

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL  
WELFARE

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HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Annabel Palma  
Fernando Cabrera  
Ruben Wills  
Donovan Richards  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Corey D. Johnson  
Carlos Menchaca  
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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Letitia James  
Public Advocate

Gale Brewer  
Borough President

Gilbert Taylor  
Commissioner of Homeless Services

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Deputy Commissioner at Department of Homeless  
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Yianna Pavlakos  
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Patrick Markee  
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Bobby Watts  
Care for the Homeless

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Picture The Homeless

Libby Mathewson  
Urban Justice Center

Stephanie Gendell  
Citizens Committee for Children

Bonnie Stone  
Women in Need

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning.

Good morning everybody. I want to welcome you all to today's hearing. My name is Council Member Stephen Levin. I am Chair of the General Welfare Committee. Today is a very special day for me as this is my first hearing as Chair of this Committee, so I want to begin by expressing how much of an honor it is to be doing this work to each of my colleagues here on the committee. We are joined by Corey Johnson of Manhattan and we'll be joined by other members of the committee shortly, and we are also very pleased to have Public Advocate Letitia James here as well, and I look forward to her input and her questions. I want to give a special thank you to the General Welfare Staff, Andrea Vasquez and Peter Drivus [phonetic] who have worked tirelessly in preparing today's hearing. I'd also like to acknowledge Council Member Annabel Palma who should be arriving shortly who served as chair of this committee for the past four years and did an exemplary job in navigating the vital and complex issues over which this committee

has oversight, as well as being a fierce advocate for families and individuals in need throughout New York City. Thank you Council Member Palma. I am looking forward to working closely with each of you in this room on the issues that become before this committee and there is much work to be done in improving the lives of those of us who are most in need. We are here today to discuss the conditions and operations of the Department of Homeless Services and Family Shelter System. Over recent years, more and more homeless individuals and families are entering shelters in New York City, and now the homeless population has reached an all-time high. As of February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014, total of over 52,000 individuals were living in New York City shelters. Of this population there are over 10,000 families living in shelters including over 22,000 children. I'm going to repeat those numbers. Over 10,000 families and over 22,000 children are currently living in Department of Homeless Services shelters. These numbers constitute a 70 percent increase in the number of families

with children in shelter from 2008 with the sharpest increase occurring in the past two years after DHS stopped providing a subsidy program for families to leave the shelter system and obtain permanent housing, and if anything I would hope that this hearing will remind us all that there is a need to reinstate a subsidy program. I'm looking forward to working with administration and Commissioner Taylor and the rest of the Administration on focusing on addressing that need and finding the resources to do so as it is vitally important to providing families with an opportunity for public and for public support and permanent housing. This past December, the New York Times reporter Andrea Elliot wrote a five part series entitled "Invisible Child" which chronicled the life of 11 year old Dasani Coates and her family as they lived for three years in the Auburn Family shelter in Brooklyn. The series brought to life significant and appalling conditions that existed in the Auburn shelter and also the "purgatory" that thousands of families and children in the shelter system

find themselves in every single day. Over the years there have been over 400 violations at Auburn from state and city inspectors that run the gamut of hazardous none of us would find acceptable in any type of housing. Those includes rats, mold, exposure to lead paint and allegations of sexual assault by security and shelter staff. I was encouraged to hear last week that Mayor de Blasio and the City Administration announced that they have begun transferring over 400 children and their families out of the Auburn family residence and the Catherine Street Shelter in lower Manhattan, and I am pleased that the Administration is providing funds in the FY 15 budget that are going to be addressing this issue. It must be our mission as a city to ensure that every child and family is provided a safe and healthy upbringing, and by transferring families with children out of Auburn and Catherine Street we are taking a positive step forward in improving the lives of our children. So I want to thank and commend Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Taylor for

1 this immediate action to protect the children  
2 of New York City. It's a fact that no Mayor  
3 prior took this step and it shows an important  
4 willingness on the part of this Mayor to make  
5 this a priority. Today the committee is  
6 interested in learning the plans for the future  
7 of DHS Family Shelter System, including the  
8 types of facilities families are placed in, the  
9 quality and variety of services families  
10 receive and how the Administration plans to  
11 improve conditions within shelters. The  
12 committee is also interested in learning more  
13 details about the transition undergoing the  
14 Auburn and Catherine Street Shelters and if  
15 there are any plans for similar changes at  
16 other facilities. Again, I want to thank  
17 Commissioner Taylor for being here and his  
18 staff, and we're going to be joined by Borough  
19 President Gale Brewer from Manhattan to provide  
20 testimony, but I do want to ask our Public  
21 Advocate if she wants to say a few words.  
22 Borough President Gale Brewer. Borough  
23 President, before you begin, I do want to also  
24 acknowledge the advocacy of our Public Advocate

1  
2 around this issue and making clear that the  
3 conditions that existed at Auburn and Catherine  
4 Street as well at other facilities are not  
5 acceptable and are--that it's our  
6 responsibility, our collective responsibility  
7 to address them, so.

8 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: I thank you,  
9 Mr. Chairman, but a lot of the credit goes to  
10 an organization in Fort Greene known as SNAP  
11 led by Sister Close [phonetic] who's in the  
12 audience who will be testifying shortly. She  
13 will talk a little bit about the work, the task  
14 force that we created long before the article  
15 and all the work that we had done in the Auburn  
16 Shelter, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I  
17 look forward to the testimony of all who are  
18 present.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
20 Public Advocate.

