

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
COMMITTEE ON AGING
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SENIOR CENTERS

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March 2, 2012
Start: 10:13 a.m.
Recess: 1:00 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room
250 Broadway, 16th Floor

B E F O R E:

DOMENIC M. RECCHIA, JR.
JESSICA S. LAPPIN
DAVID G. GREENFIELD
Chairpersons

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.
Jessica S. Lappin
David G. Greenfield
Maria del Carmen Arroyo
Gale A. Brewer
Vincent J. Gentile
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Margaret S. Chin
Deborah L. Rose
Peter A. Koo
James S. Oddo
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Albert Vann
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A P P E A R A N C E S

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Karen Koslowitz
Diana Reyna
Fernando Cabrera
Darlene Mealy
Joel Rivera
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Robert Jackson
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

David M. Frankel
Commissioner
NYC Department of Finance

Sara Meyers
Assistant Commissioner
NYC Department of Finance

Lilliam Barrios-Paoli
Commissioner
NYC Department for the Aging

Kim Hernandez
Assistant Deputy Commissioner
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Vito Lopez
Assembly Member
New York State Assembly

Aravella Simotas
Assembly Member
New York State Assembly

Alec Brook-Krasny
Assembly Member
New York State Assembly

Rafael Espinol
Assembly Member
New York State Assembly

Aida Morel
On behalf of
Grace Meng
Assembly Member
New York State Assembly

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

Allison Weingarten
Social Work Intern
Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program
Queens Community House

Fern Hertzberg
Executive Director
ARC XVI Fort Washington

Jane Landry-Reyes
Senior Staff Attorney
Housing Unit
South Brooklyn Legal Services

Kaitlin Nelson
Assistant Director of Development
VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Reuven Lipkind
On behalf of
Eric Adams
Senator
New York State Senate

Faye Brown

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Good morning
3 and welcome to today's Finance Committee hearing.
4 My name is Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., and I'm the
5 chair of this wonderful committee.

6 Today's Finance hearing is joint
7 with Aging Committee, chaired by my colleague and
8 co-chair Jessica Lappin, and the Subcommittee on
9 Senior Centers, chaired by my colleague David
10 Greenfield.

11 Before I begin, I'd like to
12 introduce all my Council Members who have joined
13 us here today. To my left we have Peter Koo and
14 Council Member David Greenfield. To my right we
15 have Council Member Jimmy Oddo from Staten Island.

16 In 2009, Mayor Bloomberg submitted
17 legislation to the Council to transfer the
18 administration of SCRIE program from DFTA to
19 Department of Finance. According to the bill's
20 memo in support, the assumption of SCRIE operation
21 by the DOF was designed, quote, "achieve a better
22 customer service experience for seniors as well as
23 reduce administrative burdens on the city. DOF
24 has the technology or capacity to streamline the
25 SCRIE process by cross checking databases and

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2 making determinations with respect to initial
3 eligibility and renewal applications."

4 This assumption has, however, not
5 proven to be true. On September 27th, 2011, the
6 Finance Committee, jointly with the Aging
7 Committee held an oversight hearing to examine
8 DOF'S implementation of the SCRIE program and
9 learn about the success and failures that the DOF
10 has encountered when implementing the program.

11 As a result of the hearing, the
12 committees learned that DOF's current process of
13 administering the program was inefficient. Some
14 highlights of what we have learned is seniors have
15 experienced delays in the time it takes to process
16 initial SCRIE application and renewal application.
17 Some delays have been as long as six months.

18 DOF has only 13 fulltime staff
19 members to deal with SCRIE issues, compared to
20 DFTA which had 30 employees. DOF does not have a
21 public phone number that SCRIE tenants or owners
22 with SCRIE tenants can use to contact someone
23 directly at DOF about the SCRIE program. A
24 computer glitch caused errors in landlords'
25 property tax bills, causing all 15,000 buildings

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2 receiving SCRIE benefits to have erroneous tax
3 bills with the improper amount of SCRIE credits
4 applied and no credits applied at all.

5 The committees also learned that
6 the problems that existed with DOF's
7 administration of the SCRIE program also existed
8 with the Disability Rent Increase Exemption, known
9 as DRIE program, which was also transferred to DOF
10 in 2009 and has a similar structure and
11 administrative model as SCRIE. But the benefit
12 varies and is provided to disabled individuals.

13 As a result of that hearing,
14 Council Members Lappin, Greenfield and myself
15 introduced legislation to address the
16 inefficiencies of the administration of the SCRIE
17 and DRIE programs by DOF and ensure that seniors
18 and individuals with disabilities and the
19 landlords who rent to such individuals are
20 receiving the benefits and services of the SCRIE
21 and DRIE programs correctly and in a timely
22 manner.

23 A summary of the bill is provided
24 in the briefing papers prepared by my committee
25 staff. And I just want to thank my entire

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2 committee staff, under the leadership of Preston
3 Niblack, Jeffrey Rodus and my attorney Tanisha
4 Edwards, Antony Brito and Pakhi and everyone else,
5 and Jessica Lappin's staff. I would like to thank
6 all for their hard work.

7 The committees have a lot of
8 questions today. We have a lot of people who want
9 to testify, including the Department of Finance
10 Commissioner David Frankel and Aging Commissioner
11 Lilliam Barrios-Paoli. So before we get started,
12 I would turn the mic over to my co-chair David
13 Greenfield to make an opening statement.

14 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you,
15 Mr. Chairman. Good morning, my name is David
16 Greenfield. I chair the Senior Centers
17 Subcommittee. I'd like to thank Chair Recchia and
18 Chair Lappin for working together on this joint
19 hearing to consider this important legislation.

20 Many of New York City's senior and
21 disabled populations are in need of stable and
22 affordable housing, and the SCRIE and DRIE
23 programs offer a critical lifeline to many of our
24 city's neediest residents.

25 Folks that have to chat, if you

1 don't mind, stepping outside. We'd appreciate it.

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3 Back in 2009, when the
4 administrative duties regarding SCRIE and DRIE
5 were transferred from the Department for the Aging
6 to the Department of Finance, it was thought that
7 having one agency assume responsibility for the
8 program would improve efficiency and remove some
9 administrative burdens from the city. It was also
10 thought that this streamlining would make for a
11 better customer service experience for landlords
12 and tenants alike. Unfortunately, this hasn't
13 happened.

14 In reality, the move from DFTA to
15 Finance has not improved efficiency nor has it
16 made it easier for applicants to navigate
17 government bureaucracy.

18 So what do we do? Well sometimes
19 government makes mistakes and a sign of a robust
20 government is when the government is willing to
21 admit those mistakes and fix them and that's what
22 we're proposing to do today by moving SCRIE and
23 DRIE back to the Department for the Aging and
24 adding a new provision that would make agency
25 communications and information provided to the

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2 public more robust.

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I want to thank all of you who have come to testify at this hearing. We look forward to hearing your input. I want to thank the two commissioners, Commissioner Frankel and Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli for coming out here and testifying today. I also want to thank the terrific staff. I think we already mentioned Preston, Jeffrey, Tanisha, Tony and Pakhi, but we can't forget, of course, Robert and Matt who my BlackBerry tells me actually doesn't sleep at night. So thank you, Matt.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Before we let the commissioners testify, I'd like to recognize all my Council Members who have joined us: Council Member Al Vann, Council Member Koppell, Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, Council Member Karen Koslowitz and of course, Council Member Gale Brewer who does a great job and she was at the forefront of the SCRIE problem when it first--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Just trying to give you recognition. You're not going to be in any trouble. I'm going to make you look good.

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We've also

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been joined by Council Member Margaret Chin.

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While Council Member Jessica Lappin is sitting

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down and getting her stuff together, I just want

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to remind all my colleagues that Monday morning we

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have the first budget hearing. We will begin with

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Mark Page and it will be at 10:00 sharp. It'll be

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in the City Council Chamber across the street. So

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10:00 sharp. I just want to put that and make

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sure that's on your calendar. All the budget

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hearings begin next week. After Mark Page, again

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we'll be with Commissioner David Frankel. So have

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back to back days with this wonderful committee.

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You're very lucky.

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DAVID M. FRANKEL: I feel

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extraordinarily lucky.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Now

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I'd like to turn the microphone over to the chair

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of the DFTA, of the Aging Committee in New York

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City Council, Council Member Jessica Lappin.

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CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Good morning

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everyone. I assume you already introduced the

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members of the Aging Committee who are here. Is

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that correct? Okay.

I'm Jessica Lappin, chair of the Aging Committee. I'm very happy to be co-chairing this hearing today with Council Member Recchia. We had a very interesting and heated hearing on the topic of SCRIE not too long ago and some of the thoughts and feedback that we received have been incorporated into the legislation that we are considering today. I very much look forward to hearing testimony from both commissioners who are here and from the public as well, so we can figure out how best to move forward legislatively and to making SCRIE work better for everyone. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much, Council Member Jessica Lappin. We've also been joined by Council Member Debi Rose from Staten Island. I believe we introduced everyone. Now we'll call on the commissioners. We're very fortunate to have two commissioners here with us this morning, so I want to thank you both for taking time out of your busy schedules.

DAVID FRANKEL: Always a pleasure. Good morning Chairman Recchia, Chairwoman Lappin, Subcommittee Chair Greenfield and members of the

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2 City Council Finance and Aging Committees, and
3 Subcommittee on Senior Centers. I am David
4 Frankel, Commissioner of the New York City
5 Department of Finance. I am joined by
6 Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli from the
7 Department of Aging and my Assistant Commissioner
8 Sara Meyers, who oversees our exemptions and
9 abatements programs. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to discuss Intro 731-A.

11 While the Department of Finance
12 supports the intent of this bill to ensure
13 transparency and quality customer service, we
14 respectfully oppose transferring SCRIE and DRIE
15 administration to DFTA.

16 We recognize that SCRIE and DRIE
17 are special exemptions serving vulnerable
18 populations, and it is vital to me that we provide
19 them with exemplary service. Since the SCRIE
20 program was transferred to Finance, we have
21 experienced some growing pains, but we have also
22 made many changes to improve the administration of
23 the program.

24 Since testifying before the City
25 Council in September 2011, we have been working

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2 with DFTA, senior advocacy groups and landlord
3 groups on a focused effort to enhance customer
4 service, and we will continue to make more
5 improvements.

6 I am committed to continuing our
7 partnership with Commissioner Barrios-Paoli and
8 DFTA to further develop our collaborative outreach
9 and customer service plan to ensure that eligible
10 New York City seniors are aware of SCRIE and can
11 easily navigate the program. Both agencies are
12 committed to working with the Council on these
13 issues, and we welcome your input.

14 Commissioner Barrios-Paoli and I
15 agree that keeping SCRIE at Finance provides the
16 best of both worlds, coupling Finance's tax
17 exemption administration expertise with DFTA's
18 expertise in serving seniors. We can provide the
19 best service to eligible seniors and the disabled
20 with continued administration from Finance and
21 collaboration with DFTA on outreach.

22 Finance is uniquely qualified to
23 handle the many aspects of exemption
24 administration, including SCRIE and DRIE. Our
25 staff processes 26 personal and commercial

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2 exemption programs, including the New York State
3 School Tax Relief exemptions, the veterans
4 exemptions, the senior and disabled homeowners
5 exemptions and the clergy exemption. The 26
6 exemption programs we administer have a total
7 value of approximately \$4.5 billion annually.

8 SCRIE was initially administered by
9 HPD and then transferred to DFTA, where it was
10 administered for more than ten years before coming
11 to Finance in 2009. Each of these changes was
12 accompanied by a transitional period, with a
13 natural learning curve for recipients and the
14 agency. The transfer of SCRIE back to DFTA would
15 reverse the progress we have made and adversely
16 affect the people this program is intended to
17 help. DFTA does not currently have the office
18 space, staff or processes in place to administer
19 SCRIE and DFTA never administered DRIE.

20 These changes would be very
21 disruptive for the seniors in the SCRIE program
22 and we believe keeping SCRIE administration at
23 Finance and working to improve customer service is
24 a better alternative to disrupting the system and
25 starting again with a new set of growing pains.

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2 I will not repeat testimony I gave
3 in September 2011 about our progress since we
4 first took over SCRIE in September 2009, but I do
5 want to outline a number of improvements put into
6 effect this fiscal year. All of these efforts are
7 tied to our commitment to effective service for
8 SCRIE recipients, applicants, advocates and
9 landlords.

10 Starting in fall of 2011, our SCRIE
11 team began contacting renewal applicants directly
12 if they failed to respond to three letters
13 requesting missing information. Renewal
14 applicants have indicated they want to continue
15 the benefit, and we want to help them do that.

16 Often our staff will make numerous
17 phone calls in order to reach the right person.
18 For example, a home caretaker might answer the
19 phone and tell us to call the daughter or son of
20 the SCRIE recipient. We then call additional
21 caretakers or family members to ensure we make
22 contact.

23 Staff has tried to call about 1,200
24 people in this category so far. Of those that we
25 have tried to contact, approximately 20 percent

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2 sent us in the information we needed, and 16
3 percent were eventually approved. Four percent
4 did not qualify for renewal. We will continue to
5 make this additional personalized attempt to reach
6 each pending renewal applicant who has not
7 answered any of our three follow-up letters.

8 Another of our customer service
9 efforts has taken place in our Manhattan Business
10 Center, where we have moved responsibility for our
11 SCRIE walk-in service from administrative staff to
12 our experienced customer service representatives.
13 DFTA provided training to our staff when we took
14 over the program, and we will work with DFTA on
15 additional training for our customer service staff
16 to ensure that we remain sensitive to the unique
17 needs of seniors.

18 In addition to the staffing change,
19 we have expanded our SCRIE walk-in hours. We now
20 take SCRIE walk-in customers at our Manhattan
21 Business Center three days a week, one full day
22 and two separate half days. We are exploring the
23 possibility of increasing SCRIE hours at our
24 Manhattan location and expanding SCRIE walk-in
25 service to our other locations.

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2 We have also spoken with DFTA and
3 are exploring ideas to supplement walk-in service
4 with direct assistance from DFTA staff so that
5 seniors could get help filling out applications,
6 receive assistance with other questions and be
7 referred to their local senior centers as needed.

8 In order to be responsive to
9 current SCRIE recipients and to connect with
10 others who may qualify for the program, we have
11 been collaborating on outreach with DFTA to ensure
12 we reach seniors and educate them about SCRIE.
13 DFTA has also been advising us on how to best
14 target outreach based on the needs of the senior
15 population. DFTA has helped us coordinate with
16 senior centers to reeducate providers about SCRIE
17 and we developed a new SCRIE informational flier,
18 available in English, Spanish, Russian and
19 Chinese. Soon it will be available in Korean as
20 well based on feedback we received from senior
21 centers we have visited.

22 In November, DFTA began
23 distributing this new SCRIE flier via email and
24 fax distribution list to 410 aging service
25 providers, including senior centers, case

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2 management agencies, 14,000 home delivered meal
3 recipients, caregiver programs, homecare providers
4 and legal services providers. DFTA continues to
5 promote SCRIE in their outreach activities.

6 We have been monitoring the success
7 of our joint efforts with DFTA and are discussing
8 how our agencies can continue to partner on
9 additional outreach to ensure that seniors find
10 support in learning about the SCRIE program and
11 filling out the necessary paperwork.

12 Another aspect of improved SCRIE
13 customer service is the new Tenant Abatement and
14 SCRIE tenant reports that became available for the
15 first time via our website starting in December
16 2011. We worked closely with landlord and senior
17 advocacy groups and made significant changes based
18 on their input to increase transparency in the
19 SCRIE program.

20 We have received very positive
21 feedback from landlords and tenant advocates; they
22 find the online information to be clear,
23 comprehensive and helpful in managing their
24 business. Advocates have also told us that these
25 new reports enabled them to win housing cases for

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2 their SCRIE clients. The new reports include
3 SCRIE activity listed by building address and
4 docket number, benefit amount, benefit expiration
5 date, and the date and amount of TAC distributed
6 to landlord accounts. SCRIE tenant reports are
7 updated approximately biweekly and the online TAC
8 reports are updated monthly. The online reports
9 are in addition to the quarterly SCRIE statements
10 of account that we send landlords listing TAC
11 credit against their property taxes.

12 Behind the scenes, Finance IT staff
13 has started programming a new SCRIE database that
14 will make administration of the program more
15 simple. Our key enhancement is that the new
16 system will automatically generate an
17 acknowledgement letter when a SCRIE submission is
18 received. Currently, we do not have the ability
19 to send automatic acknowledgement letters. This
20 change will go a long way in solving the problem
21 of seniors waiting to hear whether we have
22 received their information. We expect the new
23 system will be online before the end of this
24 calendar year.

25 Now let me turn to Intro 731-A.

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2 While we respectfully oppose the transfer of SCRIE
3 and DRIE administration to DFTA, we do support the
4 intent of this bill to make the SCRIE more
5 efficient, transparent and customer friendly and
6 I'd like to provide the following comments.

7 Intro 731-A prescribes a quarterly
8 reporting requirement pertaining to various
9 defined phases of the SCRIE application approval
10 process. We have suggested revisions to reflect
11 the operational capabilities of our existing SCRIE
12 database and the format of information available.
13 We are happy to continue working on language to
14 meet the spirit of the bill, and can also report
15 additional data as it becomes available.

