints, such as the Streets Plan. New Yorkers were promised safe streets, faster buses, and better public spaces, but those promises were often left unmet. We'll never know how many New Yorkers were

killed or seriously injured because DOT didn't have the resources it needed.

Today is a new era, and we're encouraged to see Mayor Mamdani's commitment to invest in safe and world-class streets. We hope that these investments will be sufficient for DOT to meet and exceed the Streets Plan benchmarks, including the unmet targets from the previous administration, to transform our city into one where bus riders aren't trapped in traffic, people on bikes have safe and protected rides end to end, and pedestrians have more and better sidewalk space.

Among these, two immediate priorities stand out:

First, we're calling for $15 million in FY27 specifically for hardened daylighting. Repurposing the parking at pedestrian crossings to increase visibility could help prevent crashes like those that killed 9-year-olds Kamari Hughes and Dolma Naadhun. Sadly, just 0.8% of New York City's intersections received hardened daylighting last year.

Second, the current $2 million annual allocation for Open Streets citywide is simply not

enough to keep pace with rising costs. And the City must also establish a reliable reimbursement timeline for Open Streets' partners, many of whom are advancing public space improvements with little (TIMER) to no financial support. New Yorkers should not have to personally shoulder the costs of operating public infrastructure.

We recognize that this all requires new revenue; fortunately, we have an opportunity sitting at our doorstep. Today, only 2.5% of our parking spaces are metered, far below peer cities like (TIMER) San Francisco, LA, or Boston. Expanding demand-based metered parking on just 25% of eligible commercial corridors would better manage our curb space, while generating as much as $4 billion annually for neighborhood improvements. The greatest city in the world deserves the greatest streets in the world. And that requires sustained, ambitious investment. By increasing dedicated funding to DOT and pairing it with smart revenue solutions, New York City can build a transportation system for the future, not one catching up to the past. Thank you

SPIKE APPEL: Good evening, City Council. Thank you for your time.

My name is Spike Appel, a lifelong New Yorker and urban gardener, both professionally and through my volunteerism. I am also a father of two, here to speak about Bushwick City Farm, which is still under threat of closure, where I volunteered for the past 15 years.

We've been advocating since 2017, when my first son was born, for the city to preserve our green space and our sanctuary space, which sits on a privately held lot. We provide hundreds of meals weekly free of charge, as well as providing mostly neighborhood kids a place of respite, learning, and community.

Our community garden is a neighborhood hub of food resilience where folks know they can come to ask for help building their gardens in NYCHA housing, where they can hold community meetings and events, and where they can receive food and clothes when they're in need.

My son is nine now, and the neighborhood children who helped build the garden have grown, and some have children of their own who enjoy the garden their parents built. We're still asking for the same thing: for the City to step in and preserve this

critical neighborhood resource. It's a multigenerational, all-volunteer project that many depend on.

We've had strong support from Council Member Chi Ossé, Borough President Reynoso, Assemblywoman Zinerman, and Senator Brisport, Community Board 3, representatives from Parks, Green Thumb, and the Mayor's Office, and all parties are in accord as to the importance of the space and the process of acquisition.

I'm here to ask for a small portion of the Discretionary Budget to be set aside to acquire the privately held lot from its title holder so it can be transferred to Green Thumb. The City spends a lot of money to try to create what we've already built. We need a funding commitment to be set in this budget to continue the acquisition process. The city rules state they have to pay a fair market value, but it can't make an(TIMER) assessment until a funding commitment is made.

We've been asking for this for nine years now, and the price tag keeps getting higher. Please recognize the City's responsibility to protect this

critical green space, which remains a lifeline to our community of Myrtle-Broadway.

We'll skip a little bit here because everyone's tired, and I don't want to get more angry at the situation, but we've volunteered (TIMER) 15 years of service to the space and the community. We haven't asked for any support for our day-to-day operations. We independently fundraise for everything. Please join the chorus of support for our farm and pledge funding to enshrine these efforts for the next generation to carry the work forward. We need it to happen in this budget.

LAUREL LECKERT: Hi, I'm also here with Bushwick City Farm to share that we just celebrated our quinceañera on the sidewalk outside our fence. After over 15 years of community building within a very complex and diverse neighborhood, providing a deeply needed third space for the many multigenerational families living together in tiny Brooklyn apartments, as well as providing free food, clothing, and harm reduction supplies to an impoverished food desert. After 15 years of being a deeply needed resource hub and community space, our

future is now in jeopardy. Again. The title holder of the lot has locked us out.

Rather than taking matters into our own hands, we're here to request that the City take responsibility for protecting this critical neighborhood organization.

When we found this lot, it was a fully abandoned dumping ground filled with mattresses and needles. On Earth Day 2011, we started cleaning the place up. “We” includes many of the families living in the Myrtle-Broadway area, along with food justice activists like me who were newer to the neighborhood.

One of my most cherished photographs is of me from 15 years ago with two little girls who grew up in the Sumar houses across the street. They're dressed in pink outfits, straddling 4x4s, double-fisting hammers while I taught them to drive nails and build raised planter beds.

I've watched countless neighborhood kids taste their first-ever radish, which they picked out of the dirt moments prior. For over 15 years, we've been a compost drop-off location, provided free organic food from the garden, youth education, a

demographic-spanning gathering place, and a green oasis in a densely urban area.

Since 2018, throughout the COVID pandemic, we've also hosted a food pantry and clothing distribution twice a week. During the COVID pandemic, we were providing over 2,000 meals a week.

Around 2022, when the City opened (TIMER) a deeply inhumane respite center across the street from our farm, which housed hundreds of newly arrived migrants, we anxiously opened our gates to offer space for folks to cook, eat, learn, build community, escape the disgusting living conditions that the City was offering, and get their lives together.

Bushwick City Farm is a project that is deeply rooted in its land and the community that built it and has benefited from it for over 15 years. Now the City must buy the lot from its derelict title holder and protect it under the GreenThumb program.

According to New York City Council Member Chi Ossé (TIMER), Bushwick City Farm is an integral community hub. His office supports keeping the farm open to the community it serves and urges the community and all decision-makers to take the

necessary steps, with urgency, to allow the organizers to continue their work.

We've had similar statements of support from Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, New York State Assemblymember Stephanie Zinerman, and New York State Senator Jabari Brisport. But words are cheap. Let's see the City put its money where its mouth is. In order for the Parks Department to engage the ULERP process to consider selecting our space for Green Thumb, capital needs to be committed in this year's budget. So please, the Bushwick City Farm community implores you to make financial decisions with the people in mind and save Bushwick City Farm. Thank you.

KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you to Chair Lee, to Council Member Wong, as well as to the incredible City Council staff for today's hearing and for your endurance.

My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I'm proud to be the Executive Director of the New York City Arts and Education Roundtable.

I'm testifying as part of the It Starts with the Arts Campaign, calling on our City to restore and baseline $30 million for the Department

of Cultural Affairs and to invest in arts education via the Support for Arts Instruction initiative.

The future of New York City starts with the arts. This is a future where every student has access to arts education and every arts education worker can afford to call New York City home.

In New York City, arts education is actually a cross-agency effort. It employs a workforce of 11,000 artists, known as teaching artists, and 2,887 certified arts teachers. Together, these artists and educators deliver arts instruction, but also contribute to the economic and cultural vibrancy of every neighborhood in New York City. But New York City doesn't make that easy. Inconsistent year-over-year funding coupled with contract and payment delays means late or unrealized programs, loss of employment, and then lost educational opportunities for our young people.

This teaching artist workforce is also earning an average income of $35,000 to $50,000 a year, less than the benchmarks in our city's true cost of living report that came out earlier this year.

Teaching artists can't afford more of these bureaucratic hurdles or to wait to see if their program's budget is going to be kept or cut.

Yet, our city relies on this workforce. 72% of schools have a CDF-funded program in their school. One in four schools relies on cultural organizations to provide external funding to support arts instruction.

This funding from DCLA and the Support For Arts Instruction Initiative helps make this possible. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging the City to take action to protect our workforce and invest in our students. This means restoring and baselining (TIMER) an additional $20 million for DCLA, restoring and enhancing support for arts instruction to $6 million, increasing transparency on the MTAC contracting process, and increasing transparency for arts in schools.

I also stand in coalition with my colleagues from the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, calling on our City to restore and baseline program funds in restorative justice, immigrant family outreach, Student Success Centers, and much more. Thank you so much for your time.

ELENI DESIERVO: Good evening, Chair Lee and Council Member Wong, Members of the City Council and Council staff.

Art workers reside in all your districts. Cultural programming benefits many of your constituents, and today I'm speaking about the critical need for City investments in arts and culture in the Executive Budget.

My name is Eleni Desiervo, Senior Director of Government and Community Relations at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

We urge the City, alongside cultural colleagues, to fully restore and baseline $30 million to deliver sustained investment in the cultural sector administered by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

We ask that the Cultural Allocation Account include year-over-year funding adjustments to cover rising operating costs and wages for the cultural workforce.

Lastly, we urge the Council to continue to fund cultural organizations through Speaker and Council initiatives.

The arts are a core part of our public and civic infrastructure. Live performing arts, botanical gardens, zoos, and museums are why people come to and want to stay living in our city.

Year-round, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts delivers entirely free and pay-what-you-can programming, welcoming visitors and New Yorkers alike. Our spaces offer more than artistic performances. We are cooling and warming centers, poll sites, and offer arts education and professional development. We're hosts of free World Cup watch parties in solidarity with the City, spaces for youth to do homework, for adults to gather with friends, support general well-being, and we are civic cornerstones of our city.

New York City's cultural ecosystem is at a tipping point. It is becoming more difficult for artists and creative workers to sustain living here. Audience behaviors are changing, and there is growing financial strain on cultural organizations as funding sources fall behind rising costs.

In support of the artists that graced our stages, the young people that will be the artists and audiences of tomorrow, and the ecosystem of small

businesses supported by the cultural sector, we urge you to be champions for culture.

City funding allows the cultural sector to fulfill its role within a healthy democracy as spaces for convening, learning, and healing.

Much like the New York Knicks (TIMER) at this moment, culture is a force that brings New Yorkers together. We invite all New Yorkers and Members of the City Council to join us at any point during the nine-week Summer for the City Festival. Today is opening night with the swing dance party. We have the hip-hop duo Dead Press tomorrow, Gorgeous, Gorgeous, and Silent Disco on Friday, and so much more. It's all free. It's all free for New Yorkers.

We urge the City Council to show their support for the sector by restoring and baselining the full $30 million in this year's City Budget.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. A couple of comments and questions actually for you guys.

So yes, we are definitely fighting for the full baselining of the cultural organizations for sure, because we know that you guys provide so many important services in this city. So I just want to thank you both for your advocacy.

And then, Spike and Laurel, I want to have an offline conversation with you after this, because I have a similar situation in my district. We have a private farm. Actually, I have a Queens County Farm. A lot of people don't realize there's a farm with alpacas and chickens and all those amazing things, like a corn maze. I'm very lucky to have them in my district, but there's actually an abandoned farm that was privately owned in my district that we're looking to engage Parks on. And it sounds like a very similar process. So, I'd be curious to have an offline conversation with you about this. Has there been funding committed by the elected officials yet? I'm assuming no, but I don't know. Or has there been funding committed? I don't know?

SPIKE APPEL: Everyone's...

LAUREL LECKERT: A lot of statements of support...

SPIKE APPEL: Statements of support...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Statements of support, okay.

SPIKE APPEL: And attempting to have negotiations with the owner. But no one's put a

single dollar down yet. And we need it to start so that ULURP can start and the process can continue.

LAUREL LECKERT: We had a meeting with the borough president where he promised in like three days he would talk to Parks and get numbers down and stuff, and this was like a month ago. And we never heard back. We did speak with Parks, and they said that he never reached out.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. So, let's definitely have a follow-up conversation because it may not happen for FY27, which is in a few weeks. However, I think that there are some timeline things that could be worked on in terms of the assessment and all of those things that you would need to have the City purchase it. So anyway, offline conversation, but I will follow up.

SPIKE APPEL: There can be an allocation in a future budget, but someone needs to make a commitment.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Okay.

LAUREL LECKERT: Do you know how to reach us for an offline conversation?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I'm sorry?

LAUREL LECKERT: Do you know how to reach us for an offline conversation?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Well, actually, I was going to say to my staff, Athena, over here, if you could give your card to them so they could reach out, that would be awesome.

Corey, quick question: for the $15 million for the hardened daylighting, do you know how many intersections that would cover?

COREY HANNIGAN: Well, there's roughly 40,000 intersections in the city. So it won't cover all of them.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right. Right. That's what I figured. Do you guys have recommendations to give in terms of which metrics should be weighted more heavily, so to speak, than the others?

COREY HANNIGAN: We'd like to leave that to DOT's discretion, but I will say what we're eager to see is to scale up the efforts, right? If this is done one intersection at a time, then you have additional costs with contracting and procurement ramping up and ramping down. But if they can create, you know, a standard program the same way they do, for example, repaving, then you can do it as a

massive project and get a lot more done for the same dollar. That's really what we're hoping for. And we're in negotiations with Julie Won's bill and with DOT themselves about, you know, what's an achievable number of intersections and how many corners qualify as an intersection. So there's a lot to be discussed, but we want to see more of it.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. And also, obviously, looking at the data, which sometimes is not so great, but you know we need to improve that.