21 GALE BREWER: Thank you very much--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
23 Madam Brewer.

24 GALE BREWER: and I will be very  
25 brief. I am delighted that Chair Levin is Chair

of this committee and it's nice to see Council Member Johnson and Public Advocate James knows everything. So I am just going to talk a little bit more general from my experience. I'm going to talk just a few minutes about more or less alternatives. I'm so excited about this hearing because this situation absolutely has to stop and I wanted to mention a couple of issues, just generally, and I will get you a more comprehensive testimony tomorrow, but just let me just talk about this funding situation because we always hear that that's the issue. And obviously I am not in the adult shelter which is slightly different, adult family shelter. I know that DHS knows and I think others know that we've been dealing with a situation on West 95<sup>th</sup> Street. Forget the situation specifically, but when you're talking about a 47 million dollar five year potential contract, paying 3,500 dollars a month for rent for a small room, and includes a little bit of case work, but I say that because why can't some of this 47 million dollars be used for families for permanent housing? And I guess I

1 still want an answer to that question. I've  
2 been asking it for 12 years. And that's really  
3 my first question. And again, there may be  
4 other similar contracts, emergency or regular  
5 contracts and I'm still quite not  
6 understanding. My understanding is it's about  
7 71 percent of these contracts, the city money  
8 and the balance is federal and state. So that  
9 is one of my questions that I'm sure you will  
10 ask. I want to thank former Comptroller Lieu  
11 and certainly I think it's still a month to  
12 month contract at this location. I assume the  
13 contract is in litigation, but there are  
14 probably similar situations elsewhere. So I  
15 want to bring that up. Secondly, in all of  
16 this, instead of establishing these shelters we  
17 all want to figure out how to have permanent  
18 facilities, and that could be turned tier two  
19 family shelter facilities into permanent  
20 housing. I am very tired of this discussion.  
21 You build, they come. I don't agree with it.  
22 and I think we have to stop that mentality and  
23 think specifically about permanent housing for  
24 people who are ready and able and positively  
25

interested in doing that. Third issue is I know a lot of people are talking about New York, New York Four. We've had one, two, and three. That would take a commitment between the city and the state, but it's something that we have to work on. I'm a big supporter, as people know, of finding culturally appropriate mental health services. That would be, obviously, part of this effort. We need to think of these services before people end up being homeless, but certainly New York, New York four is something we have to find and find sites for. Obviously, the issue of NYCHA comes up often and placement. The list is long. The issue will be using it, and I have to credit the Administration, de Blasio Administration for bringing over some of the NYPD money. That would be what that would be for, and then we have to work out how much go to people on the list, how much is priority for people who are homeless. I believe there's also some possibility of Medicaid redesign, team restructuring, to be able to use some of that Medicaid money perhaps for permanent housing.

We have to find every possible dollar, either for rent or for construction. I want to talk for two minutes about prevention. I have about five ideas about how we can prevent people before they go in. We've had thanks to the initiatives that the Council's had in the past, we've done housing clinics in our neighborhood. We need to have housing clinics for prevention in every single neighborhood. It can't be means tested. They just have to exist, and that means we go in there to find out when you didn't-- when you paid your section eight and the landlord didn't, all of a sudden you're evicted. Why did I get evicted? That kind of information, the personal use, all the issues that go on in a neighborhood can be discussed with attorneys who will give you the guidance to be able to address your housing issues. So I suggest that we work together for anti-eviction services in every single neighborhood, non means tested. Second, I want to commend the Department of Homeless Services and NYCHA on the Family Reentry Pilot program. We all know people who do time and they come home to NYCHA,

and then there's a challenging situation because of the regulations. What I understand that with Vera providing support, NYCHA and DHS working together, there are some families who would be able to be stabilized and have an opportunity as long as things go well to stay in that apartment, and that is an excellent idea. Third, I have always been a critic of home base. I will be willing to be reeducated, but I would like to see longer hours. I would like to see more discussion of what their services are. I'd like to see more outreach, maybe it's just in Manhattan. Maybe Brooklyn is great. I don't know. But I will say that I think we all need to work on the services that they provide. Fourth, is the one shot system. I have the greatest respect as everyone knows for the HRA staff that does the one shot. But many families end up in DHS because they don't have a third party to pay the ongoing rent. It is-- like, I would love to know the number of families or the percentage of facilities who are DHS because they don't have the third party rent. And so let's work together to figure that

1 out. Maybe we should couple it with job  
2 services that are expedited so that we have an  
3 intensive job search while we are going through  
4 the one shot process. Obviously, somebody has  
5 to do it, but that's something that needs to be  
6 evaluated. We'd save a lot of apartments at 900  
7 dollars a month instead of paying 3,500 dollars  
8 a month in the system. I talked a little bit  
9 about the city's portion of section eight. We  
10 all get lots of calls. Families didn't know  
11 that the city wasn't paying, something  
12 happened, they get evicted, they need up in  
13 court, they don't know what the paperwork is,  
14 and that's just because the section eight  
15 portion that the government pays wasn't paid.  
16 The family's been paying their section eight  
17 rent. More people know than I do about the FEPS  
18 program, but I know that families have only six  
19 months to utilize the voucher, and sometimes  
20 it's tied to an eviction, so that program needs  
21 to be looked at. The families who are  
22 increasing the shelter, I think you know it's  
23 obviously people who are aging out of foster  
24 care, families who are generational in the  
25

system, and I think people who just need skills and just don't have the skills to navigate. So those are all the people who need to be addressed before they end up in shelter.

Finally, the stumbling blocks when you're in there. The number of supportive units, housing units, is not adequate. So you apply, you get all your paperwork in, and then you don't hear.