16 Intro 731-A mandates a quarterly
17 mailing to landlords regarding their TAC. Our
18 online SCRIE Tenant and TAC reports offer more
19 information than the proposed bill requires and
20 are easy to access. Based on the positive
21 feedback we have already received about these
22 reports, we believe this is a sufficient means to
23 communicate with both landlords and tenants and
24 that there is no need for an additional mandatory
25 mailed quarterly report.

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2 We do not support the creation of a
3 dedicated phone number for SCRIE phone calls
4 capable of handling upwards of 100,000 calls each
5 year which are currently managed efficiently by
6 311.

7 311 was developed to help New York
8 City residents by providing a single entry point
9 into a complex city bureaucracy where people can
10 receive help for any issue. This was an important
11 improvement in service, and is one of the reasons
12 why 311 is the right place for seniors to call for
13 information about SCRIE. A senior concerned about
14 SCRIE may also want information about lack of
15 heat, how to get a pothole filled, or where to
16 find a senior center. New Yorkers should not have
17 to go back to the old days where each problem
18 required a separate phone number and operators.

19 In calendar year 2011, 311 received
20 more than 100,000 calls regarding SCRIE. The vast
21 majority of these calls were resolved by 311
22 representatives who have access to our SCRIE
23 database. Most of these calls are simple
24 questions that 311 operators can quickly answer,
25 such as the status of an application or how to

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apply.

When callers ask questions that 311 operators cannot answer, they are told to call back in 14 days while the information is researched. These service requests are transferred to Finance and our staff provides 311 with the answers within a day or two. We are committed to maintaining this timely response to all SCRIE service requests.

The sheer volume of SCRIE calls, given the bill's requirement of a dedicated phone line, would require an in-house call center. The bill requires that at least one person's phone number be given out to respond to SCRIE inquiries. No one dedicated employee could possibly handle 100,000 calls annually, which is about 8,250 calls per month. We estimate that we would require at least 14 fulltime staff members to handle that call volume. The additional staff would require an extra expenditure of approximately \$1 million annually and initial capital investment of \$1.3 million.

Lastly, Intro 731-A requires Finance to provide certain information to

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2 landlords and tenants whenever sending a landlord
3 or tenant written communication. We support this
4 idea and could meet this requirement by posting
5 the full information on our website, but have
6 suggested modifying the information that would be
7 included in mailings as a more cost effective
8 solution.

9 We look forward to continuing our
10 collaboration with the Council and landlord and
11 tenant groups, as we keep working to improve SCRIE
12 and all of our programs. I appreciate the
13 opportunity to testify and now turn over the floor
14 to my colleague Commissioner Paoli.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Commissioner,
16 before you go, I just want to introduce some of
17 the colleagues who have joined us. We've been
18 joined by Diana Reyna. We've been joined by
19 Fernando Cabrera, Darlene Mealy, Maria Carmen
20 Arroyo and I believe we have everyone else. Go
21 ahead, Commissioner. We've also been joined by
22 the Chairman of the Housing Committee in the State
23 Assembly, Vito Lopez. Good morning. Thank you
24 for coming.

25 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Good

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2 morning, Chairs Lappin and Recchia and
3 Subcommittee Chair Greenfield, as well the members
4 of the Aging and Finance Committees. My name is
5 Lilliam Barrios-Paoli and I am the Commissioner of
6 the Department for the Aging. I am here today to
7 discuss Introduction 731-A and the broader Senior
8 Citizen Rent Increase Exemption program or SCRIE.

9 The Department for the Aging
10 administered SCRIE, as you know, for more than 10
11 years, until September of 2009. Prior to this
12 time, SCRIE was administered by the Department of
13 Housing, Preservation and Development. DFTA has
14 never administered the DRIE program. SCRIE was
15 transferred to the Department of Finance as per
16 local law soon after I became Commissioner of
17 DFTA.

18 The Department of Finance has
19 testified before this body previously that the
20 transition from DFTA to Finance was a difficult
21 one and significant work had to be done to improve
22 operations of the program within DOF. That being
23 said, I am confident that the administration of
24 SCRIE has significantly improved and DFTA has not
25 received complaints from seniors regarding the

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2 program in many months. For these reasons, DFTA
3 supports the continued administration of the SCRIE
4 program within the Department of Finance and
5 respectfully opposes Intro 731-A.

6 I understand and respect the
7 Council's commitment to protecting the interests
8 of its constituents in regard to the SCRIE
9 program. It is a crucial benefit for many
10 seniors, allowing them to maintain their housing
11 and independence in the community. However, in my
12 judgment, is not good public policy to force
13 another transition, especially since DOF has
14 worked hard to correct past problems within the
15 program. I strongly believe this would create
16 significant confusion for SCRIE recipients,
17 landlords and the social service providers that
18 refer clients to SCRIE.

19 As stated in Commissioner Frankel's
20 testimony, DFTA and DOF have worked in close
21 collaboration on SCRIE outreach and will continue
22 these efforts. The agencies have jointly arranged
23 outreach at senior centers; distributed DOF's
24 SCRIE flyers to all DFTA contracted agencies as
25 well as DFTA's 14,000 home delivered meal clients.

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2 To be clear, DFTA's outreach team has always
3 included SCRIE as part of our regular outreach
4 efforts and will continue to do so going forward.
5 From October 2010 to October 2011, DFTA reached
6 over 20,000 seniors at 214 outreach events.
7 Nonetheless, I think we can agree that government
8 should always strive for further improvement.

9 For these reasons, Commissioner
10 Frankel and I commit to working together to
11 develop a more comprehensive outreach and customer
12 service plan to ensure that eligible New York City
13 seniors have access to and are able to navigate
14 the SCRIE program with ease.

15 We are happy to present our plan to
16 the Council and to collaborate with you on its
17 development and implementation. DFTA is ready to
18 support DOF in any way to ensure the continued
19 success of the program. Thank you for the
20 opportunity to testify today. I will now take
21 questions.

22 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
23 very much, Commissioner. We've been joined by
24 Joel Rivera, Steve Levin and Darlene Mealy.

25 I'm going to ask a few questions,

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2 because my colleagues have lots of questions and
3 I'm going to give them the opportunity to ask
4 questions and then I'll come back. I just want to
5 start off with the commissioner of DFTA. When
6 SCRIE was in DFTA, how many people were assigned
7 to work on SCRIE?

8 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: We had 39
9 staff assigned to do SCRIE.

10 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. These
11 39 people, they implemented the entire program?

12 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes. Just
13 to make sure. So the 39 people administered the
14 SCRIE program and all of the eligibility criteria
15 and went through the documents and all of that.
16 We had a walk-in center that was staffed mostly by
17 reservists and Title 5 workers and several
18 supervisors that would take walk in seniors, you
19 know, to help them fill out the forms and so on.

20 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: And where was
21 that walk-in center?

22 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: It was on
23 the sixth floor of DFTA at 2 Lafayette.

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: At 2
25 Lafayette. And was that open five days a week?

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LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: It was open five days a week.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay, and eight hours a day?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: In addition to that, how many phone calls would you get in a year, in a month, whatever is easier for you, about SCRIE, inquiries about SCRIE?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: You know, I really do not know the answer to that. I'm looking at my staff that administrated the program before.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You could call your staff up. We'd love to hear from your staff. They could come on up and testify.

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Let me say this. I don't know the exact number of phone calls. SCRIE is one of the most frequent calls that we get and still to this day it's just plain information. It's a benefit that people need and avail themselves of. So I would say probably thousands of phone calls.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. But we

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don't have a number?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: No. But I could try to go back and see if could--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing] All right, I appreciate that. When you had SCRIE and when the phone calls came in, they came directly to DFTA?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Do you know how--

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: [interposing] In the past few years, calls from 311, many a time when they could not be answered by the 311 operator were referred to DFTA. So we would get direct calls and we would get 311 calls.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's what I'm going to get next. Prior to 2009, if you know, how many phone calls were made to 311 concerning DFTA? Do you know that?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: About 800 a month.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: About 800 a month were made to DFTA. I just want to be clear on your position. Your position is that it should

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stay in the Department of Finance?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. In doing that, when it was transferred, according to different memorandums of understanding, you were supposed to keep doing outreach and inform the seniors about SCRIE and how to become eligible for the program.

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes. And we've continued to do that.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: How did you continue to do that?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: We do that in our senior centers. We do that through home-delivered meals, by including information on the different programs. Case management agencies, when they do intake, you know go through all the possible programs that seniors are eligible for. We do close to 300 activities in which we go to street fairs and other places to do this kind of thing.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: What do you hand out to promote SCRIE?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: We have a

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pamphlet that the Department of Finance had developed.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: And do you have a copy of that pamphlet?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: I do not.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Because I've never seen that pamphlet. Did any member ever see that pamphlet? When was that published? Do we have a copy of it?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: It's a one-page flyer. I could try to make it available for you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It's a one-page flyer. If we could get a copy of that because I've never seen it and a majority of my colleagues have never seen that flyer. Only two people have seen it here today.

We've also been joined by Council Member Vincent Gentile.

You also said that this has been translated in different languages? I just want to be clear. Is there a pamphlet or is this a one-page flyer that we have?

DAVID FRANKEL: It's a one-page

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flyer.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: A one-page flyer. That was produced when?

DAVID FRANKEL: It's in Russian, Chinese and Spanish in addition to English.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: And when was that produced?

DAVID FRANKEL: October.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: October, after our hearing?

DAVID FRANKEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: So from 2009 up until September 2011, what materials were handed out from DFTA to promote SCRIE?

[Pause]

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: This is Kim Hernandez who used to administer the SCRIE program at DFTA. She's an assistant deputy commissioner.

KIM HERNANDEZ: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Just state your name for the record please.

KIM HERNANDEZ: Kim Hernandez.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Good morning. Welcome to the City Council.

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2 KIM HERNANDEZ: Thank you, good
3 morning. Traditionally, what we would hand out at
4 any outreach that we do for Department for the
5 Aging is "DFTA at a Glance," which is a 16-page
6 book that highlights all of the programs that
7 seniors are potential eligible for. So that would
8 always include updated information about SCRIE and
9 other benefits.

10 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: So it was one
11 book that contained all the programs. There
12 wasn't just one book for SCRIE.

13 KIM HERNANDEZ: Correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. You
15 used to promote this wonderful to Senior Citizen
16 Rent Increase Exemption program. Do you print
17 this anymore?

18 KIM HERNANDEZ: We don't print it
19 anymore but that's what I would call our SCRIE
20 blue book, which is a book that is for seniors and
21 also for landlords and it explained the SCRIE
22 program. In addition, it always included an
23 application.

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: When did you
25 stop printing this book?

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2 KIM HERNANDEZ: When the program
3 moved, we stopped printing the book.

4 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Is it
5 online? Is it available anywhere else besides me?

6 KIM HERNANDEZ: I can check to see
7 if it's on our website.

8 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It's not. We
9 checked already. You know, this--

10 KIM HERNANDEZ: [interposing] Can I
11 just add?

12 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Sure.

13 KIM HERNANDEZ: I believe the last
14 printing was May 2009.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: May 2009.
16 This book is very effective. It really helped a
17 lot of people but we could come back and talk
18 about this. I'm just trying to understand and let
19 my colleagues understand the outreach that DFTA
20 did. I have more questions, but we have a lot of
21 people that want to ask questions and then I'll
22 come back. I'd like to at this time turn it over
23 to my co-chair, Jessica Lappin.

24 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Thank you. So
25 in 2009 when SCRIE was moved from DFTA to DOF, I

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2 think the concept was it was supposed to be
3 simpler and easier and better managed. So that's
4 the real question I think we have today is did
5 that pan out. We had the hearing in September of
6 last year because there had been some screw-ups,
7 so I wanted to ask a couple of follow-up questions
8 since quite a few months have passed.

9 At that time, we discussed that all
10 of the July 2011 SCRIE tax bills that had gone out
11 were in error. There were errors with them, they
12 were not correct. So I guess my first question is
13 have they all now been corrected?

14 DAVID FRANKEL: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Great. When
16 you send out the next round you anticipate there
17 will be no problems?

18 DAVID FRANKEL: That's right.

19 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: At that
20 hearing, Commissioner Frankel, you testified that
21 the system that had caused the computer glitch was
22 inherited from DFTA. Your agency was in the
23 process of developing a better system. So can you
24 update the committee on your progress and what new
25 system you have developed?

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2 DAVID FRANKEL: As I said in my
3 initial testimony, we're currently working on a
4 rewrite of the SCRIE database which should be
5 finished by the end of the year.

6 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: End of the
7 fiscal year or end of the calendar year?

8 DAVID FRANKEL: End of the calendar
9 year.

10 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: So it will not
11 be in place by the time the next set of tax bills
12 go out? Is that correct or incorrect?

13 DAVID FRANKEL: That's correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: So what system
15 will you be using to send out the next round of
16 tax bills?

17 DAVID FRANKEL: Well the tax bills
18 get sent out from different finance systems but we
19 use the SCRIE information to feed into those
20 things. We'll be using the same system this year
21 that we used last year.

22 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: So I guess my
23 question is has the computer glitch been fixed?

24 DAVID FRANKEL: Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Okay. So what

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did you do to fix it? How has it been fixed?

DAVID FRANKEL: You know, I'm not a technical expert on this. The problem had been fixed very shortly after we discovered this through landlords calling us about the problem. Like any software system, you have bugs from time to time, and we fixed it.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: But not to your satisfaction if you're putting a new system in place by the end of the year.

DAVID FRANKEL: It's not just the system that's dealing with that. We think the system that we inherited and that's been around for decades is very, very old. It's written in languages that you just can't--like many systems quite frankly in the city and in Finance the whole system is due for an update. This is not just in response to that problem.

As I testified to, I mean one of the things we very much want to do is as soon as we get an application and get it into the system, we want to automatically send out a letter to the senior saying we've received your information. We don't currently have the ability to do that on

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2 automatically. This system will give us that
3 ability, as well as other things that we can do.

4 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Do you still
5 have--I reread your testimony and I didn't see it--
6 --but do you still have 13 people working on this?

7 DAVID FRANKEL: We have 17 people.

8 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: You have 17
9 people. And DFTA had 39 people, you testified,
10 Commissioner, correct?

11 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: So it's still
13 substantially less. Even if you did have to hire,
14 I think you said 14 people to deal with the volume
15 of calls--which I would dispute--it would still be
16 31 as opposed to 39. Is that correct?

17 DAVID FRANKEL: The right math.

18 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: I mean we all
19 lived and survived and worked in city government
20 before 311. Certainly DFTA and even HPD handled
21 SCRIE before 311. They didn't have massive call
22 centers and a whole SWAT team devoted to answering
23 the phone. So I guess I just don't really see
24 how--I guess I just don't agree with your
25 assessment in your testimony that that's what it

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2 would require, I mean to have a human who could
3 answer complicated questions and walk people
4 through the application process. So how did you
5 kind of come up with--I mean you're just assuming
6 that future experience would so vastly differ from
7 past experience?

8 DAVID FRANKEL: No, I'm assuming
9 that we receive 100,000 calls a year in the city
10 about this program. And to answer 100,000 phone
11 calls over a year, you need a certain number of
12 people to be able to handle that volume.

13 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: I mean I do
14 think you would need more people. I think you
15 should have more people who are working on this
16 within the agency. So I wouldn't say that I don't
17 think you should hire additional staff, because I
18 do. I just don't agree with you. And 311 may be
19 great for getting the alternate side of the street
20 parking schedule, but in terms of actual service
21 to New Yorkers, I don't think it works. So I
22 still think it'd be very important to have a human
23 that people can interact with who can answers
24 questions on a more timely basis.

25 DAVID FRANKEL: As I said in my

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2 testimony, on the vast majority of calls about
3 SCRIE, the 311 operators are perfectly capable of
4 handling the vast majority of questions that come
5 up.

6 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: I think we
7 would disagree. I'm going to turn it over to my
8 colleagues who I know have comments and questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you,
10 Council Member Jessica Lappin. Council Member
11 David Greenfield?

12 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you,
13 Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to recognize the
14 presence of a county leader, the Housing Chairman,
15 Assemblyman Vito Lopez, and thank him as well for
16 his leadership on this issue. I believe that his
17 hearing along with our hearing in a tag team
18 effort has led to significant reforms and I'm
19 grateful for that.

20 I want to thank both commissioners.
21 Commissioner Frankel, I especially want to thank
22 you. I know that you have been working hard to
23 try to rectify a lot of the issues that we've
24 highlighted since. I want to thank you for doing
25 something that is relatively rare in government,

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2 which is accepting parts of our bill. Usually
3 people come in here and just pooh-pooh the whole
4 thing. So I'm grateful for that.

5 I do want to just chat about a
6 couple of things. I want to start first with
7 DFTA, and I will keep it quick because I know we
8 have a lot of questions. So the main objection,
9 Commissioner, to returning the services to DFTA is
10 that you think that it's working well or that it's
11 working well enough? I mean, quite frankly, if I
12 was sitting in your seat--if we're being frank--
13 concerned about funding stream issues as well. So
14 could you just sort of elaborate on that just so
15 we know what the challenges are in case we do end
16 up moving in this direction, at least we can
17 address them in advance.