Okay, and then Jessica, a really quick question for you. I almost feel like, or maybe it's just my warped sense of time, but it seems like, you know, OneLIC was... because it was such a huge project that just-- wasn't it last year?

JESSICA SECHRIST: Yeah. So, it passed City Council in early November, and some of the commitments are being funded, but several of the key Parks commitments have been pushed off until 2031 or later. But between how long it takes for Parks to build anything and the likely federal level funding disaster that's coming with the midterms, we're concerned that by pushing them off, they're going to be delayed. I mean, my job is to care about Parks,

but they've also failed to fund three schools in a community that already doesn't have enough elementary school seats.

I mean, it is admittedly nearly $2 billion dollars in investments from the City, but it is going to generate so much revenue for private developers that if the City, but isn’t just baselining, I mean I have a list of what they aren't funding, but it's some incredibly basic commitments that just aren't in the Executive Budget.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah. Just really quickly, when did you find out about the fact that they were not going to include those things?

JESSICA SECHRIST: I want to say maybe two or three weeks ago.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

JESSICA SECHRIST: This has been a very quick turnaround. I'm on the Oversight Committee, so we are slightly better clued in, but we were anticipating all of these to be included in the Executive Budget, and then with the most recent iteration of the budget we saw that Parks was funding a lot of the infrastructure funding, and the school funding was just missing. School funding was missing

completely. Parks were largely pushed back five-ish years, which means they're probably not going to happen. And a lot of them were really focused on Queensbridge Park specifically, which obviously, like, is a bigger problem because of who it serves. So...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. Thank you. Sorry. Thank you for staying and answering my questions. I really appreciate it. And thank you so much, Elizabeth, also for being here. And thank you so much for your services. So, thank you.

Okay, so I'm going to be calling up another bunch of names. Okay, so we have Emily Rios, from AAFE. I don't know if she's still here: Emily Rios, Miral Abbas, Nikita Boyce, Richard Soohoo, Edwin Rodriguez, Audrey Duncan, Jairo Guzman , Melanie Reyes, Mohamed Amin, Van Xelo, Rachel X, Faith Behum, Emi Montenegro. I'm just going to call up these names as well, just in case. Melody Capot, Elizabeth Axel. I know they are no longer here: Janice Monger, Sandra Mitchell, Kristina Lerner, Eva Davis. This person was here already: Katherine Glass.

Okay. And feel free to start. Muhammad, you want to go first?

MOHMED Q. AMIN: Hello. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Lee, for being here for the entire day, and to the remaining council members who are here.

My name is Muhammed Q. Amin. I am the founder and executive director of Caribbean Equality Project, and we are New York's only Caribbean LGBTQ immigrants' rights organization.

We are also a proud steering committee member of the New York City Trans and Queer Coalition, representing more than 70 LGBTQ+ led and serving organizations.

Today, I come before you to request the creation of New York City's first LGBTQ immigrant legal services fund, a $15 million FY27 budget demand that will save lives. This is not just policy. This is a lifeline for thousands of Black, AAPI, Indo-Caribbean, and Latinx LGBTQ immigrants, who have lived in the shadows, fearful of ICE, and denied legal protections they deserve.

The $15 million LGBTQ Immigrant Legal Services Fund will provide direct legal services, know your rights training, and immigrant support; fund community-based organizations already serving

LGBTQ+ immigrants; expand access to safe housing, health care, and social services; and ensure that immigrant legal services are culturally competent, language accessible, and explicitly affirming of LGBTQ immigrants.

The proposal demands $7.5 million to create a new Speaker-wide Initiative allocated to nonprofit organizations that have applied for city discretionary funding and a $7.5 million to expand the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to existing services by adding additional LGBTQ specialized attorneys and social services.

LGBTQ immigrants live at the intersections of invisibility and terror. We have fled countries where our existence is criminalized. We have crossed borders and oceans, risking everything to reach New York, a city that promised safety and dignity. (TIMER) But what did we find? A legal system that was never designed for us.

Today, I call on the New York City Council to create our City's first LGBTQ Immigrant Legal Services Fund, which will benefit an estimated 200,000 LGBTQ immigrants who call New York City home.

EMILY RIOS: Hello, I'm Emily Rios from AAFE. Thank you, Chair Lee and Council Member Wong, for letting us testify today.

We're in the midst of an unprecedented housing and affordability crisis. The vulnerable communities AAFE serves are desperate. I urge the Council to preserve and expand these vital programs.

Under housing stability:

Our programs prevent displacement and empower low-income tenants. The request for our services is increasing. We ask for Council support to enhance funding through SNYC and the housing preservation strategies in order to keep families and older adults safely in their homes.

Under food security:

We distribute 80,000 pounds of food annually, and the growing demand cannot be met without more funding. We are now fielding questions and concerns over the new federal SNAP work requirements. And until we get more clarity on how to navigate the new federal requirements, we are anticipating an increased demand for food, especially from vulnerable families. We request additional funding to sustain our food pantries.

Under youth education:

Our underfunded afterschool programs supported by COMPASS and Council discretionary programs enable hundreds of immigrant kids to reach college or vocational training. Recently, our COMPASS funding was cut by half (50%). We request funding to continue to offer support to our immigrant youth.

Under immigration services:

The range of immigration-related questions we receive tells us about the panic and fear of neighbors. Our programs include regular community workshops to calm fears and ensure immigrants understand their rights in all languages. One of the biggest demands is citizenship navigation. We ask this Council for enhanced funding for RISE and other immigration services that will help us continue (TIMER) all of our immigrant-related programs. Thank you.

AUDREY DUNCAN: Thank you for this opportunity to present our request. I'm Audrey Duncan, Director of Community Affairs at BronxNet, representing Michael Max Knobbe, Executive Director of BronxNet.

BronxNet operates three state-of-the-art media production studios in the Bronx, including our production studios in the South Bronx. We program channels on the Optimum and File Systems. BronxNet provides local content media education for all Bronx residents and workforce development internships for students that prepare them for media and media-related careers.

We're requesting support for our media Workforce Development Services for youth. This includes outreach to youth in key NYCHA developments. BronxNet has been serving the Bronx for over 30 years, and over the years, hundreds of participants in our internship programs have obtained positions in the competitive media industry because of the skills they develop at BronxNet. Participants in our internship programs work alongside professionals producing our signature public affairs and art shows and gain hands-on experience in numerous aspects of media production and management.

With disruptions in the media landscape, including cord-cutting, BronxNet is facing new financial challenges and was forced to reduce staff in 2025.

BronxNet is working to diversify revenue in several ways. Fiscal year 2027 support from the City Council would help us provide our workforce development and experiential learning services to more students as we work towards long-term sustainability. Specifically, the support would provide hands-on media and production training for middle school students through tours and workshops; hands-on media production internships for high school and college students to help them gain experience in directing, writing, producing, and a whole range of media professions; outreach to NYCHA developments; and opportunities for interns to focus on the newer immersive media and AI technologies so they can build careers (TIMER) that keep pace with technological advancements. Thank you again for this opportunity.

VAN XELO: Good evening, Council Members. Thank you for taking the time to listen to our testimonies today.

My name is Van, and I am the community organizer at Mixteca, a community- based organization in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. We have been serving immigrant, Latin, and indigenous communities for over 25 years.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee for its ongoing support of the immigrant and Latin community. It was encouraging to see that the Executive Budget proposes an increase in funding for legal and deportation defense for immigrant communities, especially at a time when our current administration continues to propose policies that threaten our community.

While it's encouraging to see the expansion of legal services for immigrant New Yorkers and the continuation of Know Your Rights training, there is still a pressing need to further expand New York City benefits that support many low-income immigrant communities.

As an organization that assists with Access HRA applications, we have encountered countless stories highlighting how these services have become essential to people's lives. For example, Valeria, a single mother residing in a shelter with two children, recently visited our office to apply for New York City Care and to renew her SNAP benefits. Finding time to come to our office has been challenging for her as she needs to care for her youngest child. However, the benefits she has

received from HRA have enabled her to access a more complete and nutritious diet. These services have significantly improved her family's quality of life.

Although some New York City benefit programs are funded by the City, SNAP also receives federal funding and is currently at risk. This is why it is essential to continue expanding city funding for services that have become vital lifelines for millions of New Yorkers. Thank you.

CHAPLAIN SANDRA MITCHELL: Good evening. Thank you for enduring all of our testimonies. I want to say thank you for what it is that you do every day on a daily basis. I know I couldn't do it, but we're doing it with you.

My name is Chaplain Sandra Mitchell, and I'm a Parent Leader with the New Settlement Parent Action Committee. By profession, I'm a mental health, behavioral health, and substance misuse counselor. T

The Parent Action Committee, PAC, is a member organization with the New York City Dignity and Schools Coalition. You saw them all here with their blue shirts, and Andrea is our Director and also the Healing Center Schools Working Group and the Coalition for Equitable Educational Funding.

As a Bronx parent living in the Bronx for 55 years (now it's about 56 years), a mental health advocate, and a counselor, it is clear that the city of New York needs to reinvest in our schools and our families and reinvest in social-emotional support for students and families, not increase funding for policing.

A student in crisis doesn't need policing. They need counseling and support. Our students and families need trauma-responsive care and culturally responsive, healing-centered practices, not surveillance and cops. I happen to have good experience with the police officers, but usually it doesn't work out well when we're dealing with mental health responses from the cops.

Our school staff also needs to be provided with the support and assistance to develop trauma-responsive and healing-centered schools for all schools. Now I can be trauma-informed, but I don't know how to respond. So there's a difference.

It is time for New York City to reinvest in the highest quality education that respects the dignity of all schools and pursues restorative approaches to conflict and harm. Reinvestment in

supportive staff positions like mine—I'll be going back to Lehman, and I will be learning how to help people like myself with disabilities and teach the children—English and mathematics—Through continuous professional development. So I will be learning Selenke. I will be learning different languages, and I will be more equipped to help those in need.

We're calling for funding to hire Black and brown New Yorkers for jobs that support young people's social, emotional, and mental health. We need to hire (TIMER) necessary personnel such as Restorative Justice Coordinators and paraprofessionals. I'm being specific: community outreach staff, nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors.

Reinvesting in our public schools is the right thing to do. We must protect, empower, inspire, and nurture the genius of our New York City students. This is how we should be reinvesting in our children, the city's future, and the city. The Mayor and City Council should no longer be investing in metal detectors and the policing of our youth. Our youth are not criminals. The end.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And congratulations on getting your degree, and thank you all so much for testifying. I know that it's been a long day. Sorry, Emily, my eyes are playing tricks on me because I didn't realize you were still here. My bad. And thank you, Muhammad, and everyone. All the nonprofit work that you guys do. It's amazing. So, thank you.

Okay, another long list of names: Matthew Johnson, I think Lexi Peterson spoke already, Adam Reyes, Dr. Charles Corliss, Reverend McCall, Kevin McCall, he spoke earlier, Megan Perlleshi, Michael P. Pritt, Jamilla Brown. Ben Weinberg, Tammy Reed, Darren Mack, Victor Herrera, Danyil Alva Willotran, Eric Diaz, Rose Khan, I think she spoke earlier, Jane Brown, Sally Stein, Jordan Rosenthal, actually, I think she was here earlier, Deymis Baquero, Marie Wavrer, and Michelle Martinez.

Okay, perfect. Feel free to start.

DR. CHARLES CORLISS: God bless you guys. This is democracy at work. Really, in this dark time. I appreciate it.

I'm Dr. Charlie Corliss. I'm a clinical psychologist and Executive Director of Inwood Community Services for the last 46 years. First

person hired in 1979, $10,000-a-year salary on a $ 20,000-a-year grant. We've grown to an $8 million operation, over 200 employees, a multi-service family center, doing everything we can to support the community with a licensed outpatient mental health clinic, chemical dependency clinic, literacy program, DYCD, six afterschool programs, SYEP, etc., etc.

We've worked a lot with DYCD. Always a good partnership. I'm here just to be on the record. They're not perfect. They got something wrong. P.S. 189, Inwood Community Services has done a COMPASS program there for 16 years. We didn't get it. Now the numbers just speak for themselves. Always positively rated for a range of services, including STEM, sports, theater, music, education, art, celebratory family events, and is loved by all participants. The principal keeps asking, my guy, who's been there for 16 years, how can they change it? They don't want the new group in there.

In addition to that, there's a petition attached to my thing with every single person; 157 kids and families want to keep the program. In addition to that, the program is embedded in our multi-service center. Again, we have lots and lots of

programming. We serve at least 4,000 people in Inwood and Washington Heights on an annual basis.

Who's the competitor? A single-service sports entity, zero COMPASS experience, questionable track record, complaints by the principal about safety, annual budget less than 10% of the money they awarded, a board of directors on there: one guy, the owner, an address of somebody's apartment. This is the kind of stuff from years ago. And I've been doing this for a long time: the Koch administration. I've been here, and I've presented... this for a long time.

So the point is, we need to have this program. We were debriefed. The debriefing said we were tied with these guys. We showed the debriefer that they were wrong with their metrics. In addition to that, they did a face-off because we were tied. They determined that the smaller group has more community presence than we do. It's just madness. And the reality is, the kids in this DYCD, sure, the kids are resilient. They'll deal with it. I'm a psychologist. We have clinics. We know kids are resilient. Why the hell should we have to impose on these kids a resiliency when they have enough they're

dealing with? So, this is just all wrong. I want to be on the record. That's wrong. I love DYCD, but they've got to correct this particular thing in this situation because there's no empirical reality for it. So, thank you all for what you do.