You have bad credit, you are a great family, you function extremely well, but you don't end up with an apartment because owners won't rent to you, so you have--and getting credit correct

is a challenge. In order to have a job today

you have to have a GED. I know the Education

Committee will deal with the GED issue. It

costs money unless you can get a waiver. It's

online. It's more challenging. I just want to

make sure that every family in DHS, some of the

wonderful programs like Volunteers of America

have onsite GED. Does every family have

opportunities to get GED training and be able

to get help in passing it. Obviously we need

the childcare. Some of the places, some of the

shelters have 24 hour shelter, 24 hour

1 childcare. You work at the airport, you work at  
2 a shift job, someone's got to watch your kids  
3 while you're at your job. So you're in the  
4 shelter, you're working you're trying to get  
5 out, you got to have childcare and it's got to  
6 be 24 hours a day. I think the other issue is  
7 if you're a young person, you're 19, you have a  
8 child, you're in shelter, but you're still on  
9 your mother's budget, oh my goodness. You  
10 don't like your mother. You have a big fight  
11 with your mother. I understand that, but you  
12 have to untangle the situation so that you can  
13 both get a budget. That's often a challenge.  
14 We love the Parks Department Number Six, their  
15 excellent program to have people work within  
16 the parks after performing services there.  
17 That's been cut back. I think it should be  
18 reinstated. Obviously if you get into NYCHA you  
19 have been, you know, you've won the golden  
20 goose so to speak, but it takes a lot of time  
21 to do that paperwork. Can that be streamlined?  
22 There is a housing subsidy for ACS cases but no  
23 one that I know in the case work world knows  
24 how in the world to access it. It's 350 dollars

per month. It's for nonpreventive cases, so I don't know how small the number of families is, but that's a question mark in everybody's mind. And then of course, government can be very slow in providing the upfront money when you finally find an apartment. So you lose the apartment because the owner isn't going to wait, and I think if you move out of New York, which I know is an issue. Some people want to move, some people don't. I just don't know if that's good for the family and is it good for the next jurisdiction. So, and then finally, domestic violence is only three months. As you know, the families who are in DB really love the case work, they love the support that they get there, but if you're on there for three months and then you have to go, sometimes it's not as great at the next place. So these are just some of the ideas that I've gotten over the years, and I look forward to working with you. It's my understanding, I could be wrong, but it's millions and millions of dollars that are allocated to the DHS budget. I'm sure it's spent well, but could we please use it for

permanent housing. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Borough President. Thank you for your numerous ideas and for bringing them to this committee and having them on the record, and they will-- we will certainly be cataloging them, acting on them. They're extremely helpful and I want to acknowledge your contribution to this committee during your tenure in the Council and for bringing all these ideas and for fighting for all these ideas and for sometimes sounding like a voice in the wilderness because they have fallen on deaf ears from time to time, but I'm hopeful that moving forward in the new administration that they are going to take your suggestions which often are, you know, much more practical than the system that's in place, and so I really--

GALE BREWER: [interposing] We're looking forward to you being Chair. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. Thank you Madam Borough President.

[applause] Normally we don't allow applause, but for Gale we'll make an exception. With that I want to call the Administration, Gilbert Taylor, Commissioner of Department of Homeless Service, Yianna Pavlakos, Deputy Commissioner, and Julia Davis-Moten, Deputy Commissioner at DHS. Thank you very much, Commissioner for joining us today. I look forward to a productive relationship and for your leadership during these really vital times. So with that I will ask you to present your testimony.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Good morning, Chair Levin and members of the General Welfare Committee. I am Gilbert Taylor, the Commissioner of--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Commissioner, can I interrupt one second. I just want to acknowledge that we've been joined by our colleague Vanessa Gibson and Fernando Cabrera from the Bronx. Thank you.

GILBERT TAYLOR: I am Gilbert Taylor, the Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services. Joining me is Julia Davis Moten, Deputy Commissioner for Family Services

and Yianna Pavlakos, the Deputy Commissioner for Facility Maintenance and Development. Today we will provide an overview of our family services systems and discuss conditions and operations in facilities that serve homeless families with children. Thank you for hosting this hearing and for highlighting the important issue of family homelessness. I did read the New York Times article which the committee referenced in scheduling this hearing prior to my arrival at DHS, and I too was struck by the need to improve the conditions in our family shelter system. I began working this position seven weeks ago and committed to the Mayor and to the clients that we serve that I would work with the dedicated staff at DHS to make a difference in this area. I'll begin my testimony this morning by sharing two examples which illustrate the complex and varied needs of the families we serve in the New York City shelter system. Family A entered shelter last November and was comprised of a single mother with two children, ages 22 and 15. Family A had left shelter several years ago with the

1 assistance of an advantagemental [phonetic]  
2 subsidy but returned after the building in  
3 which they had lived fell into foreclosure. The  
4 family was placed into a shelter in Queens  
5 where the mother and the eldest child  
6 maintained their employment and routinely met  
7 with their case worker to plan for their return  
8 to independent living. After only three months  
9 of working closely with their case manager in  
10 shelter, family A was able to secure an  
11 apartment. Last Friday with the additional help  
12 of an HRA enhanced one shot deal, which  
13 provided the family with four months of rent in  
14 addition to the 1,700 dollars which they had  
15 been able to save. The family exited shelter  
16 for their new apartment. Family B situation is  
17 a bit more complex. Family B is comprised of a  
18 two parent household whose 10 children and four  
19 grandchildren have been part of their family  
20 composition during their stays in shelter. An  
21 eviction, after an eviction the family first  
22 entered shelter 17 years ago. Over the course  
23 of that time Family B exited twice with the  
24 assistance of a rental subsidy and both times  
25