18 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: I mean,
19 clearly, when the function was given over, the
20 budget went. It became a PEG for me, so I had to
21 cut back immensely. I don't have space to house
22 the staff anymore. You know, there are sort of
23 problems with those things. But I mean that's not
24 the main thing. I think that this program has
25 been transferred several times from one place to

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2 the other and I think it's very confusing for
3 seniors in understanding where the program is
4 lodged and how to apply and what happens.

5 So my sense is that Finance has
6 really tried to make it work better. I think we
7 can work with them collaboratively and try to fix
8 whatever is still not working, if that's your
9 judgment. But I don't know that the best solution
10 is to transfer it back to DFTA.

11 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I also
12 recognize that Finance has definitely been trying
13 since we highlighted the issue. My question,
14 however, is wouldn't it actually make more sense
15 for seniors to believe that senior programs get
16 run out of DFTA rather than in Finance? And, B,
17 isn't it fair to say, and it's a trick question,
18 because I'm complimenting your agency, that your
19 agency has more experience dealing with seniors
20 who are a unique population and do have a unique
21 set of needs, and therefore you might be able to
22 do a better job? It's not to say that Finance
23 can't do an okay job, but Finance I think will
24 admit to us that they're not in the business of,
25 you know, hand holding senior needs, which is

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really what DFTA is created for?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: But there are other programs that are really important for seniors like the home care program that's in HRA, adult protective services which is also at HRA. So there are other programs that serve seniors that are not necessarily lodged at DFTA. We work closely with them and we've managed to make it work.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I agree on he make it work part. Would you agree that you have a unique skill set that other agencies likely don't have?

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: That is our only job, to work with seniors.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Great. I'll take that as a yes. So just let the record reflect that. We'll also reflect to the record that you get too many PEGs. I'm throwing that out there just because I know we're starting the Finance hearings next week.

Commissioner Frankel, I want to focus specifically also on this question about calls and customer service. I know that you guys

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2 have been making an increased effort. I will say
3 from the outset I agree with my colleagues,
4 especially Council Member Lappin, on this issue.
5 If 311 worked, I wouldn't have a job. I'm just
6 being very frank with you. Because most of my
7 constituent complaints, thousands of them are
8 people who call 311 first and try to resolve an
9 issue. They weren't able to get it resolved,
10 therefore they came to us.

11 I would also point out that when
12 you say in the testimony, and it's possible that
13 you just haven't had the opportunity to utilize
14 311 that much. But when you say in the testimony
15 that when they call and want to get information on
16 different issue that's a good way to do it. It's
17 not really what happens. When you call, they sort
18 of put you on hold for a while and then they
19 transfer you to the relevant agency or the
20 specialist and if you're lucky that specialist may
21 or may not know something about their supposed
22 specialty.

23 So it's possible that you just
24 don't have as much experience with the 311 system.
25 I'd like you to reconsider that. But my question

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2 specifically on the 100,000 calls a year, who
3 determines that these problems are solved? I mean
4 when you say that the success rate is some 80-odd
5 percent, I think it was 84 percent that are
6 resolved, who determines that? Is that the 311
7 rep that determines if the problems are solved?

8 DAVID FRANKEL: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Okay, well
10 that's a problem. Once again, perhaps not being
11 familiar with the 311 system, I think obviously
12 who get judged based on data are probably
13 incentivized to sort of check the box and say
14 problem is solved. After those problems are
15 supposedly solved, they come back to our offices.
16 Once again, it's just information sharing. I just
17 want to make you aware of that. So it's possible
18 that you're just not aware of that particular
19 perspective. Do you know how many of these
20 100,000 callers are repeat callers?

21 DAVID FRANKEL: I don't.

22 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Another
23 thing worth inquiring to. I think it's possible
24 that something that you'll find is that a lot of
25 these frustrated people call again and again.

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2 I also will point out something
3 that Chairman Lopez brought to our attention which
4 is that we have significant language issues with
5 311. People call from all sorts of different
6 languages and we've had people from some basic
7 languages like Russian and Chinese and they're
8 told us they waited a half hour plus just to get
9 someone on the phone. And even then they say, oh
10 well, we'll call you back. I see people in the
11 crowd are nodding. Then they haven't been able to
12 resolve your complaint. So that's something that
13 also frustrates us with 311.

14 So I would like you to consider the
15 possibility, and also, I imagine that in all
16 fairness, I'm not a fiscal expert, but I'm curious
17 about what you think about this. If we route the
18 calls to Finance instead of 311, I imagine that if
19 311 has less calls they don't need as much
20 staffing, right? So it's not a net expenditure of
21 a million dollars a year. Is that fair?

22 DAVID FRANKEL: Could there be some
23 reduction of 311 staff? Perhaps, but the
24 economics don't quite work on a one-on-one basis
25 at all. I should say while I appreciate your

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2 comments about 311, I have used 311. Are there
3 issues with any system like that? Yes, I'm sure
4 there are. I think on the whole 311 has done a
5 huge service for the city.

6 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I agree.
7 I'm not trying to impugn the reputation of 311,
8 but I think as Council Member Lappin pointed out,
9 I think the services of 311 are sort of limited to
10 sort of basic services. You want the pothole
11 fixed or you want some information on alternate
12 side parking. But I can tell you, honestly in our
13 experience, when it gets complicated, when the
14 issues are complicated, they're not successful in
15 resolving it.

16 I just do want to reiterate as well
17 the language concerns which concern me as well
18 because I think that's obviously a very
19 significant issue. If it's possible to find out,
20 and I think if you did the research, you might
21 find that a very large percentage of those 100,000
22 callers are repeat callers.

23 By the way, this is simply placing
24 our confidence in what we think the ability of
25 either one of your agencies would be doing this is

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2 that we think you would do it better than 311
3 would do it. So we're not saying that 311 is
4 terrible, it's just that we think you guys would
5 do a better job if you did it in-house. Is that a
6 fair possibility that if you dedicated staff you
7 probably could do a better job than 311 did?

8 DAVID FRANKEL: Always a
9 possibility.

10 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Okay. I
11 will leave it at that and I will give my
12 colleagues an opportunity to ask questions. I
13 thank you both for your testimony today.

14 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you,
15 Council Member David Greenfield. We're going to
16 have Council Member Karen Koslowitz, followed by
17 Council Member Gale Brewer. I'm going to put
18 everybody on a five-minute clock. Could we have
19 five minutes on the clock please?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Thank
21 you. You know, I'm like a ghost from the past.
22 And I don't like to say this because I usually
23 don't, but I was here before. I was here in 1991
24 to 2001. And SCRIE worked beautifully, it really
25 did. You can call DFTA and get answers

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2 immediately. You had a person that you can speak
3 with. Now, it became a bureaucratic system since
4 it's gone over to Finance. I get so many calls in
5 my office of seniors, some of them crying out of
6 frustration because they don't get the answers or
7 the help that they need.

8 You know, when you say you had 39
9 people working in DFTA for SCRIE and now we only
10 have 17 people working, for 47,000 seniors in our
11 city, it is really outrageous if you divide that
12 number. When you say you don't want to disrupt
13 moving it back and forth, well you already
14 disrupted it when you moved it from DFTA to
15 Finance.

16 We were in this hole for a while.
17 I mean we're in 2012 now. What are the answers?
18 Why did all this happen? Again, I'm going to say
19 this because I want to say this quickly. 311, you
20 could be on 20 minutes with someone on 311 and
21 they don't even know where you're calling from or
22 what the subject is or anything else. I called
23 311 just to test it out, because I like to see.
24 When my constituents call me, I like to see what
25 they're talking about.

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2 I remember being on the phone in
3 Bayside with the hanging sign being windy and I
4 live in Forest Hills and by the time I got home I
5 still didn't have the answer, 20 minutes later.
6 Then I got frustrated and hung up, and the person
7 didn't even know where I'm calling from. I
8 believe that some of the people that are 311 are
9 outsourced and they don't even live in New York
10 City.

11 Can you answer the question of why
12 do you think this is better now?

13 DAVID FRANKEL: Well, as I've
14 testified time and time again, when we took over
15 the program in 2009, we did it without a
16 sufficient plan in place and we encountered
17 enormous numbers of problems. Since that time,
18 we've made significant improvements to the
19 program. There are things that we do that have
20 never done before, such as these reports that are
21 online for landlords and tenants. We check
22 application eligibility in a way that's never been
23 done before.

24 We are working closely with DFTA.
25 We recognize and I will certainly, even though my

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2 colleague was careful in not saying it, I will
3 recognize that DFTA obviously has a great deal
4 more experience with seniors than we do, which is
5 why we work closely with them to benefit from
6 their experience. We think putting those two
7 skill sets together has already improved the
8 program and will continue to improve the program
9 as we move along.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: You
11 know, seniors, they're aging and they don't have
12 that much time, you know, left to improve the
13 system. I mean we're already in the eighth year
14 of the administration and how many--ten, I'm
15 sorry, ten years--eleven years of the
16 administration.

17 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: 685 days
18 left.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: And we
20 have less than two years to go. What's going to
21 happen? And then we're going to have a turnover
22 and it's going to change again and we're going to
23 have more problems? Eleven years is a very long
24 time. Our seniors are out there, including
25 myself, we're aging. Every day we get a little

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older.

[Laughter]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Is there a question?

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: No, I just want to know how you explain this. How can we just sit here and say that things are improving? Eleven years later they're still improving.

DAVID FRANKEL: Well I hope that's the case for the next 11 years as well. As I've said, I think there have been significant improvements to the program. Are we where we want to be? No. Will we ever be where we want to be? Probably not.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: But we were where we wanted to be when it was with DFTA. I got much fewer complaints when it was with DFTA than I get now, even now, even with the improvements. And I hate to say this; I still get many calls with people who are very frustrated. There are some people that just give up. We get calls from the children. I mean this is unacceptable. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you,
3 Council Member Karen Koslowitz. Council Member
4 Gale Brewer?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: First of
6 all, I do want to thank Finance between Lori
7 Kirkpatrick [phonetic], Sara Meyers, Alvin Wong
8 and Deborah Feinberg do a great job. So it's not
9 that your staff isn't fabulous because they are,
10 and I want to make that very clear, and they're
11 very helpful.

12 I do think for this unit it needs a
13 different focus if it's going to stay at Finance.
14 The first issue is of the 17, how many are full
15 time equivalents or part time? What's the
16 breakdown in terms of the 17?

17 DAVID FRANKEL: They're all
18 fulltime staff.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're all
20 fulltime. Do you have part time staff also there?

21 DAVID FRANKEL: No.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.
23 Number two is if I applied in, say, December of
24 last year, when will I hear about my resolution on
25 my application? Where are you kind of in that,

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how long does it take?

DAVID FRANKEL: If it's just a renewal application, then it's about 20 to 25 days. If it's a new application, it's going to be somewhere right now between 40 and 50 days. We've slipped in our processing a bit for original applications because, first of all, every other year we get all of the rent controlled apartment applications. As a matter of fact, if you look at the application numbers, you really have to look over two-year periods because they're different. You can't compare one year to the next year. We're in the middle of some of that right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right.

DAVID FRANKEL: But we are working hard to get that number right back down to where it was.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. What was it at DFTA, do we know, for renewals and new?

KIM HERNANDEZ: For initial applications, which had to go through the most--it had to be critiqued, you know to make sure that everything, that we had all of the information from the seniors. It really varied. Initial

1
2 could be somewhere from--it really varied, but it
3 could be somewhere from like 40 days to 45 days.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

5 KIM HERNANDEZ: For a
6 recertification, because with the recertification
7 you really have everything in place, sometimes you
8 need more income information and you need the new
9 lease, so that varied. That could be about 25
10 days.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The
12 reason I say that, even though it sounds like the
13 numbers are the same, it's the conversation in
14 between. I mean I have here like three or four
15 constituents. The lady is \$499 over, but she
16 doesn't understand that there are certain things
17 that may or may not be eligible. So she got a
18 letter back, she didn't understand it. Something
19 about federal income, state income, city income,
20 social security, Medicare, tax withheld. She
21 walked right into our office and I'm sure she does
22 that for others. She needs to have a very long
23 conversation with somebody in government. That's
24 the problem. It's not like your normal
25 constituency.

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2 So the 311 operator and her are not
3 going to get along. So even if she is referred,
4 she then needs to get a call back that day,
5 because seniors, they just don't wait. It's a
6 different situation. They get so nervous. Your
7 postcard going out will help, saying that we are--
8 but I'm just wondering, would it be possible, five
9 days a week, eight hours a day, to have the office
10 and a better 311 communication, because if you
11 called 311, that conversation doesn't work. I
12 just want to know if you have any thought process
13 about this conversation problem because this is
14 the root of your problem, in my opinion.

15 DAVID FRANKEL: Well, I agree that
16 for a certain number of seniors that's a problem.
17 I am very sympathetic with that. As I said, we
18 are considering keeping our centers open both in
19 Manhattan longer and perhaps expanding it to all
20 the boroughs as well.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're
22 going to get confused on the times. Am I supposed
23 to go Monday morning, Gale, or am I supposed to go
24 Thursday afternoon? They need to know that they
25 can go anytime, because they get up in the

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2 morning, they're going to go. This morning I
3 walked into my district office, they were waiting
4 with the shopping carts outside because the
5 elevator was broken nearby. That's how they
6 operate. They don't call, they show up. That's
7 how they are.

8 DAVID FRANKEL: I hear you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So is there
10 any consideration of more times to be available
11 and maybe not a dedicated but some different way
12 of doing the phone operation? Is there some other
13 discussion going on about that?

14 DAVID FRANKEL: There is not now,
15 but we'll, obviously as a result of this hearing,
16 we'll discuss it some more.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The
18 other question I have is can you explain the
19 outreach program? Is it constant with social
20 workers in senior centers? Elected officials, do
21 they have the opportunity to have this is what a
22 SCRIE operation looks like so that people can come
23 answer their questions. What is the social worker
24 in the senior centers and the outreach, how is it
25 done?

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2 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: What we
3 have tried to do for the last, at least three
4 years, since I've been there, but I think it was
5 done before as well, is when a senior comes in
6 during intake we try to ascertain what benefits
7 they already have and what benefits they're
8 eligible for. So we go through the process of
9 finding out what the issues are. Periodically, we
10 try to talk to them to see if anything changed in
11 their life and can other benefits be added or not.
12 So we do that routinely in senior centers. You
13 know, the caseworkers do that, the same thing in
14 case management, with all the new intakes. So
15 that's a pretty regular process that we do because
16 we want to make sure.

17 You know, 90 percent of the seniors
18 that come to senior centers and many, many people
19 who receive case management and home delivered
20 meals are poor. So the more you can enhance their
21 income the better quality of life potentially they
22 can have. You know, we can make sure that they're
23 taking their medicines, that they're eating
24 nutritious food and so on. So for us, benefits is
25 a really integral part of what we do with seniors.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: My time is
3 up but later on maybe we could ask about
4 databases. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
6 very much, Council Member Gale Brewer. Council
7 Member Oliver Koppell, to be followed by Council
8 Member Steve Levin.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Thank you,
10 Chair. Commissioner Frankel, I know that this is
11 primarily focused on SCRIE, but the committee I
12 chair has responsibility for disability services
13 and you didn't say anything about DRIE. One
14 question: that was never handled by DFTA. Did
15 Finance always handle that?

16 DAVID FRANKEL: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Are you
18 doing any outreach efforts with respect to DRIE
19 like you say you're doing with respect to SCRIE?
20 In terms of finding out whether people are
21 renewing, you said you're reaching out, in your
22 statement, to contact people.

23 DAVID FRANKEL: Well certainly when
24 people send in their renewal applications, we go
25 through the same similar kinds of processes.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: But you're
3 not doing any outreach? You mentioned in your
4 statement that you specifically are going after
5 people who don't renew to find out whether they're
6 eligible to renew.

7 DAVID FRANKEL: No. What is said
8 was that when people renew, if they haven't sent
9 us the required--this is with respect to SCRIE--if
10 they haven't sent us the required information, we
11 are calling them directly after a certain period
12 of time to make sure they understand what they
13 need.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Are you
15 doing that with respect to DRIE? What you say
16 here, I'll read from your statement. SCRIE team
17 began contacting renewal applicants directly if
18 they failed to respond to three letters requesting
19 missing information.

20 DAVID FRANKEL: When we do SCRIE
21 outreach, we do DRIE outreach at the same time.
22 This is the Department of Finance. So I don't
23 know if that answers your question or not.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Well, you
25 mention in your statement specifically that you

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2 started a new outreach program in September or in
3 the fall, I'm sorry, of 2011. Does that outreach
4 program include DRIE registrants?

5 DAVID FRANKEL: What you're
6 referring to is us calling people that haven't--I
7 think what I said in the statement was we were
8 calling people who hadn't submitted the required
9 information.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Right.

11 DAVID FRANKEL: I don't know
12 whether we do that specifically for DRIE. But we
13 don't have those basic problems. We have many
14 fewer problems with respect to the administration
15 of the DRIE program than we do with DRIE.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Is there a
17 particular reason for that?