TAMMY REED: Before I start, I just wanted to say that Darren Mack had to step out to assist somebody. He's coming back, so hopefully he'll make it back in time.

But Chair Lee and committee members, thank you so much for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tammy Reed, and I'm testifying on behalf of Freedom Agenda and as a member of the campaign to close Rikers.

My community, Southeast Queens, specifically St. Albans, started this school year off with the unfortunate death of one child by another due to gun violence. Sadly, we're going to end the school year with the death of a child by another in the incident that happened in Roy Wilkins Park. These two incidents have left my community shaken, disturbed, and sad. And what's even sadder is that these are not the only incidents that are happening that involve our youth throughout New York City. And

the sentiment in my community is that this is going to be a very hot summer if we don't find a way to get these kids working and involved in activities that keep them off the streets. You know, our parents are terrified, based on the evidence that I see in a Facebook group that I belong to. And they're scrambling to find jobs and opportunities for their kids, but are unable to do so because there just aren't enough funds.

I am constantly reminded of the fact that we taxpayers are paying out nearly half a million dollars per year to incarcerate just one person on Riker Island. Even with some vacancy reductions in the Executive Budget, the DOC is still sitting on $95.6 million worth of vacancies. We need to reinvest every dollar of those resources in services that foster real community, safety, and wellbeing. Given how I started off this testimony, the City should be throwing money into these communities. There are plenty of organizations that already have boots on the ground and are ready to do it; they just need the funding.

I'm asking this Committee to invest in preventative care for our youth and communities. My

dream would be that we never have to lose another (TIMER) life to gun violence because, truth be told, when these situations occur, when we lose, we actually lose two. We lose one to death, and we lose one to the City.

And to sum it up real quick, I would like to remind the City Council of New York City's commitment to closing Rikers by 2027. And we'd like to see the savings be recommitted and reinvested back into our communities for mental health care, housing, ATIs, preventative care, and including the investments of the Campaign to Close Rikers.

MICHAEL PETTY: Good evening, Chair Lee. Nice to see you again.

My name is Michael Petty, folks. I am a representative of Lifelinks Clubhouse, which is located in the Elmhurst Hospital.

I don't think it's any secret that the city is being overwhelmed with mental health issues, and the Lifelinks in all the clubhouses are one of the very few places that patients can actually talk to and get help—just to talk, not be afraid, to have a safe haven, because it's not easy to talk about mental illness to just anybody. I'm a very active

member of my church. I don't talk to anyone about it because they simply don't understand the illness.

And I like that I come in and sit at all these council hearings, because I hear I get a broad sense of how increasing this illness has become. To take away these Lifelinks and all the clubhouses, it shouldn't be a yearly thing where we'd have to come in and beg for these things to stay open. This should be automatically in abundance, because this is a medical necessity.

A former chairman who used to run mental illness in New York City has a book that states these clubhouses are just as important as the medication itself. And people don't have the opportunity to talk at home or with friends because their family doesn't really understand the illness. It's so broad. It's so misunderstood and misdiagnosed. People think you're either crazy or you're a former drug addict, which is the farthest thing from the truth. Mental illness can be brought on by anything. I myself have never touched a drug in my life, but I come from an abused background. I had an alcoholic father (TIMER) who used to tie us up, light us on fire, and I tried to take my life three years ago this August. If not for

Lifelinks having an opportunity to talk about it, I don't know where I'd be right now. And they train people to go back to being everyday citizens. We have three members right now who are currently peer counselors in Elmhurst Hospital because of the training there.

So I applaud you. Please do everything to keep these clubhouses open. Thank you.

MARIE WAVRE: Good evening, everyone. Good evening, Chair. Thank you for being with us tonight. I really appreciate it. I know it's late.

My name is Marie Wavre. I am the attorney program manager at the Crime Victims Treatment Center (CVTC).

CVTC has provided free healing services to survivors of violence since 1977. We are proud to be part of the New York City Sexual Assault Initiative. Today I want to speak to a part of our work that survivors cannot heal without legal help.

Founded as part of our expansion program and formation as an independent nonprofit in 2018, our legal services program provides free trauma-informed legal representation to survivors of crimes including sexual assault and domestic

violence. Last year we served over 200 people, and we are only a team of two attorneys and two paralegals. Half of the people we served were survivors of sexual assault.

Survivors' legal cases are never simple. In family court, we help our clients obtain orders of protection against their abusers, secure custody and child support, and finalize divorces.

For immigrant survivors, we secure U-Visas, T-Visas, and VAWA protections, the legal status that lets a person leave an abuser without fearing deportation.

In today's climate, many immigrant survivors are terrified that coming forward or cooperating with the police could cost them their family or get them deported. That fear keeps crimes hidden and abusers unaccountable, and demand for this help has surged faster than we can meet.

This is why I respectfully ask the Council to support two initiatives that fund this work. For Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-Based Harm at $150,000 and the Culturally Specific Gender-Based Violence Initiative at $125,000.

This funding will let us add legal staff and reach more survivors who have nowhere else to turn. (TIMER) Thank you for your time and for standing with survivors.

MATTHEW JOHNSON: Good evening, Chair Lee and Members Of The Finance Committee. My name is Matthew Johnson, and I am the Deputy Director of Immigrant Justice at Legal Services New York City.

Legal Services New York City's immigration practice includes over 40 experienced advocates, including attorneys, paralegals, and at least one social worker in every borough. With our 13 community-based offices, we meet our clients where they are.

I'm here today to ask the Council to reaffirm its commitment to protecting the lives, families, and futures of New Yorkers through funding immigration legal services.

The situation, as the Council knows, that our immigrant communities are facing is alarming. Just last week, the New York immigration courts began holding so-called Mega Master Calendar Hearings where hundreds of New Yorkers are rushed through a system

that is already confusing, punitive, and nearly impossible to navigate without an attorney.

More than half of the people in each of these hearings appeared without legal representation. Many were deported on paper without even being present, often because they did not have a lawyer to help them understand where to go, what to file, how to proceed, or what was at stake.

Worse, and as a young constituent, mentioned earlier during this proceeding just yesterday, the Department of Homeland Security's so-called border czar threatened to send "more ICE agents than you've ever seen to New York City" in retaliation for the state's legislative efforts to protect New Yorkers from the state terror and racialized violence that the agency has inflicted across the country.

At this moment, a lawyer is a crucial barrier standing between an immigrant New Yorker and family separation, detention, deportation, and in some cases, death.

Legal Services New York City is already doing this urgent work, but the need is far greater than our current resources allow us to meet. That is

why we asked the Council (TIMER) to fund Legal Services New York City's $1 million request so that we can sustain the legal programs we are already carrying and expand our capacity to serve more New Yorkers in need. Thank you.

DARREN MACK: Good evening, Chair Lee and Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm Darren Mack, Co-Director of Freedom Agenda. We are led by our members who have experienced incarceration themselves or through a loved one. We're one of the organizations leading a Campaign to Close Rikers.

Rikers Island is the most expensive and least effective tool our city has to create safety. The Executive Budget eliminates some waste in DOC's budget and restores what would have been devastating cuts to mental health diversion and reentry programs. But we'll need to do more than maintain the status quo to get Rikers closed.

We need at least $39.2 million more to meet mental health needs in the community; $47.2 million more for diversion and re-entry programs;

$3.6 million to restore cuts to the Board of Correction and increase their oversight capacity.

DOHMH reported last week that over 1,000 people are on waiting lists for community- based mental health treatment like IMT and ACT. Too many people spiral into crisis while they are waiting for help and end up at Rikers.

ATI re-entry programs also remain underfunded while Rikers is set to operate at a cost of $2.96 billion in FY27.

New York City can afford to invest in programs that work. The Executive Budget eliminates some vacancies for a uniformed officer at the Department of Correction, and that's a good start, but more than 700 vacancies remain. Eliminating them could free up $96 million. That could more than pay for the budget needs we outlined.

The budget also includes funding for 580 more police officers at a time when the NYPD is arresting more and more people who need housing and mental health services.

Hiring more police will not address the reasons why people are sleeping on the subway (TIMER)

or stealing food, but it will consume funding that could be used to address their needs.

The FY27 budget should demonstrate that the Mayor and City Council are taking a legal and moral mandate to close Rikers seriously. We cannot afford another year of arresting and jailing our neighbors who need housing and health care and then act surprised when the cycle breaks through.

And I will submit written testimony with more details. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you to this panel, especially with the legal services and the prevention services and ENDGBV, everything. And Michael, I remember hearing your personal story with DICE (phonetic) over at Lifelinks. And we will continue to fight for the smaller clubhouses so that they get funded. So, thank you. Thank you, everyone.

I almost feel like we should just have you all come up, but I have to read these names out loud for the record:

Randi Levine, Jindu Obiofuma, Jaclyn Okin Barney, Eva Gray, Amanda Jules, Tracy Kernan, Shelby Lohr, Eman G., Jordan Peveda, Elroy Salawitz, Shannon Brown, Kaisha Caraballo, Marshall Azan, Tan Hayatt,

Sarah Zaman, Atri Hassan, Garrett Morgan Junior, Davia Willis, Audrey Jenkins, Michelle Alayne, Garrett Silver, Madison Markham, Noah Williams, Michael Ring, Tahaman Hidary, and Christopher Leon Johnson.

So, you guys can go first, and then the remaining folks will come right after. Okay. Go ahead.

GARRETT MORGAN, JUNIOR: Hello, Chair Lee and Honorable Members of the Finance Committee. My name is Garrett Morgan, Junior, and I am the Student Government Association President of LaGuardia Community College and a Senator at the University Student Senate, where I have the honor of representing over 13,000+ degree-seeking students and an additional 15,000+ adult continuing education program students.

Community colleges are the backbone of New York City and the higher education system; we serve a large population of working-class students, immigrant students, first-generation college students, and people returning to school later in life each and every day.

Most of our students are working students, either working part-time or even full-time jobs along with taking our classes. We also have a large population of students who have family responsibilities, either taking care of their own children or taking care of their elderly or sick parents. At LaGuardia, we serve a large population of low-income students and provide affordable, high-quality education and a real pathway to transfer and earn their bachelor's degree or enter straight into the workforce.

No matter where a LaGuardia student chooses to go, wherever we go, we make an impact. Yet, many of our students still face preventable obstacles: The cost of getting to campus, issues with finding good, reliable jobs and internships both during our time at CUNY and after graduation, and issues with critical areas around our campus in desperate need of repairs. That's why I'm here today urging the City to expand transportation benefits to our CUNY students, as well as to expand funding for CUNY (TIMER) Beyond Programs, and expand funding for the CUNY State of Good Repair Fund.

The City recognized how important reliable transportation is for younger students in the DOE. This made a real difference. Our college students deserve the same support. When students don't have to choose between transportation and basic needs, they show up more, perform better, and stay in school. Free transportation access improves attendance, boosts academic performance, a(TIMER) and helps students fully participate in campus life. I'll skip forward a little bit.

We need funding for our areas of good repair, in total, $100 million for the City to fund areas for all of our community colleges as well as the CUNY Beyond system, which helps get students good jobs, connections in the workforce, and puts them in a situation that when they graduate they can get a job on graduation day.

An investment in college students is, of course, an investment in the City's future. Thank you.

MICHELLE ALLEYNE: My name is Michelle Alleyne. I was a 9/11 officer at City University of New York. And the World Trade Health and Compensation Program was under the banner of Renew 9/11 health,

not to turn into a peculiar institution where chronic labels and victim labels went for survivors.

After 25 years since September 11, the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act for uniformed personnel and survivors needs a universal, walk-in, brick-and-mortar office so that registered survivors could walk in and get the resources out of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. For 26 years, it's been under the federal program under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which is a military bill, and it has been curtailed before the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Why reinvent the wheel? Most of the funding went to improve the Post 9/11 bill, and these resources can be used for the Zadroga Bill and military uniformed if they just put a subsection under the military uniformed and put an office in the Veterans Administration.

I truly believe the Zadroga... putting it in his name is a heavy load. All right? Because on the medical forms it asks, are you a veteran or are you chronic? It should not be chronic because that leads to psych experimentation, which the Veterans Administration has through the Citizens Commission

for Human Rights; they have resources and videos regarding what happened there. We do not want that to happen in the Zadroga Bill.

We need the cancer vaccine to be put into the World Trade Center Occupational Health Program. Many departments in the city, state, and local agencies are being held back from going into the program. Okay? And they're starting to put time restrictions on being registered for the James Zadroga Health and Compensation Act.

(TIMER) The program needs to get out of the Centers for Disease Control. We've got to get this to stop, and they've got to find some form of administration. Renew 9/11 health to have some kind of alternative health medicines, acupuncture, meditation. It should be a choice, and a patient bill of rights should be a priority in the program. Thank you.

AMANDA JULES: Hello. My name is Amanda Jules. I'm a parent of a sixth grader at the School of the Future Manhattan. Thank you for listening.

Today, I want to discuss the City's commitment to our children's future. I am aware the Council cannot reverse a procurement award, and this

testimony does not ask it to, but I do have three requests at the end.

The COMPASS commitment came with a clear rationale. At the May 28th budget hearing, DYCD's commissioner stated that increased investment represents stability for the sector by supporting stronger staffing structures and better wages. The numbers tell a different story. Manhattan Youth Recreation, which lost its COMPASS contract at 12 schools, currently pays activity specialists $44 an hour to start, versus $21 to $24 an hour at New York Junior Tennis League, which obtained Wagner. They pay program directors hovering around $85,000 annually versus $65 to $75,000 annually at Imagen Foundation, which obtained four of their schools. And they pay group leaders $20 to $25 an hour versus $17.17 at YMCA, which obtained two of their schools and is one of the largest nonprofits in the state.