returned to shelter after being evicted. The family is currently residing with their grandchild in shelter, while some of their own adult children are now also shelter residents with families of their own. Family B has lived in nine different shelters operated by nine different social service providers. The parents have multiple barriers including a history of mental health issues, substance abuse, medical issues, and a limited benefits income. Family B has had difficulty engaging with case workers who have tried to connect them to the financial benefits and other resources which they will need to live independently. At this time, the family has begun working with the shelter staff towards obtaining permanent housing. The work that we do at DHS requires compassion, collaboration, and transparency. As Commissioner of this agency, it is my intention to learn more about our clients and shelter to better address their needs. I will also prioritize working closely with the communities in the city that host our shelters and strive to strengthen the relationship between our

various nonprofit and government partners who assist us in this challenging work. As you may know, the city of New York is legally mandated to provide shelter to every homeless family and individual who is eligible for services. This obligation sets us apart from many other cities across the nation, many of whom turn families away or place them on a waiting list once shelters are full. In New York, families seeking shelter must apply at the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Path Intake Center, a state of the art ecofriendly facility which opened in the Spring of 2011. Located in the Bronx, Path is designed to serve families more efficiently and to make them feel secure in their surrounding from entry to departure. Path brings several city agencies under one roof to coordinate care including HRA, the Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Education and has been physically structured and staffed to meet the complex needs of families that we serve. As I've discussed with Chair Levin, I'd be honored to host the General Welfare Committee on a tour of

Path in the coming months. We at DHS are extremely proud of Path and I plan to build on its successful function to improve every family experience by providing them with the most appropriate, safe, and well run shelters that we can. Under state and local law and court order, DHS must place families in shelter pending investigation of their application for temporary housing assistance. As a practical matter, this means that the agency must shelter families the same day they apply, a feat which we achieve 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. As part of the shelter placement process, the agency's Housing Emergency Referral Operations unit also known as HERO is responsible for placing families into shelter. HERO takes into account various factors unique to each family such as the household size and composition. In cases of domestic violence, HERO also has to consider placing families in specific boroughs to ensure the safety of all family members. HERO strives to place families in the school district of their youngest child and if medical conditions

1  
2 exist, they consider proximity to the client's  
3 healthcare provider. Each and every day HERO  
4 must and does balance each family's placement  
5 needs against the current availability of units  
6 that best meet the needs of--that best meet  
7 those needs in making shelter placements.

8 Currently, DHS oversees 151 shelters that serve  
9 more than 10,000 families with children  
10 throughout the five boroughs. In an effort to  
11 meet family's specific needs as outlined above,  
12 we utilize several shelter models. All shelters  
13 are required to provide services in a safe,  
14 decent and clean environment. These services  
15 include development of an independent living  
16 plan setting forth specific steps that families  
17 will take to return to the community in  
18 assisting the family with completing each step  
19 such as applying for public assistance or other  
20 benefits or helping families search for  
21 apartments. The shelter system is currently  
22 comprised of 88 tier two shelters, 48 non tier  
23 two shelters and 15 cluster programs. Tier  
24 two's are contracted stand alone buildings  
25 operated by nonprofit providers and four sites

that DHS directly operates which offer rigorous services including case management, recreational space and programing and services to link families to housing resources. Some tier two shelters provide onsite medical services and onsite childcare. Cluster programs provide services similar to tier twos, however, in most cases the apartment units are located in multiple buildings. Formerly known as scatter site apartments, families with children residing in contracted cluster units are provided with an array of social services including case management and housing referrals. Hotels refer to buildings that historically functioned as hotels prior to their use as shelter. Staff at these sites also provide services to assist families in exiting shelter for permanent housing. The safety of our families in shelter is a top priority for DHS. We staff our directly operated shelters with a combination of DHS peace officers and contracted security guards. Living by the model, policing with compassion, DHS police officers regularly manage their enforcement

duties will understanding that clients in shelter are often households in crisis. Revolutionizing the methods of policing depend on social service framework, peace officers pledge to maintain a public peace, value human life, respect each individual and render services with courtesy, pride and civility while displaying the highest standard of integrity. All of our nonprofit provider partners are also required to take measure at the shelters they operate to ensure client and staff safety. DHS maintains 24 city-owned buildings that serve as shelters of families with children. Of these, four are currently directly operated sites, Auburn, Catherine Street, Jamaica and Flatlands. While the remaining 20 are operated by nonprofit providers. While DHS is responsible for the management and execution of capital projects at all two dozen facilities, we also oversee the day to day maintenance of the four shelters that we directly operate. Prior to the opening of any new family shelter or cluster site, the agencies facilities maintenance and development

1 division inspects all units to ensure that they  
2 are in good and safe physical condition. If  
3 not, families will not be place there until  
4 remedial actions are taken. Thereafter, FMD  
5 conducts biannual inspections of all family  
6 shelters to ensure that they remain in good  
7 condition, free of hazardous conditions. FMD  
8 utilizes a 360 instrument--350 item instrument  
9 in conducting these inspections known as a  
10 routine site review inspections or RSRI's,  
11 which entail a thorough review of the physical  
12 condition including cleanliness of each unit,  
13 the common areas and the buildings integrity as  
14 a whole. All items requiring repair are noted  
15 and shelter operators are required to submit  
16 corrective action plans detailing what action  
17 will be taken to rectify each issue and a  
18 timeline for completion. DHS also responds to  
19 repair requests by shelter families or  
20 community representatives acting on their  
21 behalf. We ensure that the repair is promptly  
22 made and if it cannot be done quickly we take  
23 the unit off line and move the family to  
24 another unit. DHS's Family Services Division

also conducts biannual performance evaluations of each shelter, which includes a two pronged assessment, an evaluation of the staff's programmatic efforts to assist families in returning to the community and an assessment of the physical condition of the shelter including the cleanliness and over all condition of each unit. Here again upon receipt of the performance evaluation, the provider is required to submit a corrective action plan for Family Services review and approval. In addition to FMD's inspection and Family Services performance evaluations, each shelter is required to conduct biweekly health and safety inspections of each unit. Unit inspections are conducted on a weekly basis for families with newborns, those with an active ACS case and those who have been in shelter for more than two years. The shelter staff is responsible for ensuring that needed repairs are made and that families who require additional counseling on maintaining a safe and clean unit receive the same. Last week, DHS announced a plan to convert Auburn and