18 DAVID FRANKEL: Well, first of all,
19 it's a much smaller population. I think we have
20 4,000 or 5,000 DRIE recipients as opposed to I
21 think the 36,000 or so DRIE recipients. And in
22 many cases, we are not dealing with the same
23 issues from a senior population that we are with a
24 disabled population who many times are more
25 capable apparently of doing what they need to do.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Do you
3 have any people who are specifically knowledgeable
4 about the DRIE program so that they can, you know,
5 they're the ones who can be contacted where issues
6 arise.

7 DAVID FRANKEL: We certainly have
8 people who are knowledgeable about the DRIE
9 program, yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: So I mean
11 could you identify specific staff people who have
12 that expertise?

13 DAVID FRANKEL: Well, once again,
14 just like with respect to SCRIE, the calls that
15 the city takes with respect to both of these
16 programs go through 311. If the 311 operators
17 cannot handle them, they are referred to my shop
18 where experienced people will get back with
19 answers.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: I don't
21 want to take the time of asking you specific
22 detailed questions about this but I think it's
23 important for us to know. So I'd like to get from
24 you or from your staff a report on the number of
25 people who are enrolled in the DRIE program, you

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know the statistics on reenrollments and such so that we can review that.

DAVID FRANKEL: We're happy to provide that.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: So I would appreciate that being provided within a reasonable time. I also might say that it's shocking to me that the brochure that the Department for the Aging prepared with all the details that the chairman showed is not being reprinted anymore and not being available either to individuals who may be concerned or organizations. I can't believe that there isn't a program. That a brochure like this existed and that is allowed to go out of print and not kept up to date.

I would strongly urge, Mr. Chairman that we insist on behalf of the public that this be edited so it's up to date and reprinted by the department. If they won't do it by agreement, I don't know what my position is on putting the program back into the Department for the Aging, but I do know that it's certainly my intention to insist that a brochure like be available. That maybe should be part of the legislation that

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you're considering or a separate bill.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It is part of the legislation.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Good.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We've never really been answered. Why was this discontinued? Why did we stop printing this?

[Pause]

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: I'm sorry. The brochure was created for SCRIE when it was part of DFTA. When the program was transferred, essentially you know the need was not seen as continuing because we assumed that the Department of Finance would take over and develop their own materials. If it's seen as something that should happen, I have no problem updating and reprinting. We would do whatever helps everyone.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: This is in the bill. I want Oliver Koppell to know. It is in the bill. It's very, very effective. Council Member Oliver Koppell, are you finished or you want to have more questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: No, I'm finished.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Thank
3 you very much. Council Member Steve Levin, but
4 before Council Member Steve Levin goes, I want to
5 recognize we've been joined by Council Member
6 Melissa Mark-Viverito and Leroy Comrie. Council
7 Member?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you
9 Mr. Chairman.

10 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: If any
11 Council Member would like to ask questions, please
12 submit your name to Tanisha Edwards.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: So my
14 concern just at the outset in looking at this from
15 my perspective is that it's not that DFTA is
16 entirely uniquely qualified. My question really
17 is, the way I'm looking at it, the Department of
18 Finance just does not have--it's a question of the
19 mission of the agency. The Department for the
20 Aging mission is to serve senior citizens. HRA's
21 mission is to serve individuals that are in need
22 of benefits. The Department of Finance does not
23 have a human resources, it's got an entirely
24 different approach to things and it really that's
25 part of its mission. It's not built in that

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2 there's really supposed to be necessarily a
3 customer service aspect.

4 So my question, and this is kind of
5 a rhetorical question and you don't need to answer
6 it, it's kind of like why does the Department of
7 Finance really even want to administer the
8 program? I understand that the idea is kind of
9 theoretically you want to have efficiency but the
10 efficiency is not really there. So why even want
11 to take on all of these issues that you're not
12 suited to address?

13 So in your testimony, Commissioner
14 Frankel, you spoke numerous times about how in
15 recent months DFTA staff has been helping DOF with
16 the outreach, with sensitivity training, right.
17 But I'm actually curious how much--so we've
18 increased the number maybe of DOF staff. How many
19 DFTA staff members have been helping out in recent
20 months with the outreach stuff?

21 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: We can
22 answer that separately. The outreach that we do
23 for SCRIE is the outreach we do for all kinds of
24 benefits and entitlements. We continuously do so
25 because we want to enhance seniors, you know,

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2 income and ability to have disposal cash. So we
3 do that routinely in all of our programs. So that
4 would be independent of any specific other
5 outreach that everyone may decide we need to make.

6 We have been working with the
7 Department of Finance in trying to problem solve
8 whatever issues may emerge around seniors and
9 SCRIE. It is difficult for seniors to gather the
10 paperwork, sometimes to understand what they need
11 to begin with. So we've been working with them
12 and trying to help them ascertain whatever it is
13 that they need to do.

14 But I think that the ongoing
15 outreach, we will always continue to do that
16 regardless because that's part of what we need to
17 do for seniors.

18 DAVID FRANKEL: Councilman, let me
19 also say that while I respect your view of
20 Finance, we actually think our mission is quite
21 broader than what you laid out. We actually do
22 think we have an enormous customer service
23 responsibility. While I certainly will agree that
24 we are not an agency that is specific to seniors
25 or to the disabled or other people, we are not

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2 content with simply sitting back and saying we're
3 just collecting money or giving you money. That's
4 not what we believe in at the agency.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Sure.

6 DAVID FRANKEL: We believe deeply
7 that we should serve this population, whether it's
8 seniors, disabled or any other, as well as we
9 possibly can. That's why we try to partner with
10 agencies who do have greater experience than we do
11 in some of this. But, you know, the vast majority
12 of this and the vast majority of people get these
13 benefits pretty efficiently.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I appreciate
15 that. With all due respect, because I have a
16 couple more questions, it's just there's not the
17 core mission and there's not the expertise.
18 That's what I'm speaking to.

19 I wanted to ask a follow-up
20 question to a question that I asked at September's
21 hearing about those with disabilities. For an
22 individual senior that's looking to either renew
23 or get a new SCRIE application or renew their
24 application and they're hard of hearing. They
25 can't do the 311. They can't get on a telephone,

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2 they really can't. What options are available to
3 those folks? Are the only options to go down,
4 because say they live in City Island? City Island
5 is like a two hour train ride from downtown
6 Manhattan. What do they do?

7 DAVID FRANKEL: My suspicion is
8 that the first thing that most people in those
9 situations do is they have neighbors and friends
10 and families who help them out. That's the way
11 the vast majority of people are helped. If they
12 don't have that and they have to come down, then
13 they would have to come down. Is there anything
14 else I'm missing?

15 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Well they
16 can go to the senior center in City Island and get
17 help and the application.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Right. That
19 kind of goes back to why DFTA would be--I mean
20 there's a satellite thing. For one thing, the
21 Manhattan Business Center, I think it's
22 inappropriate to have one single business center
23 with these hours that Gale spoke of.

24 Sorry, just one last question, Mr.
25 Chairman.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Take your
3 time.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I'm
5 disturbed a little bit by the testimony about
6 calls for renewal applications that this year
7 staff has tried to call 1,200 people. Of those 20
8 percent sent back satisfactory information, 16
9 percent were eventually approved. Four percent
10 did not qualify for renewal. That at most is 40
11 percent. Of those 1,200 there's 60 percent that
12 are unaccounted for. I know that you're trying to
13 reach out to them. How is this comparing to the
14 past? I don't understand, is this normal? Is
15 that a normal number that 60 percent are not able
16 to be reached? Are these working numbers? What's
17 going on here and what happens if we don't get a
18 hold of them in the next few months? Does their
19 renewal lapse? What's going on here?

20 SARA MEYERS: Hi, I'm Sara Meyers.
21 I oversee SCRIE. This was a program that we
22 started and we started it for a population that
23 had really outstanding renewal applications. So
24 the data now I think really reflects our older
25 applicants that a lot of which probably are no

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2 longer reachable. Because now we're calling--

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

4 [interposing] No longer reachable why?

5 SARA MEYERS: I can't answer that.

6 DFTA closed applications out in a different way
7 and we're going to be following the DFTA model.
8 So we had applications and we spoke about this in
9 previous hearings. But we had applications that
10 were pending, meaning an applicant submitted an
11 application and we were missing information from
12 them and it was never resolved. We have a lot of
13 those applications going back to 2010.

14 So we made a commitment to start
15 calling people but a lot of these people are now
16 unreachable. Their numbers are out of service. A
17 lot of numbers we've tried are out of service.
18 We've tried to do additional lookups for their
19 numbers. They're probably no longer eligible for
20 the program. But now we're calling everyone
21 timely every month, so we're hopeful the numbers
22 are going to improve.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Just to
24 close out here. I support the legislation moving
25 it back to the Department of the Aging, based on

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2 the fact that, again, it's the core mission of the
3 agency and that they have the expertise and they
4 have the set of skills that DOF really does not
5 have. So I think going back to a model in the
6 city of less automation, sometimes a more human
7 face on things I think is the direction that we
8 ought to be going in. So with all due respect, I
9 think that this is a wise move. Sometimes when
10 things aren't working, the prudent thing to do is
11 say stop digging. So that's my two cents. Thank
12 you, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
14 very much. Council Member Chin?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN:
16 Commissioners, I'm a co-sponsor of the bill. I
17 think it's really important for DFTA to really
18 take the lead. Commissioner Lilliam, I hate to
19 disagree with you and I don't think you're telling
20 us the truth. Because it is a benefit to seniors
21 to apply for the SCRIE and I think for the Finance
22 Department, yes, your customer responsibility, I
23 think is to the landlord to make sure they get
24 their tax benefit. So let the agency do what they
25 do best, right. You can still do all the tax

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2 forms that you send out and make sure people pay
3 their tax, make sure people get their tax benefit,
4 but DFTA has to be the agency to help the senior
5 apply for this benefit and make sure they don't
6 lose this benefit.

7 I have a constituent in my office
8 that she lived with her brother. Her brother
9 passed away and she lost her SCRIE benefit. But
10 what happened was it was the transitional time and
11 she got a note from her landlord that she owes a
12 lot of rent. She didn't know she lost the
13 benefit. She doesn't speak English, she speaks
14 Spanish. But later on, she was able to get a
15 community agency to advocate for her. They called
16 311. So they say you've got to send the
17 information, why don't you send a letter
18 explaining what's going on to the Department of
19 Finance.

20 They sent to the Department of
21 Finance but it turned out it was not the right
22 address. At no time did anybody say go to an
23 office and bring all your documentation. This has
24 been going on since September 2010. To this day,
25 I mean the agency came to my office in November

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2 2011, and this is March 2nd and the case is still
3 not resolved.

4 So there are all these difficult
5 type of case that someone needs to go to an office
6 like DFTA before. Back then, everyone know that 2
7 Lafayette Street 64 is where you go for SCRIE. It
8 doesn't matter if they don't speak English, they
9 knew that was the office, they can go and they can
10 get help. If it's a difficult problem, they could
11 bring their documents, not send it in the mail and
12 get lost. And even we send it in the email
13 attached, we get a response a couple weeks back
14 and say missing, you know we need the lease. We
15 attached it.

16 So that is not the way to go. We
17 need DFTA to take it back on the part in terms of
18 the outreach, helping people apply, helping people
19 with difficult problem. And when applications are
20 complete, send it over to Finance. Finance, your
21 data, whatever, you make sure the landlords get
22 their tax credit. That's your job, right.

23 So on this thing senior citizen
24 rent increase exemption is a benefit to senior.
25 That's why Department of Aging, you have to take

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2 the lead back. That's why we are supporting this
3 legislation. We got to solve this problem. It
4 cannot happen like this. So that's what I'm
5 asking.

6 Commissioner, we want to support
7 you. We know your agency can do it and you need
8 to get the resource back to do it. I'm not taking
9 anything away from Finance. Finance, you do what
10 you do best. That somehow the agency has to work
11 together, but somebody needs to be the lead agency
12 on this issue and it's got to be DFTA. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Would
14 you like to comment? Okay, I guess not. Council
15 Member Cabrera?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you
17 so much. It seems that you have a perception
18 problem and I'll explain in a second what I mean
19 by that, and also a practical problem. The
20 perception problem is like trying to go to
21 McDonald's, right, and I want to get a Big Mac,
22 and yet I have to go someplace else to get a Happy
23 Meal. That's how it's being perceived here, at
24 least by my seniors.

25 I want to go back to the question,

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2 Commissioner, of you talked about you're doing it
3 better now. Why whatever you're doing better now,
4 which I want to get to in a second, why couldn't
5 it be done or why couldn't Finance assist DFTA to
6 do it?

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8 DAVID FRANKEL: Well, as I think we
9 said, we're assisting one another right now. So
10 that's what we're doing.

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12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But you're
13 handling the cases now, correct?

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15 DAVID FRANKEL: Right. We handle
16 the cases, along with the other tens or hundreds
17 of thousands of exemption programs, exemptions
18 that we do and 40 or 50 programs. DFTA, as I've
19 said, is enormously helpful to us in this one in
20 helping train us and deal with some of the issues
21 that come up.

22

23 There are, you know the vast
24 majority of applications, both new and renewal are
25 handled without significant problems. There are,
admittedly, some that are very problematic. As I
said, we're learning every day and I said I think
we're handling most of these pretty well right
now, although there's clearly a perception and a

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2 group of people who we probably could do a much
3 better job with, and that's what we're endeavoring
4 to do.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you,
6 Commissioner. But is it possible to do at the
7 level of effectiveness that you're doing it in
8 Finance at DFTA?

9 DAVID FRANKEL: I mean I assume
10 many agencies could do things like this. I would
11 never say no. We don't have a monopoly on good
12 service. I think from an overall city's
13 perspective the program is where it belongs and
14 should stay there.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: The vast
16 majority of Council Members obviously take
17 objection to that view. Isn't it easier for a
18 senior, let's suppose I have to go to DFTA for
19 something. Listen, I'm a senior, right, I'm 70-
20 years-old, I need to go to DFTA for something
21 else. Why would I have to go now all of the
22 sudden to another building? Why can't it be all
23 in one center?

24 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Let me just
25 say, you know the only service that had a walk-in

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center was SCRIE at the time.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Right.

LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Most seniors get whatever they get from DFTA at the senior centers. There's 258 of them. It's much easier for them. They're close in the neighborhood, as you know.

So I think at the time when the decision was made of transferring SCRIE to the Department of Finance, DFTA is not an eligibility agency. We are very good at social services. We're not a very highly computerized agency. We're not very good at determining benefits, you know as HRA does for welfare or Medicaid or the Department of Finance does about taxes. So the thinking was that if it went to an agency that knew how to determine benefits and did that as a customary thing, things would be happening in a much more expedited way, in a simpler way.

When we had the SCRIE benefit, there was always complaints about our requiring a lot of proof of different things and there was too much paperwork. So I think the thinking was that it would become easier for the senior to do this

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2 in a more automated way. There were other things
3 that were not--you know, clearly the idea that
4 seniors would need much more hand holding, that
5 they needed that social services piece was not
6 figured out right. I think that that's what we
7 need to add now. But I think the idea that more
8 automation was simpler and it would take a shorter
9 period of time was what governed this whole thing.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: All right,
11 Commissioner, as you know, we had various centers
12 that were closed down the last couple of years.
13 The vast majority of seniors do not go to senior
14 centers. So that wouldn't be applicable to all of
15 them. And because I only have about 30 seconds
16 here, let me just ask regarding the business
17 centers. How many bilingual people do we have and
18 what languages are spoken?

19 DAVID FRANKEL: I don't know the
20 specific answer, but I'm happy to get you that
21 information.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay,
23 great. All right, thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you,
25 Council Member. Before we call on the next

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Council Member, those outreach centers, how many outreach centers do you have?

DAVID FRANKEL: How many business centers do we have?

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yeah, business centers.

DAVID FRANKEL: We have a center in every borough, except right now the one in Brooklyn is not open because, as you know, the space that we're in was recently leased out to private enterprise. So that will be back up hopefully by the end of the year or sometime in next year. But we have a business center in every borough.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: And what's the hours for those business centers?

DAVID FRANKEL: Generally from 8 or so to 5.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: What?

DAVID FRANKEL: From about 8 to 5. Is that about right? About that.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: About 8 to 5.

DAVID FRANKEL: About 8:30 to 5.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. During

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2 from 8:30 to 5, can anybody walk in there with a
3 SCRIE problem or just certain times?

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5 DAVID FRANKEL: No, first of all,
6 we only have SCRIE service right now in Manhattan
7 where we've only trained people. As I've said, we
8 have the Manhattan open three different days, one
9 full day and two different half days. As I also
10 said in my testimony, we are considering whether
11 we can expand that service both in Manhattan and
12 to other boroughs. And as I recall, when DFTA had
13 this program, I think 2 Lafayette was the one
14 place you could go for SCRIE.

15

16 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Right. And
17 in addition to that, I just want to follow up on
18 Council Member Cabrera. You know, the Bronx has a
19 very large Latina community and I just want to--I
20 know, so does Brooklyn, Diana. I'm just following
21 up. Do we know how many people speak--

22

23 DAVID FRANKEL: [interposing] I
24 don't, but I said I would get that information.
25 You know, we recognize in everything we do, given
the diversity of the city's population that we
have language challenges and we endeavor to meet
them as best we possibly can.

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: All right.
I'm going to call on Council Member Koo and then
Council Member Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you.
Commissioner, my question is the SCRIE and DRIE
programs, how much is these programs, how much
exemptions totally cost the city?