Apologies, I didn't turn my paper over. If the aforementioned were essential objectives, why are providers not being held to advance these goals? The RFP itself cites research on the importance of relationships and lasting connections with caring adults as foundational. Middle school is exactly when

that consistency matters most. When the provider changes, that continuity ends. There is also a structural equity gap. High school team sports, PSAL, are funded by the City. Middle school sports (TIMER) MSAL are funded entirely by CBOs. Manhattan Youth is a funding partner. It is at will. The 2022 research published in (INAUDIBLE) from a national study of more than 11,000 youth found that participation in team sports is directly associated with fewer mental (TIMER) health difficulties. I'll buy someone a bacon, egg, and cheese. I'm sorry. I'm slow. It's late.

Families selecting a middle school in the city are not choosing a building. They're choosing a culture, and the afterschool program is part of that. DYCD changing CBOs after middle school selection deadlines left families without advertised programs. The procurement process gave DYCD sole discretion under attachment to bypass the highest-scoring proposal, limit awards by geography, treat school preferences as advisory, and determine how many schools any CBO received based on undefined programmatic distribution. No standards governed how that discretion was applied. This led to middle

schools receiving their lowest preference. Some schools received a CBO they've been trying to get rid of, and other schools not receiving one who mutually wanted to return.

While discretion may be legally permissible and appropriate in other procurement contexts, afterschool programming is not a conventional market. The stakes are children's stability and well-being, not vendor competition. This method requires a higher standard of transparency and child-centered justification.

In a step towards transparency, evaluator (TIMER) identity should be public and future audited against awarded CBO connections to check for any underlying.

I'm almost done, guys. I promise.

The New York City Council's own December 2025 report card gave DYCD a D in service delivery to New Yorkers as well as in relationships and collaboration. This procurement ran inside that agency under that framework. This is not a Manhattan Youth-specific problem. It is a system problem visible in the data across one set of contracts.

The Council should ask whether it is present across the entire procurement. (TIMER)

My four asks, three asks:

One fund MSAL. Saturday Night Lights, which the Council baselined at $2.5 million in the FY26 budget for 136 locations, is the precedent. A city line for MSAL is the same category of action correcting the same category of inequity applied to the level of schooling where it is currently missing.

Second, attach a term and condition to DYCD's FY27 afterschool appropriation, requiring an independent audit of the RFP award process with contract extensions for existing providers at transitional schools during the audit duration.

And lastly, require that DYCD publish future CBO assignments preceding DOE middle school selection deadlines. As many families consider afterschool programming in school choice.

The money's already been committed. I'm asking the Council to help ensure that what was promised is actually delivered. Thank you.

DAVIA WILLIS: Good evening, Chair and Members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Davia Willis, and I am a student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a senator within the CUNY University Student Senate.

As an international student, CUNY has been more than a university to me. It has been a pathway to opportunity, leadership, and service.

Through CUNY, I have grown as an advocate and leader. However, one thing has become clear throughout my journey: Access to higher education is about much more than being accepted into college. Students need the resources necessary to succeed once they get here.

One of the greatest challenges facing students is transportation affordability. Through the University Student Senate, we have long advocated for a simple principle: Access to transportation is access to education.

The proposed $700,000 investment in the Student Commuter OMNY Pilot Program will ensure students can focus on learning rather than worrying about how they will get to campus. I also ask that you consider the proposed $4.6 million investment in Citizenship Now! As someone who has personally

navigated immigration systems, I understand how critical trusted resources and legal support can be.

Citizenship Now! helps students and families pursue opportunity and fully participate in civic life.

Equally important is investing $2.7 million in CUNY Beyond College to Career Success. Many of the leaders serving our City today are products of CUNY. From elected officials and public servants to professionals across every sector, we see every day what is possible when students are given the opportunities to succeed. However, a degree alone is not enough. Students need access to internships, mentorship, and career development opportunities that help them transition into meaningful careers.

I often hear leaders tell students that we are the future of New York. And I believe that wholeheartedly. But if we truly believe students are the future, we must be willing to invest in the pathways that make that future possible. If we want the next generation (TIMER) of public servants, community leaders, and change makers to emerge from our campuses, we must create sustainable pathways that bridge students from the classroom to career

success. Thank you for your time and continued commitment to students.

EVA GRAY: Good evening, Council Members. My name is Eva Gray, and I serve this City as a high school special education teacher in Flatbush.

I'm here to support the advocacy of dignity in schools and reiterate what was beautifully stated by the young people who spoke here tonight.

Every day, my colleagues and I are struggling to support our students. Students are late to class because of metal detectors. They miss school, and they don't do homework because of mental health crises and issues, and family responsibilities. And many students face unstable housing conditions. Then, as they get older, they lack confidence due to their lack of literacy skills, foundational literacy skills, and math skills, and this makes them all the more vulnerable, of course. If students act out, it's those most vulnerable students who get expelled.

It's critical that we sustain funding for school-based mental health supports and restorative justice programs so that students can stay in school

and receive the education that they deserve. Thank you.

JACLYN OKIN BARNEY: Thank you so much for staying so late. It is very much appreciated.

I'm Jaclyn Okin Barney. I'm a parent of a special education student. I'm also a special education attorney who has been practicing for almost 24 years. I also serve as a Commissioner with the City Human Rights Commission. I urge you to continue their funding. But I am not here in that capacity.

I'm here today on the issue of special education. I know that a goal is to decrease tuition reimbursement cases in the city. I agree and respect this goal. However, this vote cannot be achieved without also investing sustained resources in public schools to serve all students with disabilities.

I know the Mayor’s budget does give money to preschool special ed and to IESPs. But this is not enough. It’s a big problem.

As a special education attorney, I see a lot of tuition reimbursement cases. And what you need to know is that parents are not choosing options in order to get a particular placement or program. They're choosing them because they have no other

choice. They're choosing them because the public school system can't meet their needs.

There are groups of students that I see often that cannot engage in the city public schools (TIMER). I see high-functioning kids with ADHD and executive function who cannot get the small classes that they need in high schools. I see students with substantial social-emotional issues who don't get the (INAUDIBLE) social support they need in their classes and throughout the day. I also see students with physical disabilities and complex communication issues who are presumed to need highly restricted placements, when in reality they could be served alongside their general education peers.

These are only a few examples. And it makes no sense to prioritize lessening tuition reimbursement cases without putting money into the public schools. I understand that the school system is investing in and growing the specialized programs like Nest, ACES, and Horizon. These are wonderful programs, but they're not sustainable for such a large system that we have.

We need to train and allocate money to community schools to ensure that kids with

disabilities get the services and the programs that they need. And this is in line with the (INAUDIBLE) priorities of integration. Until we serve our students with disabilities, it will not be a truly integrated system.

And the very last point is to increase the funding for the accessibility of schools. As you know, only one-third of our schools are actually truly accessible to kids with physical disabilities. They do not have true choice in where they go to school. They go to school where they can get in the door, and that's not equity. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Perfectly said, and thank you so much for 24 years of service.

JINDU OBIOFUMA: Hello and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Jindu Obiofuma. I'm the Special Education Policy Manager at Advocates for Children. And I'm speaking today on behalf of the ARISE Coalition, which I coordinate.

ARISE comprises parents, teachers, academics, advocates, and allies who have worked since 2008 to advocate for systemic solutions to the

challenges faced by New York City Public School students with disabilities and their families.

At a time when thousands of students with disabilities are going without their legally mandated services and the City is grappling with rising due process special education costs stemming from the gaps in public school special education, the City must make robust investments to better support students with disabilities in our public schools.

We urge you to address the various challenges faced by New York City students with disabilities by making the investments needed to provide every student with the special education evaluations, services, and programs they have a legal right to receive.

While we are pleased with the recent increased investments in preschool special education, District 75 classes, and contracted related services, those investments represent only a portion of what is needed to ensure New York City Public Schools can adequately support the special education needs of all students with disabilities.

Significant ongoing investments are still needed to hire additional evaluators, to provide

timely assessments for referred students, hire additional providers to reliably meet the needs of students with IEP-mandated services, and to raise the reimbursement rates for related services authorizations so that students whose schools are unable to provide IEP-mandated services can access independent providers.

Furthermore, we need to invest in more of what works. This means expanding access to literacy interventions and travel training, while restoring and baselining funding for critical programming at risk of cuts next month, like SEED, restorative justice, and the mental health continuum.

Finally, we urge you to commit at least an additional $450 million in the 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan to make more schools accessible for students, staff, educators, and community members with physical disabilities. (TIMER)

Currently, only one-third of our school buildings are fully accessible. We hope that you will rise to the occasion and rise to the challenge and invest in a future where all New York City students with disabilities get the education and support to

which they are legally entitled and which they have long deserved. Thank you.

RANDI LEVINE: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Lavine. I'm the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York.

We appreciate that the Executive Budget provides much-needed increased funding for preschool special education and extends funding for important programs such as Learning to Work. However, funding for other essential education programs is still set to expire in June.

Unless funding is restored, students will lose access to the mental health continuum, SEED programs, restorative justice, immigrant family outreach, and Student Success Centers.

We appreciate that the City Council's response to the Preliminary Budget calls for continued funding for these programs, and we stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education funding in urging you to ensure that the adopted budget restores and baselines funding for these programs.

The City also has more work to do to ensure students with disabilities receive the

programs and services they need in our public schools and to address the urgent needs that we see daily in our work with families.

We urge the City to add $100 million to address the shortage of service providers for students with disabilities across grade levels—mandated services are not optional.

• $20 million to expand effective reading intervention for middle and high school students. Families should not have to sue for private tutoring so their children can learn to read.

• $8 million to hire behavioral specialists. Schools should be able to call upon professionals with the expertise to support students' behavioral and mental health needs.

• $8 million to hire English language learner instructional specialists. Schools with high numbers of ELS should have a dedicated professional ensuring these students receive appropriate academic instruction and support.

• $3 million for interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting school bus service. Students placed in the City's custody should be able to get to school.

• $2 million to expand travel training for students with disabilities so (TIMER) they can get the training needed to navigate public transportation independently, increasing access to jobs and internships while reducing reliance on yellow school bus service.

• $450 million in capital funding over five years to make more schools accessible. No one should be turned away from a school because they can't enter the building.

Additional information is in our written testimony. We look forward to working with you to sustain critical education programs and ensure that there are additional needed investments. Thank you, Chair Lee and Council Member Wong and the incredible council staff for staying and listening and for your stamina over these past 11 hours. I am happy to answer any questions that you have. Go Knicks.

AUDREY JENKINS: Good evening. My name is Audrey Jenkins, and I'm a doctoral researcher studying Public Voice and Urban Organics Management.

We heard today that New Yorkers are underpaid and essential services are struggling from

defunding, exacerbating hardships and inequities across the city. We should fund those services.

We should also rethink how we spend other public funds, including around organics. We know that, when done right, local organics collection, processing, and use can be a valuable resource to help relieve hardships and inequities while promoting New York City's organics diversion.

We have models in the city and people eager to innovate who invest in the reliable resource of organics and the quality of life in our neighborhoods, including economic, social, and environmental well-being. Simultaneously, they promote organics participation by linking collection, processing, and use to solutions for more pressing issues in New Yorkers' lives, particularly economic and environmental.

For example, Compost Power, a local business that employs 10 New Yorkers, prioritizes rat control and local green space beautification at NYCHA campuses to increase organic separation. They also work with organizations like Cafeteria Culture to promote school organics and engage kids in changing

our culture to value the economic activities that we can bring around stewarding soil. This is important.

The IBO estimates that low participation costs us $602 per ton to collect organics, with a diversion rate currently at 7.85%. We will not reach parity with trash collection costs until we get to 15%, which won't happen until well beyond 2035, if at all.

Unfortunately, the City doesn't really fund this. The City Council does. So, thank you. But you only fund 15 organizations currently, with disparities in funding. Instead, New York City primarily invests in the waste industry, paying over $200 million each year (TIMER) to send organic materials to landfills.

The City budget for organics is also scheduled to decrease from $23 to $19 million. And this, and all of this, the industrial sector capitalizes on the organic resource. It restricts the creativity, value, and relational work that so many New Yorkers are passionate about. A passion that could be catching. This is unacceptable.

New York law requires deeper investment to reach 100% diversion by 2030. And we deserve this

investment in our communities. The millions the City spends exporting organics is too much money because it is not a fair deal for New Yorkers. We need to establish public policy and investments that respect local organics for the sector it should be.

In addition (TIMER) to passing, I'll just go through the requests—In addition to passing Intro 396 to require expanded local processing, please consider the following:

• Baselining equitable public funds for local community-based collection, processing, and use with a ramp-up plan over the next 10 years with the solid waste management plan.

• Invest in annual pilot and seed funding to lower barriers to entry and equalize the local startup space in the sector.

• Use joint funding streams to bolster organics and green space stewardship (TIMER) across the city for parks, urban agriculture, flood mitigation, pest management, and organics processing.

And finally, please invest funds for community-led visioning around organic stewardship and use in the city.

I will submit testimony with more information. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello, my name is Christopher Leon Johnson.