Catherine Street shelters from families with children sites the facilities that will serve homeless adult families. The agency has been working vigorously with families at both sites helping them to transition to permanent housing and transferring them to other shelters where they will continue to receive comprehensive case management and services. The transfer process is being structured to maintain educational stability and continuity of school enrollment for special attention being paid to the youngest school aged children in each household. Due to our significant and ongoing need for shelter capacity, we cannot close the Auburn and Catherine Street shelters entirely. Rather, we will invest substantial funds into the overhaul of both facilities. These upgrades will make both sites well equipped to serve the adult family population while also allowing families with children to move to private units that are more suitable for children. In addition, our planning also includes projects that will be of value to the communities that host these shelters. The Mayor's preliminary

budget directs 1.3 million dollars in fiscal year 2014 to improve security and programming at both shelters. Funding for facility renovations have already been included in DHS's capital plan for Auburn and Catherine Street. These include increased security. DHS has enhanced security at both sites. There has been an increase of more than 100 licensed security guards at Auburn and an additional 20 guards at Catherine Street who are assigned to them under all operational client bathrooms at the site. DHS is also in the process of installing closed circuit television, CC TV systems and both Auburn and Catherine Street to provide an additional level of monitoring. Facility improvements--scheduled to commence shortly, physical plant improvements will begin this year and will include modifications to the existing units and a complete gut renovation of the bathrooms at each facility. New programming for adult families at Aurburn, DHS's plan is to work with the community to create a culinary arts training program on the ground floor of the shelter. This resource will

be accessible to both for use by both Auburn clients and neighborhood residents. The Catherine Street plan includes a security training and job placement program in the facility's newly renovated gymnasium which will also be used for adult basketball leagues, and be accessible to members of the surrounding community on the lower east side. Since January of this year, DHS has successfully relocated a number of families who had been residing at Auburn either to no congregate shelters or to permanent housing. The agency has utilized the resulting vacancies to shelter families during code blue periods which are triggered by inclement weather conditions. As one of Mayor de Blasio's first directives in office, he instructed DHS to suspend the discharge of ineligible families and automatically grant temporary shelters to all the applicant families during code blue periods. The transformation of Auburn and Catherine Street facilities is the first step in the de Blasio Administration's efforts to reform and improve the families with children shelter system. I'm

1 acutely aware and focused on the agency's  
2 efforts to improve the quality of shelter for  
3 the city's homeless families. Together with our  
4 nonprofit providers we can successfully assist  
5 many more New Yorkers to transition back to  
6 independent living. By conducting thorough  
7 inspections, holding ourselves to consistently  
8 high standards and providing intensive case  
9 management and an abundance of support to our  
10 clients, we will be successful in these  
11 efforts. I look forward to working with each of  
12 you to advocate for additional resources and  
13 funding where necessary to make our goal a  
14 reality. I will also keep you informed so that  
15 we can work together to enact the much needed  
16 policy solutions that will help our families  
17 and individuals through their crisis and  
18 stabilize them in their own homes. The Deputy  
19 Commissioners and I are now available to answer  
20 any questions that you may have. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
23 much, Commissioner. I appreciate your  
24 testimony. I have one question and then I'm  
25 going to turn it over to my colleagues for

1 questions and the we have some time for  
2 everyone's information. We have until 1:00 in  
3 this room, at which time there's another  
4 hearing that is scheduled. So we will proceed  
5 with questions for the Commissioner and the  
6 Deputy Commissioners for about another hour or  
7 so and then we'll have public testimony for  
8 about an hour. Commissioner, I wanted to thank  
9 you for taking your staff, Deputy Commissioner  
10 and other staff members taking me on a tour  
11 yesterday of the Auburn Facility with Council  
12 Member Laurie Cumbo who represents the 35<sup>th</sup>  
13 district in Brooklyn. And I was pleased to see  
14 that significant upgrades have been made within  
15 the facility, at least to the extent that maybe  
16 not total major capital upgrades, but that  
17 major glaring problems that were highlighted in  
18 the New York Times piece and that were cited by  
19 OTDA and were cited by clients. Many of those  
20 seem to have been remedied, at least to--as it  
21 appeared to me. I realize that I did not--I  
22 wasn't able to see the entire facility, you  
23 know, every single room, but the facility seems  
24 to have gotten a lot of resources in recent  
25

months and I think that that is a good thing, and I want to again acknowledge and commend the administration for the steps that you are taking not only for the capital upgrades that are going to be happening at those facilities, but also for the policy directive to have facilities for adult families but not families with children. One thing that struck me as a--I was thinking about it last night after my visit that, and it goes back to maybe kind of the bigger picture. We met a client who we saw a room, we saw her room that she shares with her two children and I was very impressed with her room. She was--it was cleaner than my apartment. It was--she had--and it was not a very big room. It was, again, her and her two young children but it was clear that she took a lot of pride in her living environment and was doing really everything that she could to make the best of a not a great situation. She works for the security company that actually provides security at the Auburn shelter. She doesn't work at that shelter, but she works for that company. So she's gainfully employed and she's

working hard and I actually had the opportunity to meet her kids, too, downstairs in the recreation area. However, when I asked her how long she had been at Auburn, she replied two years. So well beyond the average length of stay as it is currently, which is now 13 months or more, and that to me illustrated broadly the challenge that we face right now and really the failure of the system up 'til now for how to achieve--how to help people achieve self sufficiency. So I guess my first question would be can you detail to me and to this committee the range of support services that are provided to families, including employment services and education services, other family support services, the range and for city run shelters, for not for profit run contracted tier twos, and then in hotels and cluster sites. If there's a range, can you detail that range and talk maybe a little bit about how we're approaching that issue, because what concerned me is how could it be that somebody that is gainfully employed, in the system, has an ILP, is clearly capable of being in permanent