DAVID FRANKEL: The SCRIE program,
including the piece that HPD still has is about
\$125 million. And the DRIE program, do you have a
number on that? I'm not sure exactly how much.
It's significantly smaller than that.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Smaller.

DAVID FRANKEL: Significantly
smaller.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So for a new
applicant, once they submit and application, how
long does the application get approved?

DAVID FRANKEL: As I said, a new
applicant right now, we are getting back to them
within 40 or 50 days. And hopefully, you know,
they've had the right information. If they don't,
by the way, by the time they do get approved, even
if it's later than that, the approval is

1 retroactive to when they've submitted the
2 application. So they don't lose any benefits.
3 But I agree, in particular for seniors, you know
4 as these days go on, it's a challenge and--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [interposing]
6 So it takes about two months to get it approved.
7 Once they submit an application, do they get a
8 tracking number that you received the application?
9

10 DAVID FRANKEL: I think what I
11 testified to earlier is that they don't right now
12 but we are building a database which will allow us
13 to do that in an automated fashion. If they call
14 311 after they've submitted their application, we
15 won't wait for 50 days to tell you we've received
16 that, you can get that information within a couple
17 of weeks and you'll know that we've received your
18 application?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So when are
20 you building your new system that gives them a
21 tracking number?

22 DAVID FRANKEL: We hope that it's
23 in place by the end of this calendar year.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So if they
25 send in the application, they don't get anything

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in the mail that we've received your application?

DAVID FRANKEL: No, not right now.

And we agree that that's a problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Maybe you should do that, send them a postcard with a number. It's very easy. A tracking number that if after 60 days, you don't hear from us, call us, you know.

DAVID FRANKEL: I hear the suggestion.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay, thank you.

DAVID FRANKEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: All right, before Council Member Mealy, Council Member Greenfield has a quick question.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Just two quick points of clarification. You said that the Brooklyn center is closed but won't open until the end of the year?

DAVID FRANKEL: I hope by then. I'm not sure it will even be open by then.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I mean those of us in Brooklyn with the largest borough,

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2 we're very sensitive to these things. So what's
3 the hold back or the problem?

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DAVID FRANKEL: With any
5 construction job in New York City that's the
6 issue.

7

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I mean in
8 the interim, I'm willing to give you a desk in my
9 office. I'm being very serious about this. So at
10 least you could keep some of the services. Free,
11 no charge. I think potentially you should
12 consider looking at some other opportunities at
13 least so that the folks in Brooklyn can get some
14 services in the interim.

15

One other quick question, you
16 mentioned before there were some numbers and I'm
17 just trying to get some clarifications. I think
18 you said that you deal with 36,000 SCRIE cases a
19 year?

20

DAVID FRANKEL: There are
21 currently, in our world, 36,000 active SCRIE
22 cases. Is that right? About that, yes.

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CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I think we
24 heard in September I think the number was around
25 40,000, so did that change? Has it gone down?

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I'm just trying to sort of understand that.

DAVID FRANKEL: Well, it's gone down in part because one of the things that I also testified to in September is that we had begun to check whether we were giving benefits to people who were ineligible. As you may recall, the Comptroller issued an audit saying that we were giving benefits to people who had passed away. And we've been checking the master death lists that come out and there are several thousand who we discovered were getting benefits inappropriately. So that's part of the reason for the decrease.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD:
Traditionally, over the past few years have the numbers been going up or down? I only ask because--

DAVID FRANKEL: [interposing]
They've been very similar, very similar.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Does that concern you? I mean I'm concerned because as someone who spends a lot of time focusing on seniors and senior centers, the one thing that I can tell you and I'm sure the commissioner of DFTA

1
2 can tell you is that we have a lot more seniors
3 and a lot more of them are very poor. So, logic
4 would seem to argue that if we have a lot more
5 poor seniors, there would probably be an increase
6 in the need for SCRIE not a decrease. So is that
7 something that you're worried about or you've done
8 some sort of analysis on sort of why it is that
9 we're seeing this downward trend as opposed to an
10 upward trend?

11 DAVID FRANKEL: We have tried to do
12 a very rough analysis to just figure out what the
13 eligible population could be and honestly we
14 haven't been able to do anything, certainly to my
15 satisfaction, that's at all relevant. It
16 certainly concerns us all the time if people who
17 are eligible are not receiving a benefit that
18 could significantly help them.

19 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I would
20 encourage you to spend some time looking at that
21 because I think that's a serious concern. I mean
22 with the numbers that we're seeing, these numbers
23 should be going up not down. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Council
25 Member Darlene Mealy?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, I want
3 to say good morning and thank everyone. I have a
4 statement and one question. I want to concur with
5 my colleague Ms. Chin. That is true; you need to
6 go back to DFTA. Just for the record, I want to
7 just say happy birthday also to our Assemblyman
8 Alec Brook-Krasny. It's his birthday today.

9 I just wanted to say, my question
10 is I was appalled last time I heard your testimony
11 when a computer glitch went down and thousands of
12 seniors, they were calling saying that they were
13 losing their apartments. Their landlord was
14 taking them out. Were there any follow-up with
15 that, because a lot of people had stress problems,
16 our seniors. Some have died since then. Have you
17 ever did a follow-up on the ones who the landlord
18 said if they didn't get paid they were kicking
19 their tenants out.

20 DAVID FRANKEL: The landlords, when
21 we discovered this problem, the landlords within
22 weeks or months knew that they got--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY:
24 [interposing] Not every one of them.

25 DAVID FRANKEL: The landlords did

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2 know that. We solved this problem very quickly.
3 And while it may not have appeared on their bills
4 until the next January, the landlords knew within
5 a very short time that this was our problem that
6 we had fixed.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes, but
8 some of my constituents, the landlord already had
9 evicted them. And when we found out, it was too
10 late. So I'm telling did you do any follow-up in
11 regards to that because that was your problem was
12 it not? You just stated. Did you do any follow-
13 up for those seniors?

14 DAVID FRANKEL: I did not do any
15 follow-up on people who might have been evicted as
16 a result of that. No, I did not.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Why?

18 DAVID FRANKEL: As I said, we
19 solved the problem very quickly. Any of those
20 cases--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY:
22 [interposing] The last hearing you said that you
23 all would try to locate those individuals who were
24 still having problems. Did you do that?

25 DAVID FRANKEL: I don't know

1
2 entirely how to answer that question. But
3 generally, people who are having problems, they
4 find us pretty quickly, so--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY:

6 [interposing] Not ever senior know how to use the
7 phone or know how to bring all their paperwork. A
8 lot of them did not know what was happening to
9 them. That's all they knew were their landlord
10 was throwing them out of their apartment because
11 they did not get paid. I just hope that you do
12 some kind of follow-up. It's probably too late
13 now. We tried to do as much as we can with our
14 seniors. So that was my main statement. You
15 should always do follow-up, especially when it's
16 your error. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Does
18 any other Council Member have any questions they
19 would like to ask? Steve Levin has one quick
20 question.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Just kind of
22 following up on Council Member Greenfield's
23 questions before. It is concerning to me that the
24 numbers would be going down at this time. If you
25 look at food stamps, which is the efforts of our

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2 city in enrolling people in food stamps, those
3 numbers continue to increase. So if you're
4 looking at barometers of people who are--you know,
5 food stamps is a benefit that's associated with
6 the poverty line. There's a logical gap here.

7 I really would encourage both
8 agencies to look at and really put some effort. I
9 mean there's got to be a way that we can determine
10 this. We have a lot of resources at our
11 fingertips. Particularly with baby boomers now
12 being able to qualify and clearly, I mean with
13 social security being frozen where it is. There
14 are going to be fewer seniors that are going to be
15 able to be qualifying--to be exempted because of
16 income, where the overall senior population is
17 going to continue to increase.

18 LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI: Can I just
19 add something? To qualify for SCRIE you need to
20 be in a rent controlled or a rent stabilized
21 apartment. Many, many apartments have been
22 deregulated because of their number. I think that
23 that potentially could be a reason. I think that,
24 you know one of the ways of dealing with this is
25 looking at can the definition be changed to make

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2 more people eligible. There are things to look at
3 but I think the definition is very strict.

4 Assemblyman Lopez is saying that I just misstated
5 something, so I stand corrected if that is so. He
6 knows a lot more about housing than I do. But I
7 think potentially it could be something to look
8 at.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: That leaves
10 just my question is with regard to the way the
11 Department of Finance is now working with DHCR, so
12 we were told at the last hearing that you recently
13 received access to the DHCR databases because the
14 Department of Finance is requiring the leases from
15 the actual tenants and not accepting information
16 that DHCR had from the landlords. Are you now
17 accepting that information? Do you have access to
18 DHCR's rent records? What's the outreach to
19 landlords now or tenants saying you don't have to?
20 If that's the policy now, then do they know that?

21 DAVID FRANKEL: It's not the
22 policy. We do use the DHCR databases in certain
23 cases. But for the most part, the DHCR database
24 is only updated once a year and these lease
25 renewals come up throughout the year. So we don't

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think it's an effective a tool as we had hoped it was. But we do use it.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: You're still requiring tenants to give--

DAVID FRANKEL: [interposing] For the most part, except in--

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I think that that's an additional burden. And because DHCR has that information and it is, I mean an annual basis, my goodness, I mean you know this administration objects to us asking for semiannual reporting updates all the time. They say that annual is entirely appropriate. So if DHCR is updating this rent information on an annual basis, that should be good enough for DOF I think. I think that it's a real burden and it's a real impediment for seniors and it could be something that is potentially driving down the numbers of seniors who qualify for SCRIE. Thank you, Mister and Madame Chair.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Council Member Diana Reyna has questions. Did you want to respond to anything Council Member Levin said? All right, Council Member Diana Reyna.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Good
3 morning. I just wanted to take a moment to
4 understand. The 311 complaints that have come in
5 totaled about 100,000 a year you said?

6 DAVID FRANKEL: The 311 questions.
7 They're not necessarily complaints.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Questions.

9 DAVID FRANKEL: Right. 311 gets
10 approximately 100,000 calls a year about SCRIE.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Okay. And
12 as far as the breakdown of those 100,000
13 questions, how many of that are issues that are
14 delaying what would be contributing to a conflict
15 in the SCRIE applicant's viability to remain in
16 their unit?

17 DAVID FRANKEL: I'm not sure I can
18 answer that question specifically. As I've said--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
20 [interposing] And you can get back to us on that.
21 I just want to understand the 100,000 number.

22 DAVID FRANKEL: As I've said, the
23 vast majority of those calls are handled by 311
24 operators. And the department gets approximately
25 17,000 of those 100,000 in requests for more

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2 information from 311 operators that they can't
3 handle, and we get back to the operators within a
4 day or two with the information that they need.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And of the
6 100,000, Commissioner has there ever been a
7 mapping of where these calls are coming from?

8 DAVID FRANKEL: Geographic mapping?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Uh-huh.

10 DAVID FRANKEL: I'll just simply
11 say I don't know, if there has been I don't have
12 that information.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I'd like to
14 request a mapping of the 100,000 calls. The issue
15 I have is that--and first let me ask, if a senior
16 is renting a room from a unit and they are not the
17 primary lease holder, would they qualify for
18 SCRIE?

19 DAVID FRANKEL: No.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And I know
21 that answer, right. We have had a huge transition
22 in my district where seniors have lost their units
23 and are renting, cannot afford, are not regulated,
24 vacancy decontrol is taking over the district. So
25 the issue of these seniors not qualifying, I'm

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2 just trying to get an understanding because in our
3 office we have a total of two seniors who have
4 complained about SCRIE issues. We're working with
5 your department on those issues.

6 I hope to see the resolution, but
7 in the meantime I'd like to see the mapping of
8 100,000 inquiries to understand where is this
9 volume coming from and is there a correlation
10 between the issues of a lack of whether it's
11 information, language barrier or deregulated
12 units.

13 DAVID FRANKEL: I simply don't know
14 the answer to that but we'll find out.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Any other
17 Council Member have any questions? I just want to
18 close it down and just ask a few questions here.
19 What we've been hearing is that to transfer it
20 back to DOF would be burdensome and it's almost
21 impossible to do. It's amazing how you testify to
22 that today, but when the Bloomberg Administration
23 wants to transfer other agencies from ACS to
24 Juvenile Justice and the DOE went from districts
25 to regions to districts to networks, there was no

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2 problem. It's no problem because we're the
3 Bloomberg Administration, we could do it.

4 To hear you testify today that it
5 can't be done, I am going to have this transcript
6 by my side because every time they want to
7 transfer something, I am going to remind them that
8 it can't be done. To come before the City Council
9 and say it cannot be done, I'm just really, really
10 upset about it.

11 DAVID FRANKEL: Let me comment on
12 that, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Sure.

14 DAVID FRANKEL: There is nowhere in
15 my testimony where you will find that I said it
16 couldn't be done. I said that we think it is
17 inadvisable to do it. That's what I testified to.
18 I would never testify to the fact that it can't be
19 done. Of course it could be done. But we think
20 it's inadvisable--

21 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
22 But it's burdensome.

23 DAVID FRANKEL: We think it's--

24 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
25 You said it was burdensome, it won't be effective.

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2 DAVID FRANKEL: We think we
3 currently have this in the most effective place.
4 And working in collaboration with DFTA is the way
5 we should continue to go. That was what my
6 testimony was.

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: And you're
8 opposing it. You know, you say 311 gets 100,000
9 calls. Prior to 2009, when the Department of
10 Finance took it over, we heard testimony about 311
11 got 800 calls per month. That comes out to 9,600
12 calls per year. It's amazing, 10,000 calls per
13 year. It gets transferred for the Department of
14 Finance; they get 100,000 calls per year. But
15 yet, it's effective, we're doing a great job.
16 That's your testimony.

17 DAVID FRANKEL: My testimony is
18 you're now taking those numbers out of context--

19 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
20 How am I taking out of context?

21 DAVID FRANKEL: That's right, the
22 311--

23 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
24 I asked you do you have the numbers of how many
25 calls went into DFTA prior to 2009. You do not

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2 have those numbers available. The only numbers
3 you had available today was that you had 800 per
4 month. When you come to this hearing, you have to
5 be prepared.

6 You know what, I spent all last
7 night preparing for this hearing because I care
8 about the seniors. We care about those seniors
9 getting their SCRIE. That's what this Council is
10 all about. That's why we're having this today.
11 We're not having this hearing today because we
12 want to. We're having this today because there
13 was a failure of getting benefits to seniors that
14 are entitled to this. That's why we're having
15 this. So tell me how I took the numbers out of
16 content.

17 DAVID FRANKEL: When DFTA held it,
18 as you said, they had numbers that other people
19 can call. It's not that these calls have
20 increased by tenfold on the SCRIE program. I
21 don't know what the 311 numbers quite honestly
22 were before 2009. That very well may be the right
23 number, but it's not the whole complete set.
24 That's all I meant by my comments.

25 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: All I'm

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saying--

DAVID FRANKEL: [interposing] And we also care, by the way, desperately that the seniors get what they're entitled to.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Yeah, I take that back. I got a little bit of outrage. I'm very emotional today. And I apologize if I get too carried away.

DAVID FRANKEL: No problem.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I just want to understand. This has to be fixed, you know. And really there has to be people that we could call, not a 311 operator. That's why this bill is so effective, so people have someplace to call, somebody that's working on their case. I know in the preliminary budget I saw that you had to hire 40 more people in the Department of Finance. Are any of those people for SCRIE or you don't know where you would use those 40 new people?

DAVID FRANKEL: I do know where we're going to use them and I'll testify to that on Monday. And, you know, we're certainly prepared to add more people to SCRIE if we feel that we need it.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Does anybody
3 else have any more questions? I want to thank you
4 for taking time out today. Next, we'll hear from
5 other elected officials.

6 DAVID FRANKEL: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
8 both commissioners for coming, and deputy
9 commissioner. Thank you very much.

10 [Pause]

11 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Could the
12 Department of Finance please leave somebody here
13 so they could hear the testimony? Thank you.

14 [Pause]

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: First--

16 VITO LOPEZ: Thank you, Domenic
17 Recchia. I want to thank Christine Quinn. I want
18 to thank many of the people that are sitting here
19 and some who have left. Originally, when I got
20 involved in the whole SCRIE issue, many people,
21 some in the administration and others were saying
22 why as the chairperson of the Housing Committee
23 was I concerned about SCRIE? This is not a
24 housing issue, it's a finance issue. Well, one,
25 it is a housing issue.

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2 The Speaker of the Assembly had a
3 meeting about two months ago because he was
4 concerned about the complaints he was getting from
5 the Chinatown community. We had 33 legislators,
6 Assembly Members and about 9 or 10 Council Members
7 at that meeting. We held hearings, the Assembly,
8 on the issue, Aging and Housing on the issue. We
9 had amazingly the largest number of Assembly
10 Members attend a legislative hearing. There was
11 also City Councilmen. We had 26 Assembly Members
12 spending most of the day on the issue.

13 I want to let you know that
14 although it's a city issue and I want to thank
15 everyone here, but this is a serious issue. I
16 can't believe that I'm listening to an agency, and
17 the last part some of you asked--poverty went up
18 from 17 percent to almost 21 percent in New York
19 City. That's officially. It's really about 25
20 percent. We're talking about 2.5 million more
21 people are in poverty. The elderly are in that
22 category. We went from 42,000 people on SCRIE to
23 36,000. And there's a reason. Saving money and
24 the ineffective way it's run.