I want to say this right now: look, I'm calling on the City Council to allocate at least $2,000 to the Worker Justice Project so they could buy a decent, good-looking table at that Deliverista Hub outside. That hub-to-deliver table is abysmal. Why did they spend $1 million on a Deliverista table, and that table looks like a $20 table you get for the 99 Cent store or a lot less on Broadway and Dwayne Street. It's a disaster. The City Council needs to allocate at least $2,000 to give to them, at least to buy a table.

I want to say this right now: the City Council needs to start educating (INAUDIBLE) and (INAUDIBLE) about the fact that the Deliverista Hub is not owned by them. It's owned by the people. That's the people's Deliverista Hub. It's owned by the city of New York. Our taxpayer dollars got put into that hub, and we have the right to rest in that hub if we want to. We have the right to rest. We have the right to relax in that hub. They cannot say that

we cannot be there. We have the right to be there. We pay for that with our money.

So, I say this right now: look, that's why I'm just saying allocate at least $2,000 for a table. That's all I want. I know this budget's been decided, but I know the City can easily get $2,000 for a table. I want to say this right now: $2,000 for a table. Please. $2,000. I'm going to make a written statement for $2,000 for a decent-looking table. Hell, let's get one of these tables here and give it to them. Turn it, make it black. Paint it black, and let's give it to them instead. One of these city council tables.

All right. I support mental health. I support mental health outreach when it comes to this budget. I believe that clubhouses are really needed in the city of New York. I don't know why they're trying to defund these houses, but I support it 100%. But I'm going to say it right now. Look, $2,000 for a decent looking table for the Worker Justice Project for the Deliverista Hub. It's a disaster. I'll make a written statement. So, thank you so much and enjoy your day. Thank you.

HOLDEN ELLENBERG: Good evening, Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Holden Ellenberg, and I'm a high school student assisting a PhD candidate with research in urban economics. I also have legislative experience interning with Council Member Gale Brewer and Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal.

Over the past few months, I have been helping develop a memo examining the cost of shifting New York City's waste system towards a more sustainable composting model. When I began this work, I expected to learn where New York City's waste goes. Instead, I found myself asking a different question: Why are we spending so much money throwing value away?

According to the Independent Budget Office, organic material makes up more than one-third of New York City's residential waste stream. Yet only about 2.4% of residential waste collected in 2025 was captured through organics collection programs. At the same time, New York City businesses generate roughly 4 million tons of waste annually, and an estimated 1.5 million tons of food waste is still sent to landfills each year.

When discussions focus only on the price of expanding composting infrastructure, it is easy to overlook the ongoing cost of transporting and disposing of millions of tons of potentially valuable material year after year.

For many New Yorkers, the cost of waste management is largely invisible. It appears somewhere in taxes, service fees, and municipal budgets. But those costs are real. Every dollar spent transporting organic material to a landfill is a dollar that cannot be invested elsewhere. At a time when families are already struggling with the cost of groceries, rent, and everyday necessities, New Yorkers deserve a waste system that makes better use of the resources they are already paying for.

According to city budget analysis, it costs over a billion dollars a year to ship the city's waste out and pay tipping fees to other states. And according to the Brooklyn Borough President's report on expanding compost, the City spends over $195 million per year moving food scraps alone on their way to a landfill.

The question is whether we will keep paying to discard that material or begin investing in

a system that recovers value from it. (TIMER) Delay is not a savings; it is a continuation of that cost compounded over time.

I'm here because we will all inherit both the environmental and economic consequences of today's budget decisions. I urge the Council to continue investing in organics collection, composting infrastructure, public education, and the integration of organics into the City's broader waste management reforms. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

Just to really quickly start on this side, thankfully you have some council members who are really strong advocates of composting and all of the renewable energies that you guys are working on right now. I know Council Member Epstein and Council Member Sandy Nurse; they're very much big supporters of this, and thank you so much to both of you for all the advocacy you guys do.

I know it's not easy for the children, as well as for immigration legal services in general. So I appreciate you.

And thank you so much for the 24 years of lawyering. Can I say that right now? Of being an attorney and such a fierce advocate.

Christopher Leon Johnson, it would not be a city council hearing without you. And I want to know what $2,000 tables you're talking about.

(LAUGHTER)

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: It's like a little, like a lot less than a Home Depot table outside City Hall.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it. I'm going to get the link from you. Okay?

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. You should go out there tomorrow. If it’s staged tomorrow. You should go out. It's open from 11:00 to 5:00. You'll see what I'm talking about.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it.

And CUNY students, you guys rock. Thank you so much for being involved in your student senate government and everything, and for being such fierce advocates.

And, of course, 9/11 is a big issue that we've been looking into in the Council. So, I just

wanted to echo that that's also another issue we're caring about.

And of course, as we've heard throughout the day, the COMPASS contracts with DYCD are something that we will try on our end, as best as possible, to look into. I know that there are so many families that have really been impacted by afterschool. And so, I just want to thank you for being here all day because you've been here since early this morning—most of you have.

And just give yourselves a round of applause for being the last in-person panel.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you all for sticking it out. I really appreciate it.

We're going to move to virtual. Thank you. And I really—not that we don't appreciate the virtual panels, but y'all were here in person all day waiting, so I really, really appreciate your patience. Thank you.

Before we move on, is there anyone else left who has not testified that would like to testify? Are we good? Okay, we did it.

So we are going to move into virtual testimony. Thank you to all of you who came here physically to share your thoughts and experiences today. I don't think there are any other folks here in person to testify. So we are going to shift over to Zoom testimony.

And we're making a final call for Zoom registrants who have not yet spoken. And if you are currently on Zoom and wish to speak but have not yet had the opportunity to do so--oh, wait, no, sorry, that's later. Okay, if you're on Zoom, if you could please change your name to your full name, that'd be awesome so we could more easily identify you all. Sorry, folks on Zoom. We're just getting the list ready.

First up, for those on Zoom, if you could pay attention to the order, we have Charlene, followed by Corey, followed by Evan, followed by Gunny (phonetic). I think that's how I'm saying it correctly.

Okay, so Charlene, once you're ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, Charlene, are you there?

CHARLENE OBERNAUER: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, yes, we can hear you. Go ahead.

CHARLENE OBERNAUER: Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to testify. Wow! You guys must be so exhausted. Thanks again for having me on.

My name is Charlene Obernauer. I'm the Executive Director of NYCOSH (New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health), and I am here to talk a little bit about our work and also to talk to you about our funding asks for this year.

So I actually had the pleasure of listening to a lot of the amazing speakers who spoke earlier, and a lot of folks talked about workforce development programs and workers' rights programs. And I have the pleasure of leading one such program on both worker health and safety, with a specific focus on nail technicians throughout New York City. It’s called the Nail Salon Worker School at NYCOSH. This is a program we've run for the past 10 years. It is a school where nail technicians come to get the mandatory schooling they need in order to become licensed manicurists, and this has been a real success since the City Council has funded us. To

date, we've had nearly 1,300 students who've graduated from the school, and 97% have had a pass rate on the Department of State written exam, and 95% have also passed the practical exam.

There is really just a huge need for this kind of school that meets people where they're at in terms of literacy skills and also incorporates Know Your Rights materials into the education, particularly around wages, because, as we know, the subminimum wage for this sector was eliminated in 2019, and as a result, there is still some need to educate folks about what that means and how much they should be paid, and it can be confusing with tips and all of that.

So, we're really, you know, really excited about continuing this work. We're really grateful for the support of the (TIMER)...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHARLENE OBERNAUER: We're asking for a continuation of our funding. In particular, we have a $75,000 ask from the Speaker's Office that we would ask to be continued under the new speakership. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Charlene.

Okay. And next we have Cory.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. H

CORY HASSON: Hello. Do you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we can hear you.

CORY HASSON: Great. Thanks. I'm Cory Hasson. I'm the Government Affairs Manager at the New York Restoration Project. I'm going to be delivering testimony on behalf of Lynn Kelly, our Executive Director.

"My name is Lynn Bodner Kelly. I'm the Executive Director of the New York Restoration Project. NYRP is a proud member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of 215 member organizations committed to protecting, maintaining, expanding, and promoting New York City's urban forest, as well as parks and open space partners and the Play Fair Coalition.

For over 30 years, NYRP has partnered with residents in the city's least green neighborhoods to reclaim and steward public space, planting trees, renovating community gardens, and caring for parkland.

Last month, we completed our annual free tree giveaway, distributing 4,000 trees across 27 events in all five boroughs. The demand was overwhelming. We distributed every available tree at every event. New Yorkers are asking very loudly for a greener, healthier city, and a budget must respond in kind.

We acknowledge the meaningful progress on the FY27 Executive Budget. The baselining of $15 million from New York City Parks, accounting for 161 roles previously funded through one-shots, including 30 staff of forest and natural areas, is a critical step forward. We also welcome the approximately $2 million added, which shows real momentum. However, it's still not enough.

New York City Parks Budget remains $2.3 million lower than the FY26 Adopted Budget, and there is no dedicated funding to implement the New York City Urban Forest Plan, which was launched just this April.

New York City Parks manages 53% of the city's entire tree canopy and is required by Local Law 148 of 2023. The Urban Forest Plan Charts a path to equitably expand tree canopy to 30% by 2040.

Fulfilling that mandate requires the baselining of more than just temporary positions. It requires sustained growth and sustained investment.

We urge the City Council and the administration to honor Mayor Mamdani's commitment to double New York City's Park Budget and to deliver on the promise of the Urban Forest Plan. Specifically, we call on $150 million for..." (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time expired.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: You can finish up...

CORY HASSON: (INAUDIBLE) your time, and we appreciate working with you, and we look forward to working with you as this moves forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. And we definitely have been speaking pretty regularly with the Play Fair Coalition and all their assets. So, thank you so much.

Okay, next we have Evan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

EVAN BOWENS: Good morning, honorable members. My name is Evan Bowens, a city planning student, and I often visit New York. I'm here regarding QueensWay, QueensLink, and the Parks Department Budget.

Many before and probably after me have put the details into words, but I'm also a musician, so I put it into a song.

(SINGING) Don't put QueensWay in the budget. Don't you realize what choosing it means? QueensWay is a (INAUDIBLE) project that will forever block subway access to Queens.

Millions of bus riders each day would benefit from the QueensLink train.

But if it's a park with no subway, it would replace that corridor for so little gain.

Mamdani, why are you salting the earth? We thought you knew what the subway is worth.

Please reconsider before it's in ink. Don't fund the QueensWay. Fund the QueensLink.

Don't put QueensWay in the budget when you're already defunding Parks. It doesn't make sense to fund it when the existing parks are just left in the dark.

QueensLink is by far the right choice. It has parks and trains hand in hand.

Please do not fall for QueensWay's noise. They will prevent subways forever on that land.

Mamdani, why are you salting the earth?

We thought you knew what the subway is worth.

Please reconsider before it's in ink. Don't fund the Queens Way, fund the QueensLink.

I hope that was the best song you ever heard; I've been here almost 12 hours.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: That was Amazing. I wanted to beatbox alongside you... (CROSS-TALK)

EVAN BOWENS: I'd like to acknowledge (INAUDIBLE) my friend Anthony Phung, who submitted a really good written testimony. And he wanted to speak (TIMER), but he was never sent a Zoom link... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

EVAN BOWENS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: You can finish up your last couple of sentences.

EVAN BOWENS: No, I'm done.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Evan; that was awesome. Thank you.

EVAN BOWENS: Music is more engaging than speech.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

Okay, next we have Gunnie (sp?). Am I saying that right?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Are you on?

SCOTT QI: Dear Chair Lee and Members of the Financial Committee. Good Evening

My name is Scott Qi. You can also call me Scott. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify. I am writing to oppose the $43 million funding for the QueensWay Phase 1, AKA the Metropolitan Hub project in the city budget, and instead advance the QueensLink Project, which would bring both new subway service and new parkland to Queens by reactivating the former Rockaway Beach Branch.

Currently, getting from Southern Queens to Midtown Manhattan is a long commute with inconsistent A train frequencies, while getting to places in Northern Queens like Flushing or Queens Center Mall is a slow bus ride on the Q-52 or Q-53 bus along Woodhaven Blvd, which is often congested.

Currently, two competing concepts exist for the Rockaway Beach Branch: the park-only

QueensWay and the dual-purpose QueensLink, which combines subway and park uses.

The QueensLink will be the first north-south subway line in Queens and will create a direct link from Southern Queens and the Rockaways to Midtown. It will improve commutes for people going from north to south in Queens, who suffer some of the longest commutes in the nation. At the same time, and I want to emphasize this, QueensLink will include trails and park space.

On the other hand, the QueensWay would be built directly on the former railbed, which would make restoring transit nearly impossible in the future, which MTA recognizes, because there are a lot of examples like this where the park is built first, and when they want to reactivate the line, it becomes very difficult. Take the (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

SCOTT QI: And when they did the... Time over? Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: You can finish up.

SCOTT QI: Queens needs parks and trains. The QueensLink would provide both. I urge the

Committee to preserve this irreplaceable right-of-way for future transit and to support the QueensLink.

Thank you for considering my testimony. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. Next we have Haley Gorenberg, followed by Jacqueline Daly.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

HALEY GORENBERG: Okay, I'm just looking for the video.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, yeah, you can turn it on. I think from your end. I don't think we. Is it allowing you to?

HALEY GORENBERG: I am saying join as a panelist; show me as an active speaker when I talk. I turned that on.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

HALEY GORENBERG: I do have a display; usually things are visible. Well, if there's no way to fix that, then I'll just go on.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, I think, yeah. If you could go ahead with your testimony, I'm so sorry about that.