1 housing and why she's there--why these children  
2 are spending their youth in Auburn because--and  
3 again, I just want to emphasize that for  
4 children to spend half of their lives in that  
5 environment leaves an indelible impact on them,  
6 and they deserve frankly much better than that.  
7

8 GILBERT TAYLOR: So, Chair Levin, I  
9 will let my Deputy for Family Speak with you  
10 and share with the committee what our full  
11 service array is for families with children who  
12 are in our shelter system, but before she does,  
13 I wanted to share a few things that resonated  
14 with me from your comments just a moment ago.  
15 Before being appointed to this position, well  
16 actually before beginning to work in this  
17 position, I visited Auburn while I was still at  
18 my last place of employed, The Administration  
19 for Children Services, and have visited Auburn  
20 subsequent to starting as well. And within the  
21 first seven weeks in addition to those visits,  
22 some things that I've asked my staff to prepare  
23 for me have been the following. In order to get  
24 a sense of who our clients are I've asked for a  
25 review of all cases where clients had been in

1 shelter for over a two year period, and I want  
2 that review to be completed and submitted to me  
3 so that I can get a sense of who our clients  
4 are, who the children and families are in our  
5 shelter system. In keeping with that interest  
6 why I began my testimony by speaking about two  
7 cases is because I felt that it was important  
8 as we describe and talk about the shelter  
9 system, that we remember the shelter system  
10 exists for those who are in shelter, and the  
11 work going forward has to be tailored and has  
12 to be responsive to what their needs are. The  
13 information that I've obtained in seven weeks  
14 that I've been in the seat has been the  
15 following, that the three main reasons for  
16 shelter entry include eviction, domestic  
17 violence and overcrowding. And when I looked at  
18 the data sets that are kept by the agency and  
19 that are provided to me by my deputies, the  
20 length of stay in shelter is over a year, as  
21 you know, and I need to get a sense as to why  
22 that is the case. Also just generally in terms  
23 of our trends, the number of shelter entries  
24 continues to outpace the number of placements  
25

1 and shelter exits. And that is why we are  
2 continuously in need of additional capacity.  
3 And until we formulate strategies that can help  
4 change that dynamic, we're going to have some  
5 challenges in terms of moving this system to a  
6 different place. And until we do that, we have  
7 to ensure that the shelter services that we  
8 provide to individuals, families and children  
9 who are in our system are truly those that will  
10 help them to attain independent living. So,  
11 having said that, I'll ask Deputy Commissioner  
12 Moten to tell you a bit about specific services  
13 that are in each of our shelters.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you  
16 Commissioner.

17 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Okay, well our  
18 tier two shelters provide more intensive case  
19 management services for our families and when  
20 families come into our shelter system there is  
21 a general assessment that's done. After that  
22 assessment is completed, the case workers and  
23 the case management staff work with the  
24 families to develop what's called an  
25 independent living plan and that independent

1 living plan sort of sets forth you know, the  
2 tasks and the milestones of the families we'll  
3 undertake in order to move to permanency and  
4 the task could be many. It could be securing  
5 employment, opening up a public assistance  
6 case. It could be maintaining the employment  
7 that you have or upgrading the employment  
8 because we do have a lot of families in our  
9 system. They are employed, but they're under  
10 employed, and they don't make enough to be able  
11 to go out and afford the market rate apartments  
12 as it is now, and the family that we saw  
13 yesterday, I don't know if you were in the room  
14 when she said it, she just started the job two  
15 weeks ago and prior to that she had been in a  
16 number of training programs. She had been in a  
17 number of under employed jobs. So she has  
18 really just gotten a job that will help her  
19 save enough money so that she can move out and  
20 we've worked with her all along while she's  
21 been there to help her make those steps. For  
22 some families it takes a little longer than  
23 others. Some families come in with employable  
24 skills and some don't. Some have to start at  
25

1 the beginning. So once an IOP--once the IOP has  
2 been completed, the case managers will work  
3 with that family. We actually--most shelters  
4 will escort families to public assistance in  
5 order to make sure that there is case is as  
6 open and help them make sure that that case  
7 maintains--that they maintain an active and  
8 open PA case. We escort clients to housing  
9 search. We also give them leads. In addition to  
10 many families who are working in the Back to  
11 Work Program with HRA, the case managers also  
12 provide leads for employment, you know. We get  
13 job las [phonetic] on Work Force One, you know,  
14 and other employment agencies that we send our  
15 families to. We have in the evening families  
16 come back in to the facility, even the working  
17 families. There are some families that we need  
18 to make sure that they can upgrade their  
19 employment. For those other families, you know,  
20 we do interviews, job interview skills, making  
21 sure that they're able to go out and interview  
22 for a job. So, a lot of that is done with the  
23 case management staff and a lot of what happens  
24 is that families need a lot of support when  
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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. Because of budgetary reasons, is that--was that accurate or is there--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: No, it's not-- it's not because of budgetary reason. At the Auburn shelter the case managers are responsible for the entire case load. We don't separate the, you know, we don't separate out the services. You know, they work with the client as a whole.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so then so there's not specific housing specialists or employment specialists particularly in DH--in the DHS run tier twos, but for the not for profit tier twos that may be an option because--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
They do have--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] the not for profit has the discretion to establish their own protocols according to their not for profit.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: I wouldn't say that they have the--that they can establish

1                   their own protocols, you know, but what they--  
2                   if they have case managers that they want to  
3                   look at the client in a holistic approach, you  
4                   know, they will have, you know, other  
5                   specialties other than maybe a housing  
6                   specialist, and the case management staff as  
7                   does in the DHS operated sites are responsible  
8                   for that entire case load.