25 And if we could do all these press

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2 conferences, and you and I got to them, and say
3 we've got to help the poor people, we have to help
4 the elderly, and at the same time there's a system
5 that's diminishing a real basic entitlement.

6 I have testimony but I'm going to
7 let my colleagues comment. The heat program,
8 which is run by HRA--the heat program, in my
9 testimony has 26 offices that they outstation
10 people. This is a partial list. So if you want
11 to get home energy assistance program, this is a
12 city agency, HRA, 26 locations. There's only two
13 in the Bronx. But it shows the different
14 philosophy and it is an attempt to help people get
15 the benefit.

16 In total there's about 40 stations.
17 They've actually gone out to train Joan Millman's
18 staff, an Assembly Person, Meng's staff and they
19 outstation regularly in order to get the heat
20 benefit. The heat benefit, as Domenic made
21 reference to, or someone, has increased
22 tremendously--or Steve Levin did--as well as food
23 stamps. So you don't have to be a rocket
24 scientist. If food stamps are going up, if heat,
25 people getting it is going up and at the same time

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2 SCRIE is going down. There's something wrong,
3 something fundamentally wrong.

4 But you might say, Vito, look, why
5 are you concerned? There's no federal Section 8.
6 That is diminished. The only housing subsidy
7 program, the only one that's around turns out to
8 be the SCRIE program. That's the difference of
9 people taking their medicine, that's the
10 difference of people not being evicted. I mean it
11 is so critical to sit here and listen to the
12 indifference and the insensitivity is outrageous.
13 It's totally outrageous and unacceptable.

14 Assemblyman Espinal, join us.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Assemblyman,
16 come--

17 VITO LOPEZ: But let me also say to
18 you, I love the City Council and I love many of
19 the people here. I respect the role and the power
20 of it. But we as state representatives, I've
21 heard at hearings you moan and groan about our
22 authority, but now we have four bills and we have
23 three more bills because many of the people here
24 are sponsoring bills. And those bills deal with
25 everything you said today, mandating outreach,

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2 mandating greater language sensitivity, mandating
3 311 not doing it.

4 It is outrageous for people to sit
5 here and say 311 is the place to go. Unless you
6 want to attack seniors and the 311 system is a
7 failed system. Everyone knows that. Just call
8 them up. And everyone knows that. To say that
9 that's the system, and I'm telling you there are
10 at least 30,000 more seniors eligible for SCRIE.
11 That's the projections, between 30,000 and 40,000.
12 If there are 30,000 or 40,000 and Finance is
13 talking about reducing it by 5,000, maybe that
14 saves some money. Tremendous expense, tremendous.
15 So I want to challenge the politician to say we've
16 got to get Washington to do more Section 8. But
17 at the same time we're going to sit back and let
18 the SCRIE program fall apart.

19 HEAP has 26 locations, they
20 outstation. And also, I mean, as the Brooklyn
21 County leader, it is so fantastic to hear. And I
22 mean it's the arrogance. I mean there's so much
23 arrogance here and insensitivity. We don't have
24 an office in Brooklyn, but in a year's time we may
25 have one. I think you're right, use my office.

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2 There's so many offices. Rotate. I'm sure you'll
3 rent a desk, Gentile, in your office. It is
4 outrageous to come here.

5 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Gentile
6 already has a HEAP office.

7 VITO LOPEZ: No, no, no, I don't
8 understand how you can come here and say that.
9 We'll wait a whole year. I love Lilliam Paoli. I
10 don't like her, I love Lilliam Paoli. All right,
11 but the need is greater and Lilliam knows that and
12 Lilliam is here because she was asked to be. Can
13 I say this? The person that's sitting here after
14 the hearing is over, after they speak and sitting
15 and watching is Lilliam Paoli. Very different to
16 the other person who's administering it and lacks
17 that sensitivity.

18 So in Albany, we're pressing
19 legislation. We're going to resolve this issue.
20 We want to do it with you. We hope, we really do
21 hope that you get the momentum. The issue, it was
22 changed two years ago from Aging to Finance. It's
23 no big deal for it to go back. If that's what
24 everybody wants. But the goal has to be, and I
25 know all of you, we have to go from 37,000 people

1
2 to 60,000. There has to be a commitment on
3 whoever runs it to really do comprehensive
4 screening.

5 That booklet that Domenic keeps on
6 waving, all right, it's very important and it's a
7 great piece and the Department of Aging should be
8 applauded. Where the hell is it? How come it's
9 not--and someone saying I'll give you a file, I'll
10 reproduce it.

11 I will sort of close. HEAP does
12 outstationing. 311 system, you got to get on it.
13 We have Chinese people in my district; they put
14 you on different dialects. They tell you to call
15 back. We have a Russian family; I have to refer
16 them to Alec's office in Brighton Beach. They
17 don't know the dialects. It doesn't work. It
18 does not work. The way it could work is by
19 increasing the numbers. There has to be a
20 corresponding increase. More people are poorer,
21 all right, and the elderly are part of that.

22 The amount of people going down--if
23 I'm here the commission should have said we're
24 making it very difficult. All right, I'm a
25 senior. I live in a rent stabilized apartment.

1
2 I'm there 22 years. I've gotten HEAP for five
3 years in a row. We want your lease or else we're
4 not going to give you the program. Hold it,
5 here's my bills. You know I've been living here.
6 Here's my electric bills, my phone bills. I've
7 lived here for six straight years, 20 years. If
8 you don't come up with your lease, your
9 application is incomplete, you lose the benefit.

10 Someone asked how long, 60 days we
11 will make sure we get back to you, but it would be
12 retroactive. So it takes about six months for
13 them to get back to you. Tell that landlord and
14 the tenant that for six months, don't worry about
15 it, we are going to pay the bills. We're going to
16 do something about it. There is so much
17 insensitive. I mean even if it can't be changed,
18 it's the arrogance and insensitivity here that's
19 being displayed is outrageous. It really is
20 outrageous.

21 So one, Domenic, I don't know if
22 you know where Brooklyn is, I think we need an
23 office. All right, okay? Since we're the largest
24 borough--

25 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]

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We all agree.

VITO LOPEZ: Maybe we could rent them space for a dollar a year someplace. But imagine him coming here and then telling you, without blinking an eyelash, maybe in a year. By the time that happens, you'll be here next year and the Mayor will only have three months to go. So you're not going to maybe ever get that office. Something fundamentally is wrong.

And people with language problems, I'm telling you that I have a difficulty, all right, I don't operate a computer. My five year old granddaughter does. When I tell the elderly people they downloaded it to you and we're communicating to them and we sent them in English: Hi, follow the instructions. The person only speaks Russian. Only in English they tell them what to do and the person keeps on talking to them in Russian. And if you're deaf or live in City Island, somehow you could figure your way out.

We're fighting the state right now and the state and the governor's office, they want to close Kingsboro Psychiatric Facility and send everyone to Staten Island. My argument there is

1
2 how the hell would you ever get from central
3 Brooklyn to Staten Island for psychological
4 problems? You never will, all right, and we have
5 a lot of people, including me that have serious
6 psychological problems.

7 [Laughter]

8 VITO LOPEZ: So doing that is
9 outrageous. So my answer is, Domenic, I and a lot
10 of members of the State Legislature, we will be
11 coming up with a memo in support of your bill. We
12 will have 50 or 60 of the state legislators in the
13 Assembly signing off on it. Something has to be
14 done. We cannot accept 311 as the answer. How
15 could we go home at night and say 311 is the--it's
16 not even the answer, I mean god willing, on
17 potholes. But okay, let's say it is. This is hi,
18 I need to get my SCRIE, no one's called me up. I
19 just got an eviction notice. We'll get back to
20 you in 60 days or we'll put you on a list. That
21 isn't the way it has to be done. So please help
22 the seniors.

23 And if you speak Spanish, you
24 really have a problem. If you speak Greek, now
25 there's someone here that will tell you that no

1

2 one knows about that. If you're Russian, if they
3 found someone that could speak Russian, it's only
4 one dialect. And if you're Chinese, there's only
5 one Chinese dialect. It isn't the way to do it.

6

7 Now, the answer turns out to be if
8 you're Chinese and you have a problem, or say
9 you're Russian, most of them are in Brighton
10 Beach. All right, what do you do, you go to the
11 local senior center. And you know what's nice
12 about going to the senior center that's run? And
13 it's not only sensitivity; I mean it's a nice
14 place. They really are.

14

15 So if you're handicapped, Oliver
16 Koppell said hey if you're--Steve talked about it.
17 It's much easier for me, if I live on East 9th
18 Street, to go to the senior center on Ocean Avenue
19 that's five blocks away if I'm handicapped or I'm
20 blind. For me to try to figure out this system,
21 you know, and find a friend--and it's also
22 arrogant, I'm 85 years old, find a friend, you
23 have a relative. There are many older people that
24 don't have friends. One woman came to me and told
25 me that and I repeated it last time. She said I
outlived my two children. She's in her 80s, she's

1
2 probably 85 years old. I have no one but myself
3 and you. All right? That made me feel guilty.
4 But those are the people that are out there. So
5 we've got to help them out. We have to go back to
6 DFTA.

7 Philosophically, as David
8 Greenfield said, it's an agency--and others--that
9 has a mandate. This is an entitlement but it also
10 is a way of helping them. I'm willing to wager
11 here, off the record, I know I'm on the record.
12 I'm willing to wager that if we had this hearing
13 next year, Mr. Cabrera, that the numbers will not
14 be 36,000, it'll be 33,000. No one has yet said
15 that the money saved, the city saves an extra
16 million dollars.

17 I as a political leader, someone
18 caring about housing and caring about elderly,
19 can't stand by. I will do everything I can. I am
20 negotiating with Legal Services and Legal Aid to
21 come up with a class action lawsuit. I am
22 sponsoring state legislation to do it. We have
23 copies of the bills. But we hope that you do what
24 is committed to do here. And I think Domenic at
25 the end summed it up. You transfer programs back-

1
2 -the fact that this was always in Aging and went
3 Finance, all right, so let's bring it back to
4 Aging. And if that's what all the Council Members
5 want and the State Legislators want, why not do
6 it?

7 The last thing, you know we had a
8 hearing, Domenic, I think you came to the hearing.
9 We had a meeting you came to. We've written
10 letters from the Department of Finance about our
11 concerns. Now I know I'm not anyone significant.
12 All right, I know I am not significant at all.
13 I've never gotten a letter back saying by the way
14 let's have a dialogue.

15 Later on today I'm meeting with a
16 commissioner, a city commissioner about some
17 policies, at 2:00. I meet with regular--even
18 Commissioner Kelly--I meet with these
19 commissioners regularly. But the fact that I am
20 out there, you might say your feelings are hurt?
21 No, but they refuse to have a dialogue and that's
22 fine, but I'm not going to stop and I'm not going
23 to go away. I'm going to do everything in my
24 power to support you, Domenic. But the key here,
25 it's just so important because, let me say this,

1
2 if you ever track the record of Lilliam Paoli and
3 her commitment to people, forget about elderly,
4 and agency sensitivity and that brochure in itself
5 is a good reason why--and they refuse. You've
6 waved that at them a long time, they refuse to do
7 it. It has to go back to Aging.

8 And you know what you accomplished,
9 you say the City Council is important because
10 that's what we want. And you know where all the
11 senior centers are? In all of our communities.
12 You know where our offices are? Let me outstation
13 a person in our office, all right. They went from
14 39 workers plus a walk-in center with nine.
15 That's about 50 workers, to 14. All right, that's
16 a huge difference. Even if they were magical,
17 they could not do the same.

18 So I support the bill. I'd love it
19 to be beefed up a little bit, but I border, like I
20 said, on some problems. So I'm hoping that this
21 bill goes. Whatever I can do to support it. We
22 have four pieces of legislation and everyone on
23 this table is sponsoring one. All right? We'll
24 get you copies of it. We have three more that
25 we're going to do. There will be seven. We

1
2 prefer to do it with you and through you. You
3 answer a lot of our concerns, instead of us having
4 a state mandate to do it. So thank you, thank you
5 very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
7 very much, Assemblyman Vito Lopez. I appreciate
8 your testimony. Your leadership on this issue
9 means a great deal to us. The DFTA commissioner,
10 we all agree she does a great job, especially
11 during these tough economic times. Just
12 yesterday, she opened up one of her new senior
13 centers, innovative seniors centers that we're
14 getting great calls about. We agree, something
15 has to be done here.

16 What other Assembly Members would
17 like to testify?

18 VITO LOPEZ: We're doing this
19 strategically based on language and geographical
20 locations.

21 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I just want o
22 hear, we have representation from the Bloomberg
23 Administration here. We have representation from
24 the Department of Finance. I hope you're taking
25 this all down and reporting back to the

1
2 commissioners because this is very, very
3 important.

4 ARAVELLA SIMOTAS: Good afternoon,
5 Council Member Recchia. It's wonderful to be
6 here. My name is Assembly Member Simotas. I'd
7 like to introduce my other colleagues here. We
8 have Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny from Brooklyn,
9 Assembly Rafael Espinal from Brooklyn and also
10 representing Assemblywoman Grace Meng is Aida
11 Morel.

12 You know, if you're wondering why
13 Assemblyman Vito Lopez is so irate, it's because
14 he is communicating what all of us feel. Not just
15 elected officials, but also seniors in our
16 community, also community leaders, people who care
17 about people. People who care that constituents
18 and people who've worked their entire lives to
19 make this city and this state the wonderful place
20 it is to live, that they get the benefits that
21 they're entitled to.

22 What are we talking about here?
23 We're talking about SCRIE. We're talking about a
24 program that helps senior citizens stay in their
25 homes. And what has this whole change that

1
2 occurred in 2009, what has it accomplished? Well,
3 you force seniors to either pay increases because
4 SCRIE isn't administered properly. We've heard
5 countless testimony here about all the
6 administrative problems.

7 So you're getting them, you're
8 forcing them to decide between paying their rent
9 increase out of their own pocket, so they have to
10 decide do I pay my rent increase or do I pay for
11 my prescription drugs? Do I pay for my food? Do
12 I feed myself? Or they have to go to their
13 landlord and beg that they forgive the increase or
14 they're going to get evicted. That's what we're
15 talking about here.

16 You can't tell a senior citizen to
17 wait. You cannot do that. They've waited their
18 entire lives. They've worked their entire lives
19 for this benefit. And you cannot tell them to
20 wait.

21 I see the commissioner here. I see
22 in your face that you're very compassionate and
23 you understand what I'm saying.

24 You know, I thought that it was
25 ironic that Commissioner Frankel's opening

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2 statement was well we're experiencing growing
3 pains. Well, you know what, two years going on
4 three years, and let me tell you something, those
5 growing pains, it is unfair and absolutely
6 unbelievable that we're forcing our seniors to
7 take over these growing pains, forcing them to
8 wait through an agency to determine how to get
9 over these growing pains.

10 These are senior citizens. Their
11 quality of lives is very important. Every day
12 they come to my office. I have a very large Greek
13 American community in my district and they don't
14 speak English. Some of them speak a little bit of
15 English; some of them don't have children close by
16 to help them with these applications. I can't
17 tell you, they wait at my door, before 9:00
18 because they didn't hear about their SCRIE
19 application, because they're worried about getting
20 evicted. That feeling that the worries that they
21 feel, I tell you, have a great effect on their
22 health. So then we have to deal with other issues
23 with them. This is not fair

24 We're talking about helping
25 seniors. So I don't want to belabor the point.

1
2 We've heard the issues over and over again. I
3 would like to add that there is a language barrier
4 with respect to the Russian community, the Chinese
5 community, the Greek community. I've tried to
6 call 311, actually when we had the hurricane I
7 went around, driving around and calling 311 about
8 fallen trees. You know what, they did a great
9 job. But I've also tried to call 311 on SCRIE.
10 And I waited for 30 minutes, got frustrated, hung
11 up and then called somebody else.

12 I'm an elected official, I've got a
13 law degree and I got frustrated. Imagine if
14 you're a senior citizen, 70, 80 years old,
15 somebody who might not have the educational
16 opportunities that I had, trying to call and
17 figure out their way through the system. You
18 know, we have to be compassionate, that's our job
19 and it's out duty as elected officials to make
20 sure that we're representing our constituents and
21 to make sure that we're compassionate.

22 So I urge everybody and this
23 Council, which I understand everybody here is a
24 sponsor of this bill, to pass it. We will do what
25 we can in the State Assembly to support this and

1 to make sure that our seniors' voices are heard.

2 Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
4 very much. Next please?

5 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: Good morning,
6 good afternoon. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: It's Alec's
8 birthday.

9 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: I see that I'm
10 representing a different generation now. I see
11 those iPads in some younger people's hands. And I
12 have written testimony on a piece of paper.

13 All right, anyway--

14 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Now we
15 know what you wanted for your birthday, Alec. It
16 was very subtle, but now we know.

17 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: Thank you,
18 David. I got to tell you, before I read this
19 testimony, and I know that time is of essence,
20 because we've been timing it, knowing that you'll
21 have a lot of speakers.