HALEY GORENBERG: All right. I'll begin. Maybe it would help if we cut a big red ribbon to

celebrate maintaining parks. I'm Haley Gorenberg, president of Brooklyn's Friends of Mount Prospect Park.

New Yorkers need basic care for parks, like staff and supplies to seed bare patches in our neighborhood parks, while (INAUDIBLE) and clearing debris from the drainage system. Maintenance helps Mount Prospect Park do what it was designed to do: provide shared free, flexible green space for soccer games and ball drills, off-leash mornings, picnics and birthday parties, and everyday access to nature.

Volunteers picking up litter and mulching around trees don't replace maintenance, and deferred care has left Mount Prospect Park disturbingly vulnerable to a harmful project that looks to spend $11 million in taxpayer dollars to pave the lawn for a regional-scale concrete skateboard complex. Those pushing the plan suggest that thousands of petitioning park lovers, Brooklyn Community Board 9, and environmental, health, neighborhood, and historical organizations opposing it should stand down and accept it because the city would also finally seed the lawn and clear the drains. That's not leadership; it's coercion.

In the borough with the least green space per person, the plan would require spending extra public money on engineering because paving so much permeable Parkland is harmful.

The plan cuts and threatens shade trees in the borough with the worst tree canopy. It concentrates yet another skate facility in the borough with more than 40% of the city's total, many neglected and mostly grouped around Mount Prospect Park.

Furthermore, the City Council passed the Adopt A Park law to raise money for maintenance. But records. Indicate the agreement here zeroed out a $1 million payment from celebrity Tony Hawk's organization, which has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying New York officials.

Mayor LaGuardia dedicated Mount Prospect Park as a monument to good government. Good government today requires that people in power not exploit or neglect. Fund parks maintenance? Absolutely. Stop your spending on this flagrantly damaging project, contradicting laws the City Council passed to protect our physical, mental, and financial

well-being. You have the responsibility to do so. (TIMER) Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Perfectly timed, thank you so much. We love all of our Friends of Parks groups, so thank you for the work you're doing.

Next up we have Jacqueline Daly, followed by Oliver Rivera.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JACQUELINE DALY: Hi, can you hear me? Good evening, Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee on Finance. My name is Jacqueline Daly. I'm a 12-year Long Island City resident, a designer and a pre-K parent with a corporate background managing strict product compliance and an early career in affordable housing operations. I know what functional project execution looks like, and right now the City is failing our neighborhood.

I am here to demand that this Council protect and deliver the capital funding promised for Long Island City Schools. The math for local families is broken. For kindergarten, my daughter started waitlisted at number 113 for P.S. 78 and has only crawled to number 98. Meanwhile, her waitlist

position for P.S. 384 has moved exactly one spot in two and a half months, leaving us stuck at number 62.

These are our zoned neighborhood schools. It makes no sense that we can secure a seat across the river at P.S. 16 in Manhattan, yet it is mathematically impossible to access a school in our own neighborhood.

Let me be clear about why out-of-district options fail: school transportation is broken, and out-of-district busing isn't provided. Where transit does exist, pick-up windows vary by 45 minutes year to year, and afternoon drop-offs stagger daily by 15 to 30 minutes. This unpredictability means even remote working parents cannot simply abandon their jobs to wait on a street corner.

Furthermore, while farther schools may offer affordable aftercare, they never provide transit after aftercare; working parents are trapped.

Furthermore, we were offered a spot at the new P.S. 439 incubation site. A temporary fix created only because the SCA delayed the permanent building. (TIMER)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired... (CROSS-TALK)

JACQUELINE DALY: The physical demand and the lack of permanent facilities make it unworkable. Connect to... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry. I was just going to say, if you could summarize.

JACQUELINE DALY: (INAUDIBLE)...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah, thank you.

JACQUELINE DALY: (INAUDIBLE) Full transparency on where developer mitigation fees are going. We need the hundreds of millions of dollars promised in the capital budget fully secured. School construction must move in parallel with residential growth, not years behind it. Please hold the SCA and DOE accountable and build our permanent Long Island City schools on schedule. Thank you.

Thank you so much. We have Oliver Rivera followed by James Dill.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

OLIVER RIVERA: (BACKGROUND NOISE) Good evening, everyone. Thank you for taking the testimonies. A lot of great speakers today. Just like the callers before me, I'm calling today to represent the parks. I'm a part of a friends group in the

Kingsbridge area. And my testimony has to call for funding for the Parks and Recreation Department.

It was said that 1% of the budget is being allocated for parks and finance, and in reality, a lot of New York City is made up of green spaces. Staten Island is the borough with the most green space, and the Bronx, in which I've been a resident for about 20 years, is the second, with some of the biggest parks like Van Cortland.

I'm representing Bailey Playground. And what I'm calling for is the full renovation of the park. That's just one of my asks. For the park renovation, it's estimated to be a few million dollars, but that's just a drop in the bucket for what I know is needed to keep these small parks in the five boroughs up to speed as far as cleanliness and as far as enforcement.

My daughter is a part of the New York Junior Tennis League. Thanks to Scott Daly for presenting that group. I'm glad that he was able to be on the committee today just to speak about the importance of that program. My daughter started that about a year and a half ago as a beginner. She's now intermediate, and she's still in it. But that program

takes place in many parts, like Crotona, like Williamsbridge Oval, like Van Cortland, and the amount of trash and litter that I come across is not due to the fact that there aren't any maintenance workers, but it's due to the fact that there's little funding to shift...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

OLIVER RIVERA: I'll be done in just one second.

The fact that there's little money to be able to pay for more time for these shift workers is the problem. So, to end it all, I'm just asking for at least 2% to 5% annual leave to be considered for Parks and Recreation. We need more maintenance workers to keep the parks clean around the clock, restrooms included. And we need more enforcement officers. There were a few people on the call today—I've been on this call since 9:30 a.m., and I heard a lot of testimony. I learned a lot about the city, all boroughs, all the organizations. Much respect to everybody. I spoke today because it was a learning lesson for me about everything going on in the city. But the green space does definitely need more attention, and the funding is what's going to help

with that attention, with enforcement officers. There are bad actors and bad teams that do bad things in the park, like smoking and drinking, and it shouldn't be parents' and parkgoers' responsibility to approach those people. We need Park Enforcement. We need the parks. I think more funding is going to help that, so that's why I came here today. So thank you, Council (INAUDIBLE). One of my district leaders and Council Member Dinowitz, was at the park today during (INAUDIBLE) in District 14 of my area as well.

And thank you again to everyone on the committee. Please consider upping the budget from 1% to at least 3% annually for the Parks and Recreation budget, just so we can keep these parks clean and safe for everyone. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

OLIVER RIVERA: Thank you so much; I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And I know that the current Parks Chair and former Parks Chair are definitely huge advocates of increasing funding and making sure that our parks and also just the City Council in general will continue to fight to baseline more. Thank you.

Next we have. James Dill, followed by Kayla Spence. You may begin.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JAMES DILL: (BACKGROUND NOISE) I'm Jim Dill, Executive Director of Housing and Services, Inc. We provide permanent supportive housing, the most cost-effective, humane way to end chronic homelessness. We serve 725 households in Manhattan and the Bronx, in both congregate and scattered-site settings. We are a member of the Supportive Housing Network in New York and support all the network's advocacy points for this meeting.

We urge the City to allocate $78.3 billion of funding for the preservation of permanent supportive housing. This amount includes $13 million for a flexible expense fund as advocated by the Council's Progressive Caucus.

We are proud to have been one of the organizations to pioneer Housing First. The success of this first generation of supportive housing has increased expectations, and now the City has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in permanent supportive housing. However, we now have SRO units that have been online for over 40 years in buildings

that are over 100 years old. SRO rents are low, and state NYCHA social services contract funding has been stagnating for decades. Accordingly, current operating revenues are insufficient to (INAUDIBLE) major repairs and long-term maintenance. During this time of record-high homelessness and an extreme shortage of affordable housing, the City must protect its investment and cannot afford to lose any supportive housing units. It's imperative that supportive housing be preserved with the $78.3 million in funding.

On another note, I would also like to echo (INAUDIBLE) point; we cannot stress enough the need for the city and state contingency planning to address the threat of HUD cuts of millions of dollars in housing and services, as HUD insists on defunding the time-proven Housing First model while reverting back to... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

JAMES DILL: (INAUDIBLE) responsibility (INAUDIBLE) model. On behalf of my tenants, I thank you for this opportunity to speak. I will submit written testimony.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

Next we have Kayla Spence, followed by Laura Wolf-Powers.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KAYLA SPENCE: Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we can hear you.

KAYLA SPENCE: Great. Hello, my name is Kayla Spence, and I'm a parent of two young children in Long Island City and a proud member of Community Education Council 30.

The now-approved OneLIC Neighborhood Plan recognized that growth would require additional schools. Commitments were made for a school at 44-36 Vernon Boulevard and two additional schools, creating approximately 1,300 seats alongside more than 14,000 new housing units.

I supported OneLIC because I believe those commitments would be backed by the funding necessary to make them a reality. Today, I'm not seeing that promise reflected in this budget.

My son will enter kindergarten in 2027, and instead of looking forward to that milestone, I'm worried about whether he will have a kindergarten seat near him. P.S./I.S. 78, our zoned school, currently has a 71-seat kindergarten deficit. P.S.

384, the designated overflow school, has a 48-seat kindergarten deficit. Neighboring P.S. 111 has a 12-seat deficit.

There is no school walkable to me that is not significantly overcrowded. There is a very real chance my child, just like many others in Long Island City, will need to leave their neighborhood to go to school.

I'm deeply concerned to see the lack of clear allocation of funding for the School Construction Authority to build promised schools as part of the OneLIC plan. SCA estimated a total of $519 million was needed to complete these schools, and yet that's not in this budget.

We urgently need the City to ensure that the funding promised by the Mayor's Office is fully committed to and prioritize construction so that they can move forward without further delays. Timely completion of these schools is essential to addressing the immediate seat shortage and supporting long-term stability of Long Island City as a family neighborhood.

On another note, CEC-30 stands with all the parents who were rightfully upset regarding

contracting for afterschool providers. I hope you hear them and you right this wrong. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Next we have Laura Wolf-Powers, followed by Manuel Figueroa.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LAURA WOLF-POWERS: (NO RESPONSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Laura, are you there? Laura Wolf-Powers? We'll come back to Laura.

Manuel Figueroa, are you there? Manuel, are you there?

MANUEL FIGUEROA: Yes, Hi.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Hi. How are you? Sorry, go ahead.

MANUEL FIGUEROA: Hi, good evening. And thank you for having me here, Chairperson and Members of the Committee.

My name is Manuel Figueroa. I am a member of Freedom Agenda, a community activist, a renewable energy educator, and someone directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

I know firsthand the challenges people face returning home after incarceration because I've lived it. When I talk about public safety... When we talk about public safety, we must also talk about

opportunity. Right now, New York City spends a half million dollars a year to incarcerate one person on Rikers Island. Yet too often we release people back into our communities without the tools, the support system, workforce training, or pathways necessary to succeed. Then we asked ourselves why recidivism continues.

If we are serious about reducing incarceration and truly closing Rikers, then reentry cannot be the day someone comes home; reentry must begin before release and continue immediately upon release.

That is why the Campaign to Close Rikers is calling for a $10 million increase in funds for reentry programs. Also, with investment in prevention and diversion, we need to invest in workforce development, education, and transitional programming that gives people a real chance of stability and dignity.

I am currently teaching Renewable Energy, a community-based workforce program that introduces justice-impacted individuals and underserved communities to renewable energy, energy efficiency,

solar literacy, and green... green career pathways. (TIMER)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: It's okay. You can just summarize it in a couple of sentences.

MANUEL FIGUEROA: Yeah, I strongly support increasing investment in diversion and reentry services, mental health support, transitional housing, and community-based programs. But I also urge policymakers to extend funding for workforce readiness and green job programming as part of the reentry plan.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today, and have a blessed and beautiful night.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Manuel. We're going to go back to Laura Wolf-Powers if you are there.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think we're asking you to unmute Laura if you're there.

We're going to go to Mark Gonsalves. Followed by Matea Elizer.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: He's raising...

MARK GONZALVES: Good evening, Chair Lee.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes.

MARK GONZALVES: Thank you so much for staying this late. I know it's a long day for you, but it's appreciated.

My name is Mark Gonzalves. I'm Co-President of the Citywide Council on Special Education, serving more than 200,000 students and their families with disabilities. I'm speaking to a parent of two students in the city.

We hear the Mayor; we hear the Office of Management and Budget vilify students with disabilities, talking about Carter cases being too high and Connor's cases being too high. The reason they're too high, and the reason there aren't any of these, is because the City is not building the programs they actually have in the DOE out.

Think about the ASD programs, right? DOE created Boldly Reimagining Special Education and Nest, Horizon, and AIMS programs for students with autism. Successful—95% graduation rate for Nest and Horizon, according to DOE's own data. And yet they only have the program working on a pilot basis in three districts.

We need the City to roll this out to all 32 districts, but as of now, the Mayor's Office will not fund it. If we want to fix Carters and Connors, build the programs. We've got amazing programs like Literacy Academies in Brooklyn and in the Bronx. We have an amazing Reading Academy on West 125th Street, and yet that's three schools.