10                  GILBERT TAYLOR: But there are sites  
11                  that do have housing specialists and it's a  
12                  model that, you know, obviously we would want  
13                  to have available to our shelters.

14                  CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right. I'm  
15                  just thinking that sometimes certain case  
16                  managers may have a strength in one area and  
17                  not necessarily an other area. You know, I've  
18                  worked at a not for profit. There was some  
19                  housing people. There was some employment  
20                  people--

21                  JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
22                  Right.

23                  CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and they kind of  
24                  did different things.

25                  JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So is that a model that DHS is looking at of kind of saying maybe essentially train the trainers, make sure that case managers that are tasked with helping to find employment have some expertise in that area or those case managers that are helping with specifically with helping a family find permanent housing have a housing background.

GILBERT TAYLOR: So, I'm looking actually at our structures right now as I begin in this role, and wanting to make assessments as to whether more what I would call a generalist model, whether that is as successful as opposed to having individual staff who have expertise in various areas including having a housing specialist. So I am examining it. I will continue to examine it to understand what resources are available for directly operated sites and meet with our providers to understand what resources are available to them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.  
Public Advocate James, do you have any questions?

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: So thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you Commissioner. I know you and I've had a--and your staff have had a number of meetings since my election to this office and the entire city as you know was moved by the New York Times article, the story of Dasani Coates. And her story really represents a symbol of the homeless crisis in the city of New York and as you mentioned there are 22,000 Dasani's in the city, and near the end of last year homeless families with children constituted about 79 percent of the city's shelter population and the average stay for families with children is now 13 months, roughly 409 days and it might be more than that. And my concern as you know since we've had a number of discussions is since there are over 22,000 children in the system there are more likely than their peers to experience acute and chronic health problems, developmental delays, clinical depression, anxiety, behavior problems, and on average they missed about 31 days of school each term. They performed lower on tests and they're more apt

1  
2 to repeat their grades over and over again as a  
3 result of their situation which is through no  
4 fault of their own. That was the reason why I  
5 held up Dasani Coates hand during my  
6 inauguration, to let her know that there was--  
7 there's a number of us in the City Council and  
8 the Mayor's Office who are now--who are very  
9 much concerned about her situation and we're  
10 going to work 24 hours a day to try to address  
11 it, despite the fact that most of the media  
12 didn't get it. So my first question to you is  
13 are there any restrictions currently in the  
14 City of New York to draw down any federal money  
15 so that we can provide assistance to homeless  
16 families?

17 GILBERT TAYLOR: Not that I--not that  
18 I know of. I have been informed that we are  
19 seeking to tap into as many resources as we  
20 possibly can to support families and  
21 individuals who are in our shelter system. To  
22 your point, Public Advocate, thinking about  
23 ways in which we can improve life outcomes for  
24 children and particularly children who are in  
25 the shelter system is at the forefront of my

agenda. Improving educational outcomes and improving health outcomes, improving just life outcomes in general is something that we have to take on. So that means, in my opinion, as I begin this work understanding who those children are, understanding where they are being sheltered, that led us to make the decisions that we made around Auburn and Catherine Street. It was in very quick order, and after very quick inspection that I was able to decide and, you know, the Mayor was able to agree that those were not places that we should be sheltering children towards the end of improving their life outcomes. And if we're able to tap into resources that will help us to support those children and their families, because I've always said you can't help children unless we help their families. We will make every effort to do so. That also includes thinking about cross system families and thinking about families that are also known to other agencies within our city, and the work that intend to do with my Deputy Commissioner is to ensure that we're leveraging all

resources that might be available to a cross system family or multi system involved family, families that certainly may have child welfare involvement, families that may have benefits cases with HRA obviously and thinking about what resources we can bring to bear as a city in order to help children and to help their families.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And let me also publicly thank you and your staff for updating me on the status of the Coates family, Dasani giving me weekly progress reports on her family. I just want to thank you for doing that. Federal vouchers and section eight vouchers and housing assistance, the best way to deal with homelessness is obviously have a permanent home. What's the status with respect to section eight vouchers, federal vouchers, housing assistance programs? Do you anticipate bringing back the advantage program or something similar notwithstanding the criticism of the program? Are there any housing assistance programs on the horizon?

GILBERT TAYLOR: They can all help. They are being actively discussed obviously. They are resources that if they were available they would enable us to get what to had I spoken about in terms of the entries into shelter outpacing the exits and placements from shelter. So there's lots of conversation taking place here at City Hall as well as at DHS and across agencies on all of those topics. I don't have a definitive answer for you right now.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Sure.

GILBERT TAYLOR: And I'm not ready to say that this will be the rental subsidy because I don't know what it will be. I don't have the answer for that right now.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Can we begin with public housing? At one point in time homeless families were not on the waiting list. Are we going to reform that?