22 First, let me tell you about my
23 thoughts. When I'm listening to our great Mayor
24 speaking Spanish, I understand that I don't have
25

1
2 to convince Mayor Bloomberg that there is a very
3 important issue in the city and that's language
4 sensibility, because he speaks Spanish. Now when
5 it comes to the departments under him, whether
6 it's 311 or Department of Finance, I have to
7 convince those departments that it's a very
8 important issue in this city, the language
9 sensibility. I don't know why. You follow me and
10 understand the way the departments under him
11 wouldn't.

12 I have to tell you--I don't have to
13 tell you, we're talking about seniors, people who
14 just, it's very difficult for them to learn
15 English. If they're coming here at the age of 60,
16 65, 70, it's totally impossible. And SCRIE for
17 them is a matter of life or death. So there is so
18 important to have a language sensibility regarding
19 SCRIE. We're talking about it again and again and
20 again and again. And 311, if we had time now and
21 you want me to call 311 and speak Russian, oh
22 we'll have a good time, guys, for about an hour.

23 [Laughter]

24 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: Here's my
25 testimony. Again, again we're talking about

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2 SCRIE. You know what, this is in English because
3 I totally understand the Department of Finance
4 wouldn't understand my Russian. When it's going
5 to be in the hands of Department for the Aging, I
6 might do it in two languages then because I still
7 have hope.

8 The Senior Citizen Rent Increase
9 Exemption, SCRIE program, currently serves over
10 44,000 residents.

11 VITO LOPEZ: I hate to ever
12 interrupt you. But that's 44,000 and your staff
13 helped you get the number. Every day it goes
14 down. Today's testimony, it's 36,000 or 37,000.

15 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: Thank you,
16 Vito.

17 VITO LOPEZ: So where the economy
18 is getting worse, the numbers of people are going
19 down. So your research is a year or two behind.

20 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay. Alec
21 Brook-Krasny, we'd love to hear from you. Unless
22 you want to pass your time--

23 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: [interposing]
24 I'm happy that I gave my chairman an opportunity
25 to--

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CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]

You could give us the short version. You could summarize your testimony.

VITO LOPEZ: It's only two pages.

[Laughter]

ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: And is the main lifeline of assistance to many of the seniors. Every day, seniors call and come into my district office because they need assistance with SCRIE. This is the number one problem issue my constituents have. Day in and day out, my staff and I hear the same complaints. The application process is too confusing. Our certification letter never came. The office staff doesn't speak our language. Often they are confused and reduced to tears because of the constant threat of becoming evicted.

Is this the way to treat our senior citizens? Should they be forced to make the choice between paying for their medicine or food? I certainly don't think so. There is no reason that new applications should take longer to get approved and that recertifications should be backlogged for as long as they are.

1
2 Landlords are also feeling the
3 negative impact. When property bills went out
4 last July, landlords weren't given their SCRIE
5 credits. Many landlords with mortgages were
6 forced to pay the incorrect high bills before
7 defaults on their mortgages. Tax abatement credit
8 reports, which spell out the specific subsidy for
9 each tenant never arrived. Also, the city claims
10 this was fixed the following months. It is this
11 kind of incident that shouldn't happen at all.

12 The current operation of this
13 program is seriously flawed. Since SCRIE moved
14 from the Department of Aging to the New York City
15 Department of Finance, it has downsized its staff
16 from over 30 people to less than 10. Am I right?
17 I am all for progression and adjusting programs so
18 the outcome means our citizens are going to
19 benefit from this adjustment. However it seems
20 clear to me that the downsizing of this staff has
21 not been beneficial to anyone. Not landlords who
22 own these buildings and certainly not to the
23 seniors, to both sides. For these reasons, I'm in
24 full support of moving the SCRIE program from the
25 Department of Finance back to Department for the

1
2 Aging. If you need the Russian translation, just
3 tell my staff, they will do it.

4 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
5 very much.

6 ALEC BROOK-KRASNY: Thank you very
7 much.

8 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay, next?

9 AIDA MOREL: Good morning. Good
10 afternoon everyone. My name is Aida Morel and I'm
11 here representing New York State Assemblywoman
12 Grace Meng. She is a member of the New York State
13 Assembly's Aging Committee as well as the New York
14 State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian
15 Legislative Caucus. She represents the district
16 of Flushing Queens that consists of approximately
17 one-third senior citizens. We also have a huge
18 population of Chinese and Korean citizens as well.

19 Our office deals with over 40 walk-
20 in constituents a day. Our work load is
21 tremendous because agencies like the New York City
22 Department of Finance are unable to efficiently
23 and timely process and respond to many SCRIE
24 applications it receives.

25 Some of the most common problems

1
2 our constituents have encountered are the lack of
3 forms available in their own language. On the
4 finance website, only the initial SCRIE
5 application is available in the Chinese language.
6 For Korean speaking, there are no SCRIE forms
7 available online as of yet. As a result, we were
8 requesting that applications and also forms would
9 be in the Korean language, but as the commissioner
10 said before, that would be available soon.

11 Also, for all those who were able
12 to submit their SCRIE application, our office
13 receives many complaints that they never heard
14 from the Department of Finance again about the
15 status of their application. They never receive
16 any sort of confirmation or receipt. Their
17 dilemma is what should they do? Do they reapply?
18 Who do they call? They often don't receive any
19 sort of response prior to the deadline.

20 I am here today on behalf of
21 Assemblywoman Grace Meng to advocate for better
22 customer service for our SCRIE and DRIE customers.
23 We support his legislation that would move the
24 SCRIE and DRIE programs back to the Department for
25 the Aging. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
3 very much. Does any other Council Member like to
4 ask any questions to this wonderful panel? Yes,
5 Council Member Vincent Gentile.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I just
7 want to make a comment, as one of the Council
8 Members that does have a HEAP office in my
9 district office. It strikes me that one of the
10 things that I always tell seniors is if they have
11 a problem with SCRIE, call me, don't call 311.

12 What I didn't realize, until I
13 heard the testimony today, is that Department of
14 Finance, even when there is a problem reported to
15 them through 311 will not get back to the senior,
16 they get back to the 311 center and 311 apparently
17 calls the senior, as far as I can tell from the
18 testimony I heard. That is outrageous. That is
19 absolutely outrageous.

20 So I understand the total
21 frustration that if you get through to 311 in the
22 first case, you don't even get a response back
23 from DOF directly. So there's never any
24 connection. That's why it's even worse than I
25 thought. But that's one of the reasons I tell the

1
2 due respect, the administration has to know it, I
3 understand there's a fiscal problem, more people
4 are eligible for food stamps, Medicaid, HEAP and
5 SCRIE. That number has to be up by 20,000 or
6 25,000. It can't be 44,000 to 36,000. The number
7 that Alec has is a two-year old number. We've had
8 to readjust. So there's something missing in the
9 translation and there's a tremendous need.

10 And language, I mean we are a city
11 of multiple languages. We do an IT-214 drive in
12 our office. Every year we do about 500 of them.
13 This year we're up to 879. You know why, because
14 the economy for the working class and the poor has
15 gone up and we're only in the beginning of the
16 year. SCRIE has to increase. There has to be.
17 The only hope that these seniors, the underserved
18 seniors have is the decentralization, going to the
19 senior centers, community board or our local
20 offices. Her office does that. Our office does
21 it. It would be really nice to be able to say
22 okay, you know, where's the relationship, and with
23 the Department of Aging we would have it.

24 I just want to go on record,
25 Domenic, one more time, the State Legislature, I

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2 know you fight for your importance and you deserve
3 to do it. With term limits, some of you might go
4 to Albany. But we have a stake. We do the
5 enabling legislation and we have a stake to
6 modify. It is totally unacceptable in my opinion,
7 it's like you, you know that the status quo is the
8 way it is, that state legislators, over 30 of them
9 are going to be sending you a letter, problem more
10 like 45 that we want to change. And we have no
11 dialogue really on the issue.

12 There's a position being said that
13 New York State Legislators and Speaker Silver does
14 not have any role in the SCRIE program when very
15 soon the SCRIE program comes up for
16 reauthorization. Right now we have four bills
17 that are probably going to pass the State
18 Legislature. Then someone like yourself,
19 justifiably, will say: Vito, why is the state
20 mandating this?

21 And the things that we are passing,
22 if you look at the bills, are almost in your
23 legislation. So what we're doing is three things.
24 We're doing our own legislation to help you out
25 and we could easily say we won't mandate it. Two,

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2 we hope you pass yours. And third, we've actively
3 pursuing a lawsuit because there's no reason that
4 if you're blind--you know find someone that can
5 call up. I don't know how you receive a
6 downloaded computer--I mean I couldn't do it now
7 because I'm illiterate, but I don't know if you're
8 blind, how do you download a computer.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [off mic]

10 VITO LOPEZ: All right, but the
11 average person does not know that and falls
12 between the cracks. Okay, maybe you could do it.
13 But the question is fundamentally, your point
14 someone has to answer and later on you need to do
15 because you're a strong advocate for poor people
16 and the undeserved. Why is the economy tanking,
17 the poverty rate going up tremendously in the last
18 two years, by 5 percentage points, over two
19 million people in poverty and the numbers of SCRIE
20 going down from 44,000 to 37,000. There has to be
21 a reason. The only reason I have is the system
22 stinks in those two years that it shifted, and
23 two, the motivation behind it, the arrogance and
24 insensitivity has a purpose. You save money.

25 I don't mind stepping out. I don't

1
2 mind, I'll hear about it, but I'm not going to run
3 away from an issue that's a rent supplement.

4 Seven thousand less people have a rent supplement.

5 The question that you asked of
6 others, if I'm a senior for 30 years living in a
7 rent stabilized building and I can't find my lease
8 because I lost it, I have to go and produce a
9 lease and I have in to that nasty landlord and say
10 I demand a lease, otherwise I'm going to lose my
11 SCRIE. The landlord wants your apartment and you
12 understand that. So they ain't going to give you
13 a lease.

14 So then all of the sudden you've
15 lived there for 30 years, you're listed on DHCR's
16 site. They're saying they still expect a lease.
17 That's putting that senior against the landlord
18 and facing eviction. That's a policy statement.
19 That was said here today. That was said by the
20 commissioner of Finance. He's not going to accept
21 DHCR statement. He wants a lease. The senior
22 cannot get the lease or the landlord is
23 insensitive or the landlord is a holding
24 corporation that they could never negotiate. So
25 we're going to send this older Russian man to try

1
2 to find his landlord and demand a copy of his
3 lease. It's not going to work.

4 I want to give you, I know I'm
5 talking too long--

6 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
7 No--

8 VITO LOPEZ: I sat here for two and
9 a half hours. I postponed some medical
10 appointments. This is a very significant issue,
11 Domenic, and it has to pass and it has to not--you
12 said it well. There's a lot of changes. This was
13 changed once before. Since advocates want it, and
14 a lot of people have left, but they're all going
15 to testify here that they want it to go to Aging.
16 So what in the world, they still could work the
17 same relationship that was said today, Finance
18 working with Aging, keep it. Just turn it around
19 a little bit and let Aging do it, all right? Then
20 in you mindset, just take the Lilliam Paoli and
21 Frankel and say who do you want to run the
22 program. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Council
24 Member David Greenfield would like to say a word.
25 Well, hold on, sit down. We're not done yet.

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2 Council Member Greenfield? We have a lot of
3 people that want to testify.

4 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: We want to
5 thank you and we want to recognize the partnership
6 that we have with you. We appreciate you inviting
7 us to your hearings and we're happy to have you
8 here. We appreciate your leadership.

9 I will just point out,
10 incidentally, I didn't think about this on the way
11 over but you have a terrific point. On the way
12 over here today, when I was listening to 1010WINS,
13 I actually heard an advertisement on the radio for
14 HEAP. I'm sure some of you have actually seen
15 that, ads in the paper, ads on the radio. I've
16 never seen any sort of advertisements, in fact I
17 think they testified today SCRIE doesn't even have
18 a pamphlet. And HEAP is actually getting
19 advertisements out there. So think that's very
20 significant.

21 VITO LOPEZ: And they even go to
22 Gentile's office. That's something.

23 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: And for
25 the record, I have three field offices for HEAP in

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my district.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay--

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD:

[interposing] But Mr. Chairman, I will note though in all fairness, I think the blame does fall on Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli because she does such a good job she makes everyone else look bad. I think she gets some of the blame, in all fairness. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much. Thank you for taking the time out, Assembly Members, for coming here and testifying. We greatly appreciate it. Your input was greatly important. Please call the next panel.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Allison Weingarten, Fern Hertzberg, Jane Landry-Reyes and Kaitlin Nelson.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Everyone who wants to testify, everybody take your seats so we can see who's up here, who's here and who's not here.

[Pause]

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2 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Just state
3 your name for the record, where you're from and
4 then we'll hear from everybody and then if any
5 Council Members have questions, they'll ask
6 questions. Go ahead.

7 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Allison
8 Weingarten with the Queens--

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
10 You've got to turn it on.

11 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Allison
12 Weingarten with the Queens Community House.

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay.

14 FERN HERTZBERG: Fern Hertzberg,
15 ARC XVI Fort Washington and co-chair of the
16 Washington Heights and Inwood Council on Aging.

17 KAITLIN NELSON: Kaitlin Nelson
18 VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually
19 Impaired.

20 JANE LANDRY-REYES: Jane Landry-
21 Reyes, senior staff attorney, housing unit, South
22 Brooklyn Legal Services.

23 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You could
24 either read your testimony, summarize it or make
25 your statement.

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2 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: I think I'll
3 read it. Good afternoon Chairperson Recchia,
4 Chairperson Lappin and Chairperson Greenfield and
5 members of the New York City Council Committee on
6 Finance; Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on
7 Senior Centers. My name is Allison Weingarten and
8 I am a social work intern at the Queens Community
9 House Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program.

10 Thank you for the opportunity to
11 provide testimony on behalf of Queens Community
12 House and to comment on the New York City Senior
13 Citizen Rent Increase Exemption program and the
14 Disability Rent Increase Exemption program.

15 We have read through the City
16 Council legislation and commend the City Council
17 Finance, Aging and Senior Centers Committees and
18 all others involved for introducing legislation to
19 improve SCRIE and DRIE. The legislation indicates
20 that you understand that action must be taken by
21 the City Council to ensure that SCRIE and DRIE are
22 more easily accessible, especially because these
23 programs are meant to serve inherently vulnerable
24 populations: the aging and people with
25 disabilities.

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2 Queens Community House is a multi-
3 generational settlement house engaging over 20,000
4 Queens' residents in youth, adult, family and
5 senior programming. Our Housing and Homelessness
6 Prevention Program assists approximately 3,000
7 residents with housing concerns in Queens.

8 At the Queens Community House, we
9 assist seniors and people with disabilities apply
10 and recertify for SCRIE and DRIE. First time,
11 eligible applicants, may have their rent frozen at
12 the rent of their previous lease. Approved
13 applicants may reapply for the program with each
14 new lease so that their rent may remain frozen at
15 the rent they were initially approved for.

16 At the Queens Community House we
17 started seeing problems with tenants losing their
18 SCRIE and DRIE benefits when the Department of
19 Finance started overseeing both SCRIE and DRIE in
20 September 2009.

21 We are now noticing a high number
22 of SCRIE and DRIE renewal applicants losing their
23 SCRIE and DRIE benefits because, without any
24 notification from New York City Department of
25 Finance, seniors and people with disabilities are

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2 not aware that their SCRIE or DRIE is no longer
3 current. These tenants continue paying their rent
4 as if they are approved for SCRIE and DRIE but
5 once the tenant and the landlord realize that the
6 tenant is no longer receiving the SCRIE or DRIE--
7 sometimes a year or two after the tenant lost
8 their benefits--the landlord charges the tenant
9 the rent that they were not paid by the New York
10 City Department of Finance.

11 Here's an example of one of our
12 tenants. One tenant never recertified for SCRIE
13 in April 2010. The tenant's landlord did not
14 realize that the tenant was not recertified for
15 SCRIE until January 2012. Once the landlord
16 realized that the tenant was not receiving SCRIE,
17 the landlord charged the Tax Abatement Credit that
18 the landlord had not received which was \$7,987.

19 And the landlord informed the
20 tenant that the tenant needed to start paying the
21 legal rent which is \$1,128, much higher than the
22 SCRIE rent that was \$728. The tenant's combined
23 household income is only \$1,152, not enough to pay
24 the arrears or the new legal rent and survive and
25 live with dignity.

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2 We are working with SCRIE to make
3 sure that this and the other cases we have seen
4 are taken care of to make sure these tenants are
5 not evicted.

6 Additionally, we are having an
7 issue with tenants being asked for their tax
8 returns. Most of these tenants only make \$10,000
9 a year so they don't file tax returns. And we are
10 having, as has been stated, a lot of trouble
11 communicating with SCRIE, and especially DRIE.
12 DRIE is much worse than DRIE in terms of
13 communication.

14 We commend this legislation,
15 especially the fact that information will be
16 provided in non-English languages. We also like
17 that landlords will be notified every quarter
18 instead of two years later and they're like, what,
19 I didn't get \$8,000. Now my tenant must pay.