We need those in all 32 districts to help the students with dyslexia and print-based disabilities who need intensive support so they can read. Our former mayor had dyslexia, and obviously he can read because of the support he got.

SEED—We need $9 million to fund SEED. It is important for kids who need that OT and sensory-related services. We need that $100 million; there are more than 11,000 kids who did not receive services last year and more than 10,000 this year who are not receiving services. They need the services that are federally mandated by law.

We need reading interventionists, as you heard, for more than 20 million; travel trains are critical for our students with disabilities. And we certainly need capital funding of at least an additional $450 million...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MARK GONSALVES: Make our schools accessible. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, and thanks for staying with us this long as well, and for lifting up your voice, especially students with disabilities, who definitely need more funding, time, and attention.

Next we have Matei Elizer followed by Mike Tucker.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MATEI ELIEZER: Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes.

MATEI ELIEZER: Good evening. My name is Matei Eliezer. I'm a Manhattan-born student at Northeastern University in support of QueensLink. I originally wrote my testimony as an open letter to the Mayor.

So I would like to open my statement with a modest proposal: Let's add subway service to the Highline. Now, surely, Mr. Mayor, you would immediately decline such a proposal on the grounds of its technical infeasibility, and rightfully so. Or you can consider Atlanta, which promised rails and

trails on its Beltline but only built a park, and the train is now in limbo 20 years later. That is the crux of that argument against QueensWay, which I bring before you today.

I'm speaking to you as a civil engineering student, a man in school to dedicate the rest of his life to public works projects exactly like these. And I am warning you of the ramifications that a decision like this will bring for decades to come. Relegating these residents of Queens to a gridlocked bus and a public park with the potential to price them out of their own neighborhoods, as we saw in Chelsea only 15 years prior, is not equitable at all, Mr. Mayor; it is all that which you claim to stand against.

A park alone will not benefit these residents. For them, there is no other transportation option. A subway line must be built concurrently with the park to truly serve its community and not become a simple playground for the rich. It has even more potential than just that.

Building this line opens up more opportunities to build affordable housing at a time when the city faces the worst housing crisis in its

history, and it is only technically feasible now. To that end, I urge you to fund QueensLink. It itself is the compromise between the park and the rail line that you wish to see.

There is already an abundance of green space in Queens, but only here can any of it translate into an option that can benefit the locals: by reducing their travel times, by better connecting them to the rest of the city, by taking cars off the road and cleaning their air, by simultaneously giving them the park proposed by QueensWay, and by acquiescing to their popular will. Local support for a subway line on the Rockaway Beach branch exceeds 25%.

Mr. Mayor, this proposal is in line with everything that you say that you want. So again, I urge you and the City Council to fund QueensLink. Central Queens needs your help.

Now, with all of that said, I understand that funding may be a genuine problem. I did not simply come to testify... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired... (CROSS-TALK)

MATEI ELIEZER: to yell at the Mayor and City Council Members and demand that they produce hundreds of millions to billions of dollars out of thin air. In such a scenario, I urge the following: that funding of QueensWay specifically be withdrawn and construction permits halted in order to secure and preserve the right-of-way. Another transit line and park to be revisited once the City has the wherewithal to do so, all while saving money in the short term.

To reiterate, Central Queens needs a transit line more, and construction of the park now would preclude it. Thus, construction should be halted until both are possible at once. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. Next we have Mike Tucker, followed by Malique Rivers.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Mike? I see you're unmuted. Are you there, Mike Taylor? Oh, Tucker. Sorry. Feel free to start when you're ready.

Okay, for some reason we can't hear you, so we'll come back to you.

So we have Malique Rivers, and then we'll try going back to Mike.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Mike, I see that you're unmuted. Is your mic working?

MALIQUE RIVERS: Hello, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, we have Malique. Go ahead.

MALIQUE RIVERS: Yes, good evening, Chairperson and Members of the Committee on Finance. My name is Malique Rivers. I am a New York native, a professional Rail Infrastructure Project Manager with over five years of experience directing multimillion-dollar transit programs across the country, and an incoming graduate researcher in Transport and City Planning at University College London.

I am writing to formally submit my testimony regarding the short-sighted allocation of $43 million for the QueensWay's 'Metropolitan Hub' phase within the FY2027 Capital Budget. As a rail systems engineer, I must state clearly: this design represents an act of permanent Option Value Destruction for outer-borough infrastructure. Just so

we can vote on WNYC, the Mayor stated that the administration is moving forward with the QueensWay in a way that, quote, "does not preclude future rail activation."

As an infrastructure project manager, I must challenge the internal logic of that statement. By placing permanent park structures directly over the center track bed of the Rockaway Beach branch, the City is at least many millions of dollars away from structurally blocking a vital north-south transit corridor.

I urge the Committee to consider three critical financial and spatial realities:

First, the choice between parks and transit is a false dichotomy. The Mayor asked on air if we want to just wait and not do anything while seeking state-level interest. But the City does not have to wait. The QueensLink proposal offers a collated 'Rails and Trails' design. By simply shifting the pedestrian trail to the side of the embankment, the City can deliver a continuous greenway today while explicitly protecting the rail bed for future transit use.

Secondly, QueensWay has zero provisions to accommodate rail, yet is being built in an area already surrounded by existing park space and greenway. Conversely, South Queens is a severe transit desert. Passing a park-only budget completely ignores working-class families who endure grueling, multi-seat bus commutes just to travel a few miles within their own borough.

Third, we must reject the MTA's inflated cost padding. The administration has argued that the cost of a park is a minimal effort compared to route expansion, but $43 million dollars of city capital... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired

MALIQUE RIVERS: It is not minimal. It is a significant diversion of funds being used to create an engineering obstacle. While the MTA padded soft costs to project an inflated $6 billion price tag for the line, independent engineering audits confirm the actual civil construction costs sit at $1.8 billion. It is fiscally irresponsible to fast-track multi-billion-dollar deep-cavern subway tunnels in Manhattan while utilizing padded numbers to starve the outer boroughs.

Budgets reflect our true values. A park is a localized luxury; a transit link is an economic lifeline. I call on this committee to pause the Metropolitan Hub funding and mandate a joint-use redesign that protects the rail corridor. Let's focus on a budget that protects rails and includes parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

Mike Tucker, are you able to? Is the sound working?

MIKE TUCKER: Hello.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: We got you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MIKE TUCKER: Oh my God, I probably waited for 10 hours to have this call. And thank you, Chair and Committee.

My name is Mike Tucker. I'm from an organization, well, two organizations; one is called Lay the Guns Down Now, where I work with families impacted by gun violence. And then the other one is called the Community Hub, where I bring family resources to community-based organizations and elected officials.

Today I'm calling on behalf of a mother, Dalisa (phonetic) Grimes. She is the mother of Damien Grimes-Fuller, an inmate at Rikers Island. We're calling in hopes that the Committee, any funding that is being allocated to the Department of Correction as well as CHS, be put on hold until there's a full investigation into why Damien Grimes-Fuller has not been given mental health services that he so desperately needs. He was assaulted; he's been abused.

And I want to say, if you're ever trying to close Rikers Island and you need a reason why Damien Grimes-Fuller is the number one example. This man has been on Rikers Island for 2,920 days. I'm gonna repeat that again*: 2,920 days* on Rikers Island. He has been failed by the Department of Correction, by the court system, and by CHS.

I know that this Committee has subpoena power. We're asking, before any more money is sent to Rikers Island and CHS, that a subpoena be given to the head of the Department of Correction, as well as to CHS, to come in and testify under oath as to why this man has been denied services.

We feel that he's been denied services for two reasons:

First, he was a part of constricted...

(CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MIKE TUCKER: Confinement lawsuit, as well as a lawsuit he brought against Department of Correction employees, being a captain and 10 correction officers.

He's been moved around over the last eight years, but wound up back in the building where the people that he sued and were supposed to be watching over him were. This goes deeper because of why he was there: his father was incarcerated; there was a threat made. He has a co-defendant. The co-defendant was brought into the building and threatened this man. Mr. Grimes called his mother and let her know that. His father, as I said, was brought into the building and killed on Rikers Island. That's another part of it.

What's concerning, as far as his mother, is that he had lost contact with the family. Recently, just in the last couple of months, he's been back in contact, but they haven't had contact

with him for over nine months. And the only reason that happened is that I reached out to Public Advocate Jumaane Williams' office, and his office did an investigation. He has a record. There's been testimony submitted online that was sent to your committee.

I'm talking fast because I've been on the phone for 10 hours, and I want to make sure that I get everything. If I'm jumbling, if you need me, I'll come back. Most of the Council people from Brooklyn know me, but this is something that has to be investigated. We're asking for your help in an emergency transfer of this man to the new B Bellevue facility so he's able to get the mental health resources that he needs that he's been denied for over eight years.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Mike. Can you, can you do me a favor? Can you spell his name for me? Damien is D A M I E N, Grimes, G R I M E S, Fuller, F U L L E R

His booking case number: 1 1 3 2 2 0 0 7 3 9

We're asking, as I said, for emergency help in transferring this man to the new Bellevue

facility. But as I said, a full investigation into what is going on is needed. There's a legal part of it: his legal team has failed him for the last eight years, the court system has failed him, and we need answers as to why all of these things have happened.

We're dealing with the legal part of it, but I need the Council and the Members to please suspend any funding that's going to Rikers Island and CHS and help us get this man transferred into the Bellevue facility. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. We have Melat Seyoum.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin...

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Followed by Sorry, followed by Kelsey Brow.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MELAT SEYOUM: Thank you. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes.

MELAT SEYOUM: Yes, thank you. Good evening- well, good night at this point—— distinguished Members of the New York City Council Committee on Finance.

My name is Melat Seyoum, and I'm the Director of Policy Advocacy and Strategic

Partnerships at the New York City Network of Worker-Owned Cooperatives, also known as NYC NoWC. We are here.

We are the member-led trade association representing worker cooperative businesses and democratic workplaces in New York City.

I'm here alongside my colleagues in our advocacy Council, members representing 14 other organizations that make up the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative.

As many before us have shared, we are here during these unprecedented times to support our immigrant worker owners in New York City, asking the City Council to continue supporting the expansion of worker ownership in New York City's (INAUDIBLE) budget and firmly into the future.

Since the initiative began 11 years ago, we've launched over 200 cooperative businesses and created more than 1,200 jobs, delivering not only higher hourly wages, but also opportunities to build wealth and assets for individuals, the vast majority of whom are immigrant women.

We have seen firsthand how the initiative has served to bolster our sector, strengthening

existing cooperative businesses and creating new ones. WCBI Initiative partners have collectively worked to create a comprehensive ecosystem of support for cooperative businesses that not only ensures the creation of new cooperatives in low-income areas, but also the technical assistance needed to sustain businesses and create jobs, as well as the education and outreach needed for communities interested in entrepreneurship and allied organizations.

We did a ton of work during the early years of the pandemic and beyond and brought over $20 million in grants and loans to cooperatives to keep them afloat. We did this with a $3.7 million Budget.

We ask the City Council to enhance our funding to $5,097 million in order for the initiative to double down on the essential long-term economic recovery for cooperative businesses that will be needed to claw ourselves out of this crisis.

We thank the City Council for the opportunity to testify, and we hope that you will consider our budget priorities and recommendations during this year's budget negotiation process. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Kelsey Brow, followed by Seungho Kang.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KELSEY BROW: Good evening. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we can hear you.

KELSEY BROW: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the emotional labor from Chairperson Lee. I've also been on this call since 9:30, and a lot of this testimony was sad and difficult to hear, and it's not my job to fix it. So I can't even imagine how difficult it must be for you. So thank you for that.

Unfortunately, I'm not able to sing to bring any levity into the situation, but I do have something important to say on behalf of QueensLink.

I'm Kelsey Brow, a resident of downtown Jamaica and Executive Director of King Manor Museum.

Why is the museum testifying in support of QueensLink? We preserve history to create a better future. It's hard to have a better future if you can't breathe. We need trails and rails. I can't go for a jog in my neighborhood because I can't breathe.

And it's not just me. The neighborhoods that would be improved by QueensLink average upwards of 35 PPB of ground-level ozone, some of the very highest in all of New York City. This causes and worsens respiratory illnesses. How does ground-level ozone form? A chemical reaction between sunlight and, you guessed it, vehicle emissions. Communities with poor transit access experience higher rates of respiratory illness precisely because residents have fewer alternatives to driving. This is an intersectional problem. Most of these communities are also communities of color.

A map of areas in Queens where transit would be improved by QueensLink and a map of the disadvantaged communities as recognized by New York State's Climate Justice Working Group are nearly identical.

Many of these communities have recently been or are in the process of being upzoned, so population density and the need for transit are rapidly increasing. Without QueensLink, that means more cars, more traffic, and more respiratory diseases in neighborhoods already dealing with environmental justice issues.

Furthermore, when we build a park without providing transit access, we are making a statement about who can reach different parts of our city. We are deciding who has access to jobs, education, recreation, and opportunity.

Public transit is not just transportation infrastructure. It is economic infrastructure. It is social infrastructure. It is a tool for mobility. Are we willing to build that... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired... (CROSS-TALK)

KELSEY BROW: curtails economic and physical mobility based on access to a car?

And you, I'll wrap up, but I'm sure you know the old saying: buy cheap, buy twice. If we don't build this rail connection now, there's a very real chance it will never be built. Look at how long it took to build the 2nd Avenue subway.