20 But we'd like some things to be
21 added to the legislation. We'd like to add to the
22 legislation that it's legally mandated that SCRIE
23 and DRIE send out recertification packages. We
24 think the initial application should be provided
25 in non-English languages. In the legislation, I

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2 think it says that if you request it you'll get
3 information in non-English languages. We'd prefer
4 that the initial application can be in other
5 languages.

6 Whatever department ends up taking
7 this over, we just want them to be more sensitive
8 to the fact that these are vulnerable populations.
9 Tenants shouldn't be asked to provide tax returns.
10 I think that should be put in the legislation.

11 And any tenant that had failed to
12 recertify should automatically and in retroactive
13 payment by SCRIE to the landlord once the tenant
14 has recertified. We're passing these cases on to
15 Legal Services for anyone who didn't recertify and
16 now the landlord is saying pay us \$8,000. We want
17 some sort of umbrella if this happened to you, you
18 don't have to pay; we're just going to
19 automatically cover that. And those tenants
20 should be recertified for SCRIE or DRIE at the
21 original rent that they were approved for.

22 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You can sum
23 up.

24 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Yes. And
25 whichever agency administers SCRIE and DRIE, they

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2 should have a representative to be the point of
3 contact for the community-based organizations,
4 not--

5 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
6 Not 311.

7 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Not 311 but
8 not just this number for constituents. I think it
9 would be helpful to also have one--

10 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
11 You want one person to answer for community-based
12 organizations.

13 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Yes. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you.
16 Thank you for your recommendations. We'll take
17 them under advisement.

18 ALLISON WEINGARTEN: Thank you.

19 FERN HERTZBERG: Fern Hertzberg.
20 I'm the executive director of ARC XVI Fort
21 Washington which is senior service organization in
22 Washington Heights. But for this purpose, I'm
23 going to speak as the co-chair of the Council on
24 Aging.

25 Last week, we had our monthly

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2 meeting of the Council on Aging. Fifty-three
3 provider agencies are members of the Washington
4 Heights/Inwood Council on Aging, from hospital and
5 nursing homes to the nine senior centers, case
6 management, all of the services. I just raised
7 the question, because I had heard about this
8 hearing.

9 So I said: how is it going with
10 SCRIE? Although I don't like to argue with the
11 Department of Finance, I'm sure they've got some
12 statistics somewhere that will say what am I
13 saying. The experiences that it was four to six
14 weeks under DFTA to get a response on a renewal
15 application and about three to six months to get a
16 response on a new application for SCRIE.

17 Today, the experience of the
18 members of around the table was three to six
19 months to get a renewal and six months to a year
20 to get a recertification.

21 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: So it got
22 worse?

23 FERN HERTZBERG: Significantly
24 worse, four to five times worse than it was. In
25 addition to that, the landlords are using this

1
2 opportunity to not renew leases, to say we're not
3 getting our tax abatement and try to throw tenants
4 out.

5 In Washington Heights we have a
6 significant problem and have had a significant
7 problem with Pinnacle, with Vantage and with the
8 other landlords that already notorious to the City
9 Council on the harassment and the attempt to get
10 rid of tenants to start with. So this was just
11 like opening the door and saying, come on, get rid
12 of the tenants.

13 So part of your decrease in SCRIE
14 is probably related to people not being able to
15 get their lease renewed. Not just the delay in
16 the actual SCRIE renewal.

17 The consensus of the members of the
18 Council on Aging was not only that they would
19 prefer that it be at DFTA but that they really
20 think that the City Council needs to think about
21 the resources. Because the staffing issue that
22 you've all pointed out is a significant issue in
23 delaying these re-certifications.

24 We all know it's not an electronic
25 system. It's not an electronic application. Even

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2 if the senior centers do those applications, we
3 can't speed up the process. We still have to send
4 it to whatever department it is and it has to be
5 handled by hand, by that department. So when you
6 cut the staffing by a third, it just isn't
7 possible to do it as rapidly as if you have three
8 times the number of staff. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you
10 very much. Next?

11 KAITLIN NELSON: Thank you for this
12 opportunity to testify at this public hearing of
13 the SCRIE program, administered by the New York
14 City Department of Finance. I'm Kaitlin Nelson,
15 LMSW, Assistant Director of Development and a
16 licensed social worker at VISIONS Services for the
17 Blind and Visually Impaired.

18 VISIONS completed our 85th year of
19 promoting the independence of blind and visually
20 impaired people of all ages. Annually, VISIONS
21 serves nearly 6,000 primarily low-income
22 participants and their families free of charge.
23 Our work is an affirmation that losing one's
24 vision does not lead to a loss of independence,
25 civic engagement and contribution to the life of

1
2 New York City.

3 Help with finding affordable
4 housing is one of the most frequently requested
5 services received by VISIONS licensed Master
6 Social Workers and Caseworkers.

7 The population of seniors with
8 severe vision loss is growing as the baby boomers
9 age and develops age-related eye diseases. Vision
10 impairment has an even larger impact on non-white
11 and low-income seniors, and seniors with chronic
12 diseases.

13 VISIONS is proud to be chosen as
14 one of the new Innovative Senior Centers and we
15 thank the City Council and Department for the
16 Aging for the funding for this.

17 One of the services that we have
18 provided is assistance with eligibility for
19 benefits including SCRIE and DRIE and we use our
20 computer lab, our fully accessible computer lab to
21 help assist blind seniors in determining
22 eligibility for benefits.

23 Frankly blind seniors have problems
24 accessing benefits from all government entities.
25 DFTA has acknowledged that their own staff needs

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2 training and DFTA staff participates in Disability
3 Mentoring Day as offered by the Mayors Office for
4 People with Disabilities.

5 I do believe that SCRIE applicants
6 and recipients were better served when this
7 program was housed at DFTA. However, if SCRIE is
8 to remain at the New York City Department of
9 Finance, we urge them to require their staff to
10 participate in training on aging and disability.
11 This can be done with the Mayors Office for People
12 with Disabilities or by sending DOF staff to DFTA
13 trainings. We also urge the Department of Finance
14 to create a hotline, a dedicated phone number, for
15 advocates and staff at provider agencies to follow
16 up on individual SCRIE and DRIE applications where
17 they can ask questions. This is important since
18 most blind seniors do not have accessible
19 computers at home.

20 I would be remiss if I also did not
21 address the lack of consistency and equity between
22 SCRIE and DRIE. It makes no sense that SCRIE
23 eligibility is \$29,000 and DRIE eligibility is
24 \$19,284. Both seniors and people with
25 disabilities of all ages are likely to be living

1
2 in poverty or near poor. It makes sense to make
3 the income eligibility the same to include more
4 people in the protections of SCRIE and DRIE.

5 I have additional suggestions to
6 strengthen the SCRIE program, including that the
7 City Council should explore the implementation of
8 presumptive eligibility for SCRIE. That the
9 website of the Department of Finance and DFTA
10 should be changed so that an applicant or their
11 advocate can actually complete an application
12 online rather than printing it out and filling it
13 out by pen.

14 If the SCRIE programs remains at
15 DOF, employees at DOF and community agencies must
16 be trained on aging and disability etiquette.
17 Training should be mandatory.

18 Seniors between the ages 60 and 62
19 who are also disabled should be encouraged to
20 apply for DRIE until they become eligible at age
21 62 for SCRIE.

22 And I strongly support the
23 recommendation of a directly dialed hotline for
24 advocates and community workers to call and reach
25 a live person at DOF to follow up on specific

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applications.

I strongly support providing grants to community agencies with employees who do outreach and find seniors eligible for DRIE and SCRIE and assist them with the application process. For seniors who are blind that often means going to the person's home to collect the documentation to prove SCRIE or DRIE eligibility.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak today at the SCRIE public hearing, and look forward to continuing the partnership with our City Council to match blind seniors with benefits and resources. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you very much for coming in today. Because there were some issues with the hearing impaired and all kinds of people with disabilities, and it's a big issue. It's a big problem.

KAITLIN NELSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: The fact that I forgot what the number was, that they couldn't give us the number of how many people are on DRIE was very disturbing. Brooklyn Legal Services, go ahead, you're up. You don't have to read your

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thesis.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: I'm a lawyer,
you know, 20 pages.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I know. I
read it. It's very, very good. You brought up
some good ideas.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Okay, thank
you. I'm just going to summarize my takeaways--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
Love it.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: --from the
hearing this morning. I think that what we're all
essentially saying here is that whichever agency
the program remains with or goes to, that staffing
is absolutely crucial. I was dismayed to hear as
Commissioner Frankel's last point that he would be
prepared to add personnel to the SCRIE program if
he thinks they need them. At this point, if he
doesn't understand that what they need is
additional staffing, that's quite disturbing.

I do believe that there is a
difference in the mission of the two agencies and
that we have seen the ramifications of the
Department of Finance's mission being a different

1 mission than that of DFTA. I think that DOF is
2 now actually at a point where they should have
3 been two years ago and that they have corrected
4 mistakes that they've made over the last two years
5 and that things are getting better in terms of
6 some recent improvements that they've made, from
7 an advocate's perspective, from a tenant lawyer's
8 perspective. But there is certainly much, much
9 more to be done.
10

11 Specifically, the online TAC
12 reports for lawyers who are going into court with
13 tenants who are about to be evicted to be able to
14 clarify what the subsidy levels are and what the
15 status is quickly is very, very important.
16 However, tenants are themselves, many, many
17 elderly tenants are not going to be able to access
18 that information. Mailings, regular mailings and
19 the quarterly reports that are proposed I believe
20 are very important also to establish that a
21 landlord is on notice of what the subsidy is and
22 what the status of the subsidy is. It is simply
23 illegal to bring a tenant to court to sue them for
24 an unpaid subsidy particularly when they are in
25 the grace period for recertification, which is six

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months.

The 311 system is completely ineffective. The 100,000 calls I'm sure I would be interested in knowing what the numbers are for repeat callers on that number.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We asked that. We think alike us lawyers.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Right.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We asked that question.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: I would venture to say that a combination of the 311 system and an ombudsman type proposal, as my colleagues here have testified to, would be appropriate.

Community-based organizations and legal services organizations and tenant advocates need to be able to get to a human being. They need to be able to do that and it need not to be a small percentage of people who can access that information.

As a Legal Services attorney, we've now met with DOF personnel. They've been extremely helpful, I have to say. But only after we pressed for a meeting, only after we pointed

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out what policy mistakes they were making.

I would suggest that the number of recipients, SCRIE recipients going down in part has to do with changed policies between what DFTA used to do and what DOF now does. Particularly, and it's in my testimony, DOF's policy apparently now is that if you've retired last year, they're just looking at your last year's income and if your last year's income was employment income and now you've retired, it doesn't matter, you're not eligible. This puts people in very difficult position. That's a policy change. It's something that is, I believe, ill advised. There are a number of things that--

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
Could we just talk about that for one second?

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: I just want my attorney to make a note in your testimony. What she's saying is that if somebody retires and this year they go to apply for it, they look at last year's tax return.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Right.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: So last

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2 year's tax return is going to show that you made
3 \$25,000 or \$30,000 but now you're only making
4 \$12,000 a year. What are you supposed to do for
5 this one year?

6 JANE LANDRY-REYES: Right. So if
7 you made \$30,000, now you're over the income
8 eligibility for the household--

9 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: [interposing]
10 And what did DFTA do?

11 JANE LANDRY-REYES: DFTA would have
12 looked at current, at income and with projected
13 income if you were about to retire.

14 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: My
15 legislation does not address that?

16 JANE LANDRY-REYES: No.

17 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I'm sorry,
18 if I may just interject.

19 JANE LANDRY-REYES: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: So this is
21 only for SCRIE or for other benefit programs? How
22 do other benefit programs work?

23 JANE LANDRY-REYES: In terms of--

24 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD:
25 [interposing] In terms of the retirement issue,

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how do they handle that?

JANE LANDRY-REYES: You mean for example Section 8?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Section 8, food stamps, HEAP.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Food stamps is going to be looking at what your current income is.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Okay.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Section 8 will ask for your last year's income but will look at what your current income is. So, you know, I think it's appropriate to ask if--

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD:
[interposing] So is SCRIE the only program as far as you know that just looks at last year?

JANE LANDRY-REYES: I can't say that with certainty. But it's the only one at the moment that I can speak to.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: That's fair enough.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Very interesting.

JANE LANDRY-REYES: Also, in terms

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2 of the language access issues, absolutely I would
3 echo that it is crazy that only the initial
4 application is available in other languages and
5 not a recertification. I'll give one brief
6 example.

7 I'm a Legal Services attorney. I
8 had a tenant who was threatened with eviction. In
9 the course of representing here, I did a SCRIE
10 application to protect her in the future. I put
11 myself down as a third party representative who
12 could be contacted for recertifications. A year
13 went by or actually it may have been two years and
14 recertification was due. My Spanish speaking
15 client received a renewal application in English.
16 I was a third party contact on the application but
17 I didn't get anything.

18 So my Spanish speaking client, the
19 impetus was on her now and she did do it, thank
20 god, but she came into my office with the renewal
21 application in English and said: hey, what's this?
22 I was able to troubleshoot that. But the fact
23 that you have a provision for a third party
24 representative but don't use the mechanism is
25 problematic. You know, I can't speak to the

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2 number of people who fall into that category but
3 it is a problem. Obviously, a reduction from 39
4 to 17, you know this is the source of many, many
5 of the problems.

6 I do think, also if the SCRIE
7 program would outreach to the courts and attorneys
8 at the point, and they are the point of danger of
9 eviction, that the courts were made aware, for
10 example, that there were problems in the tax
11 payments or credits to the landlords at that time,
12 that the courts could have prevented. There was
13 one councilwoman who asked what follow-up did you
14 do of the people who were evicted or potentially
15 evicted in that circumstance.

16 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: That's good
17 to make a note of that too. Send a memo to the
18 courts. Okay, anything else?

19 JANE LANDRY-REYES: That's it, I'll
20 rest now.

21 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: You gave some
22 good ideas. I like them. All right, I want to
23 thank you all for coming to testify here today. I
24 don't think, Mr. Greenfield, do you have any
25 questions for this wonderful panel?

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2 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: No. I
3 just want to thank you all for your service and we
4 appreciate what you're doing. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: We have one
6 more person to testify, from State Senator Eric
7 Adams' office. Does anybody else want to testify?
8 This is the last chance. After this gentleman
9 testifies, no more. To the sergeant-at-arms, if
10 anyone hands you a form, we're closed down. Hold
11 on, is this lady to testify? Is she with you?

12 REUVEN LIPKIND: She's with me.

13 CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Okay.

14 REUVEN LIPKIND: I'm here on behalf
15 of State Senator Eric Adams. I have just a brief
16 statement I'd like to read on his behalf. There
17 are 44,000 SCRIE recipients. New York City
18 Finance Department has a staff of approximately
19 about 10 people or so, in comparison to the 30
20 plus, the 39 staffers housed at the Department of
21 Aging.

22 It is only appropriate and rational
23 that the oversight of this program be in the hands
24 of those who are the most equipped and have the
25 best access and understanding of those being

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2 served. This can only assist in more efficient
3 and effective programs.

4 I'd just like to add a bit. I've
5 worked with the State Senator for over 20 years.
6 My position is I'm a constituent advocate. I've
7 worked with the constituents. I'm the director of
8 constituent services over here in central
9 Brooklyn. Every day we have people coming in for
10 SCRIE, DRIE. We work with them. It's very
11 difficult to communicate with the SCRIE
12 administration.

13 As my associate can attest to, many
14 times when you finally do find someone that you
15 can actually speak to, you find that a few weeks
16 later he's been moved or she's been moved to a
17 different position. Two weeks ago, I called on
18 behalf of someone. 311 will take inquiries
19 regarding SCRIE. They will not take inquiries
20 regarding DRIE. There is no way to check up on a
21 DRIE application going through 311. They just
22 won't do it.

23 I was very surprised that I got a
24 response from someone in SCRIE, in the Department
25 of Finance, answering my inquiry about a

1
2 constituent. She was very knowledgeable and very
3 good. She was excellent. I asked if I could get
4 her telephone number. She said I'll give you my
5 number but I'm only going to be here three weeks.
6 I'm terminated. This lady is gone. March 16th is
7 her last day. So when they say they've increased
8 them, they increased them but they keep taking
9 away the quality people. We have no one to deal
10 with, no one to work with.

11 I literally go to all the meetings
12 I possibly can. I speak to individuals I know
13 that work in Finance to find out who there is, to
14 find people to work with and they just keep
15 cutting it back, cutting it back, making it more
16 and more difficult.

17 I think it's actually that they're
18 trying to cut back on the SCRIE to give the money
19 back to the city. The people losing this, this is
20 their safety net. This is their lifeline.
21 Without SCRIE, thousands of my seniors are going
22 to be on the street. That's what's basically
23 happening.

24 I really applaud everything you've
25 done here today. All of my frustrations working

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with that you're dealing with and I really applaud your efforts. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you for coming to testify.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you, Reuven. Who's the young woman who's with you, just for the record?

REUVEN LIPKIND: Faye Brown.

FAYE BROWN: [off mic] My name is Faye Brown.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.

FAYE BROWN: [off mic] - - liaison.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Great. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RECCHIA: Thank you for both coming down. All right this ends our hearing. I want to thank everyone for staying. This hearing is adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Donna Hintze

Date March 16, 2012