The need for better public transit access between North and South Queens is not a future need. It exists now. Let's build QueensLink. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. We have Seungho Kang followed by Anthony Phung.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

SEUNGHO KANG: Hello, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yep, we can hear you.

SEUNGHO KANG: I would like to thank the committee and chair for this opportunity. I'm Seungho Kang, a college student majoring in environmental sustainability. I am here to speak in favor of QueensLink, a Rails & Trails project.

Recently, I have come across news that the Mamdani Administration will be moving forward with QueensWay, claiming that QueensWay will leave opportunities for rail expansion in the future. As someone who has been following this issue for a while, I'm disappointed to say that this claim is not true. QueensWay will inevitably preclude all rail activation in the foreseeable future.

This is by no means an irrational alarmist claim on my part. In fact, the issues I mentioned are exactly what QueensWay's positions are. If you look at the actual diagrams that QueensWay has been providing for their proposed Metropolitan Hub, they do not provide any provisions for rail, with park entrances in the place of rail entrances and positioned paths on top of former rail space, as well as bridges that would never support subways.

This is fatal for north-south connectivity in Queens, especially for working-class folks in the Rockaways whose commute times already exceed an hour.

Building a new right-of-way after building a park would be way more costly than building it from the get-go or leaving some sort of provisions, which QueensWay does not strive for.

If rail were to be built on an already existing Queensway, it would include destroying much of the park space, which would be counterintuitive to this administration's goals of trying to do both at the same time.

If tunneling is considered instead, it would balloon the cost to another level. We have already seen this with the Second Avenue subway, which has become the most expensive subway in the world. This is by design, straight from the horse's mouth: QueensWay has stated that Queens does not need more rail. The opposite is true: this part of Queens is already supported by some of the biggest parks in the borough, like Forest Park, but is in dire need of more rail.

Let me be clear: building rails and trails with QueensLink will include park space. Current elevated rail technology, such as the Rockaway line of the A train, as well as the red and purple modernization program in Chicago, shows that concrete elevated rail can significantly reduce running noise compared to the noisy steel elevated rail that (TIMER) (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

SEUNGHO KANG: QueensWay relies on outdated stereotypes and tropes of new rail infrastructure that argue that reactivating the line will have more costs and benefits.

I again urge the Committee to rethink QueensWay regarding its long-term economic and social costs of not being able to reactivate this abandoned right-of-way in the decades to come, without unnecessary costs that would have been avoided if QueensWay were to be pursued. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

We have Anthony Phung followed by Paul Trust.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ANTHONY PHUNG: Hello? Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we can hear you.

ANTHONY PHUNG: Nice. So hello, my name is Anthony, and I'm a recent college graduate, and I'm speaking in regard to QueensWay and the departments of Parks and Budget.

So, obviously, as the others have stated, QueensWay is not a good idea to fund and, at worst, will hurt Queens and New York City in the long term.

And as stated before, it will block a crucial subway from being able to be built. And more importantly, it will also take money away from existing parks that are in dire need of maintenance.

This is especially true when the Department of Parks is also getting a proposed budget cut in this same proposal. So how are we supposed to build a new park and maintain it when we don't have enough money to maintain the existing ones?

Even though the proposed $43 million is only for a portion of the QueensWay project, the entire QueensWay project, which would take over the entire former railway right-of-way, could cost up to $500 million, which is nearly the entire budget of the Parks Department.

So right now, while we still have the best chance to, it's better to delay or even cancel QueensWay so that the existing New York City parks can get the funding they deserve. It also gives us a chance to rethink QueensWay into QueensLink. That was mentioned earlier as being able to allow for both subways and parks, which will lead to far more significant benefits than QueensWay ever will.

So please consider what's best for New York City, especially in the long term. Thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Anthony. Next we have Paul Trust, followed by Dylan Flesch.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Is Paul on? I think he got off. Dylan Flesch?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

DYLAN FLESCH: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes.

DYLAN FLESCH: Thank you, Chair Lee, Finance Committee Members, and all the City Council Members still listening at hour 13 of this hearing, while the Knicks are playing, no less.

My name is Dylan Flesch, and I'm a Member of the New York City Public Library Action Network, or NYC Plan.

Our demand is simple: fund libraries at 0.5% of the City's Expense Budget. Mayor Mamdani campaigned on that promise, yet the Executive Budget falls $97 million short of this amount; it includes $526 million for libraries, which is just 0.42% of the budget and an even lower percentage for libraries than what they saw in the last Adams budget.

I'm grateful to the 11 City Council Members, including four members of the Budget Negotiating Team, who have committed to fighting for 0.5%. The $97 million more that we're demanding is a rounding error in the City budget, but it would be transformative for our libraries.

Library CEOs recently testified that they face a $35 million operating budget shortfall, and I'm glad they highlighted that gap. But they are not asking for enough. They do not speak for library patrons or library workers when they ask for crumbs while the need is so much greater. We want a meaningful increase in library funding, not just to keep up with inflation and barely scrape by.

Libraries belong to us, to the people, not to the CEOs. They exist because of workers and the public they serve. They're also not a gift from the City to the people; like everything else in the city, they are funded by us, and we are entitled to them.

That is why we're demanding 0.5% now, not sometime in the next two terms, but now. And as a baseline in every financial plan going forward, 0.5% is the floor, not the ceiling. (TIMER) And I'll also throw in a demand for more... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

DYLAN FLESCH: (INAUDIBLE) for parks. Thank you so much. And... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, wait, sorry. What did you want to say about parks? Sorry, you can finish up.

DYLAN FLESCH: I'll just throw in a demand for 1% for parks, which they've been promised over and over, and have also had their promise broken, so. Parks and libraries fund them, please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we love our parks and libraries, and I know that on the Council we

definitely are pushing to get as much funding for them as possible. So thank you, Dylan.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think Paul is back on. Paul Trust?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

PAUL TRUST: Hello. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, we can hear you.

PAUL TRUST: Oh, great, Wonderful. Thank you.

Well, my name is Paul Trust. I live in Richmond Hill. I'm a father of three. I'm a public school teacher. I believe strongly in the QueensLink proposal, and I know you've heard a lot from us QueensLink fans over the past 10 hours or so.

I submitted testimony, but I'll just speak off the cuff personally as a Richmond Hill resident.

It feels trapped being here in South Queens, to be honest with you. I came from Jackson Heights, lived there for about 20 years. Great transit; moved down here. It's a little bit cheaper. My family grew, and we don't have great ways to get around.

So let me just sort of give a rundown of my family and our needs:

So my daughter goes to MS 137, which is right by the right-of-way. She's going to be going to the School of Art and Design, and QueensLink would provide one train access to get there; my wife also works by the right-of-way down in the Ozone Park area. So our needs are great regarding transit, but what is available now is extremely deficient.

And one thing I think that is not being looked at so much in this equation is that it seems the MTA is thinking about ridership versus cost. But we also need to look at what's in the pipeline as well.

We know Resorts World just got their Title III, you know, live gaming tables, and they're going to expand. Aqueduct is closing. It's going to be housing. There's going to be an arena. There's all this talk. Either way, it's going to be a major economic driver for the city.

How are people going to get there when they're traveling North and South? Two blocks from me is the Q-37. That's the only public transit available. It's a local bus.

We're not thinking ahead to our future transit needs. And I feel strongly that once they build a park, it's game over for something that I feel our... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

PAUL TRUST: which is better public transit.

So thank you so much for allowing me to speak. Appreciate you, guys. Have a good night.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Paul.

I want to go back to Laura Wolf-Powers and see if she's still there.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

(NO RESPONSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: If you're currently on the Zoom and wish to speak but have not yet had the opportunity to do so, please use the raise hand function and our staff will unmute you. I don't know if anyone else...

MAGGIE SANCHEZ: Hi, my name is Maggie. I don't know what happened. I registered; I didn't receive the link.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

MAGGIE SANCHEZ: (INAUDIBLE) Change my name. Maggie Sanchez.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Maggie Sanchez, okay, hold on one second. We're all right. Perfect. Okay, you may begin.

MAGGIE SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair Lee and Committee Members.

My name is Maggie Sanchez. I'm the co-president of the Citywide Council on Special Education, and I am speaking here in my personal capacity.

I strongly urge the City to extend and baseline funding for Sensory, the Sensory Exploration Education and Discovery SEED programs. That's $8.5 million. Appropriately funding programs like SEED and expanding them will ensure that all students receive FAPE.

I urge the City to extend and baseline funding for the following: $4 million in immigrant family communication and outreach; $6 million in restorative justice; $5 million in mental health continuum; $3.75 million in Student Success Centers.

The City has a legal obligation to provide the supports, services, and programs that

students with disabilities across all grade levels need in order to ensure a decreased spending on special education due process cases.

Families of students with IEPs shouldn't need to exert their due process rights in the first place. Families shouldn't be forced to fight for even the most basic supports that their kids need.

From the very beginning, the City and New York City Public Schools should work to better serve students with disabilities. Access to intensive reading intervention needs to be expanded, and more behavioral specialists need to be hired. To that end, the City must invest $450 million in capital funding over five years: $100 million to address the shortage of service providers; $20 million to expand access to one-on-one or small group support for middle and high school students who need more help learning to read; $8 million to hire behavioral specialists; and $1 million to establish a position of ELL instructional specialists; $3 million to provide interim transportation for students and foster care awaiting school bus service; and $2 million to expand travel training to help students with disabilities learn to travel independently.

New York City (TIMER)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MAGGIE SANCHEZ: New York City and New York State must illustrate the needs of students on the ground and their rights to free and appropriate public education by fully funding instead of inadequately funding education. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

Anyone else who has not testified?

ALEXEI SANOFF: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry, wait, who was that?

ALEXEI SANOFF: My name is Alexis Sanoff. I can't really tell what name Zoom is displaying (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Wait, sorry, can you... Wait, sorry, what is your name again?

ALEXEI SANOFF: Alexi Sanoff. That is A L E X E I, space, S A N O F F.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sanoff? Okay. There we go.

ALEXEI SANOFF: Well, I’m very sorry about that.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: No, perfect, go ahead, yes.

ALEXEI SANOFF: Dear Chairperson Lee and Members of the Finance Committee, my name is Alexei Sanoff, and I am a longtime transit advocate from New York City and an urban planning student at the University of Michigan. I am also a longtime QueensLink volunteer.

I am speaking in strong support of the QueensLink Project, which would bring both new subway service and new parkland to Queens by reactivating the former Rockaway Beach Branch, and against the current $43 million allocated in the budget for phase one of the QueensWay, also referred to as the Met Hub project.

Two competing concepts exist for the deactivated Rockaway Beach Branch right-of-way: the park-only QueensWay and the dual-purpose QueensLink, which combines subway and park uses.

Renderings produced by the QueensWay show that their proposed park would be built directly on the former rail bed. This would prove a massive obstacle to future rail reactivation. There are

virtually no examples of deactivated rail lines with parks being reconverted back into rail lines.

Famously, Atlanta's Beltline Rails and Trails proposal built the trail 1st and never got around to building the rail; the rail must be designed for and built in from the start.

Full construction and integration of QueensLink would create the first north-south subway line in Queens, extending the M service S from Rego Park to Ozone Park and then over the A train tracks to the Rockaways. This would ultimately increase through service to the Rockaways by up to 165%, and this in turn would open terminal capacity in Forest Hills for the G train to operate along the Queens Boulevard local tracks, increasing local service by around 50% and connecting central Queens to northern and western Brooklyn.

A study by the Steer Group found that the QueensWay proposal would replace millions of vehicle trips every year, making streets safer and lowering harmful emissions. This makes it, ironically, the greener option. It does this while adding up to 33 acres of new parks and trails integrated with the subway design. Over 20 years, the study concluded

the project will more than pay for itself by creating jobs, saving New Yorkers time, and reducing healthcare costs tied to air pollution and traffic and traffic crashes.

As an alum of Brooklyn Technical High School, I saw how many of my peers attempted to commute into Brooklyn from outer Queens and spent a very long hour, plus trips to do so, sometimes even two hours saving (INAUDIBLE) (TIMER)... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: You can summarize, sorry.

ALEXEI SANOFF: Means more time for studying and extracurricular activities. Most of the existing MTA system is laid out to favor (INAUDIBLE) in Manhattan. By extending the G train to Forest Hills, the outer borough market can be much better served, all while increasing the total number of trains on a very crowded Queens Boulevard line.

Queens needs parks and trains, and QueensLink provides both.

I urge the community to preserve this irreplaceable right-of-way for future transit and to support the QueensLink. Thank you. Have a nice day.

And let the record stand, I've been here since 9:30 in the morning.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Thanks for sticking with us so long.

Anyone else who has not testified? Going once. Going twice.

Okay, seeing no hands, I'd like to note that everyone can submit written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing.

We thank the administration and the public for attending this hearing to share their thoughts on the oversight topics and attached legislation, and we look forward to following up on these issues.

Oh, sorry, I think I misread that, but it's okay.

And also, I just want to give a special shoutout to our interpreters who are in the room next door and have been with us all day, making sure that our community members who speak languages other than English have the ability to understand what is going on and to engage and participate in the public hearing.

And so I just want to thank you all next door, and thank you so much. MVP goes to Council Member Phil Wong, who has been here all day and is still here. Woohoo!

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON LEE: And of course, thank you to our amazing Finance team.

And with that, we are going to close out the public testimony hearing portion of the FY27 Executive Budget. That is a wrap. [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 no interest in the outcome of this matter.

Date October 3, 2026