GILBERT TAYLOR: So, I've already begun conversations with NYCHA. The new Chair has been appointed. I'm expecting to meet with her when she begins work in her new role, but

I've already spoken with her staff since I took my position--

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: [interposing]  
Right.

GILBERT TAYLOR: to begin thinking of ways in which we can look at the priority and relink it. And I want to have that conversation continue. Again, what it will look like, the contours of it, I'm not fully--I can't say at this moment, but the conversations have begun between our two agencies.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Is it true that the current cost with regards to housing these families is at or around a billion dollars, is that a true statement? What are our total costs?

GILBERT TAYLOR: The total cost for shelter?

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Sheltering all, yeah, the homeless.

GILBERT TAYLOR: The entire--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Single adults, family, yeah. I was told that it's around a billion. Is that inaccurate?

GILBERT TAYLOR: So I'm being told the whole system is a billion.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: It's a billion dollars. And is there any coordination with the new Administration coordination with HPD to ensure that this initiative that the Mayor is envisioning will include setting aside a more robust number of units for low income individuals, formerly homeless and the list goes on and on and on.

GILBERT TAYLOR: So those conversations have begun by way of task force.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Okay.

GILBERT TAYLOR: It's been convened here at City Hall.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: So there is a task force?

GILBERT TAYLOR: There is and we are active participants. We have--it's an interagency task force that's looking at what's been spoken to in terms of housing resources. Work just began and DHS is at the table and we are having conversations about all of what you are referencing.

1  
2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: My last two  
3 questions, and Mr. Chairman, I thank you for  
4 your indulgence. The part of the challenges  
5 related to the Dasani Coates family was that  
6 there were 10 members of the family, eight  
7 children, two adults. My understanding based on  
8 our conversation is that there are 33 similar  
9 family units in the system, 33 other large  
10 families with eight or more children in the  
11 homeless system. Is that true, 32?

12 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yeah, I think  
13 the number is a little higher than that. After  
14 I spoke to you yesterday I checked the numbers.

15 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: What is that  
16 number?

17 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: It's really about  
18 maybe about 100.

19 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: There's 100  
20 with eight or more children?

21 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

22 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And with one  
23 or two adults?

24 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.  
25

1  
2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And is there  
3 a special unit dealing with the challenges  
4 related to large families? I mean, I have  
5 seven sisters and brother, I too come from a  
6 large family, two siblings, seven sisters and  
7 brothers. We lived in a house. We lost the  
8 house. We were once homeless, and we had to  
9 separate, which is why I'm very much concerned  
10 about this issue, which is why I take this very  
11 serious and very personal. So what are we  
12 doing? Again, is there a unit focusing on  
13 large families?

14 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Right. There's  
15 not a specific unit that's focusing on large  
16 families, but each provider is tasked with  
17 working with all of the families that are in  
18 their facility and when they look at a family  
19 size and income, they take all of that under  
20 consideration when they're doing permanency  
21 planning.

22 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And so  
23 permanency planning, the plan that is created  
24 when a family first enters PATH, is there a  
25

case worker that stays with that family from inception to exit?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: When the families are assigned to a particular shelter, yes. They have a--there is a case manager that works with that family.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: To follow that plan?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes. And they meet with the case worker, meets with the families either on a weekly basis or a biweekly basis.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: So because clearly prevention is key, but also making sure that the services are rich, because again, going back to the Coates family, there were a number of issues, substance abuse, education, skill sets, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and I don't believe that one agency can be responsible for dealing with the homeless crisis in the city of New York. It requires a multitude of agencies and so again, dealing with those large families or--are all other--

are other agencies involved in addressing or meeting the goals of the plan?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: If they're involved with other agencies where most of them are, yes, they do--we, you know, they do collaborate with those other agencies to do, you know, case management planning and permanency planning because we don't want one agency to have independent living plans for the family and another agency that might be working at odd, so you know, we work together.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Also, in this Administration we have a unique opportunity to really leverage the resources and to have strong conversation with agencies that are servicing families who are in our shelter system. You know, it's something that I've already begin discussing with some of our sister agencies and the health and human services portfolio. So, those conversations will continue towards the end of what you're suggesting.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And my conversations with Dasani, she still attends

265 in Fort Greene. She loves her school. She loves artwork. She loves my red coat. She-- yeah, thank you. She was--but when she--but when I visited Auburn, the number--there were the children, they were about maybe 75 children in a room. There were only--at that time there were about 10 computers and I was concerned about making sure that there is individuals who can assist the children with getting to school on time, their health needs, and assisting them with their homework when they return, and that was Auburn. And so can you tell me a little bit about meeting the educational needs of the children in homeless shelters?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Right. The majority of the shelters have a DOE liaison on site and the shelter staff and DOE liaisons work closely together to ensure that kids get out to school in the morning. You know, there's a state sign out log that the families sign out when they're taking their kids to school. If kids haven't signed out, DOE works with the shelter staff. We knock on doors to make sure that the kids and parents are up and people are

going to school. When new families come into the shelter we work with the DOE liaison in order to get that client or the child registered in school. If that client needs transportation, you know, we also collaborate with DOE on making sure that the clients have-- the child has the transportation that they need to get back and forth to school.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: And their health needs?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Well, on the health needs, a few of our shelters have onsite medical and the providers that don't have onsite medical clients are referred into the community. A lot of times when families come into the system they are already connected to a medical provider. So they ensure that, you know, they continue.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: So again, I want to continue to follow up with you with regards to this, the homeless system. I know that there's some structural problems related to the homeless system. I know that the de Blasio Administration is only eight weeks in,

1 but clearly we look forward to working with you  
2 in our office, you know, Office of Public  
3 Advocate. As of to date we've received over  
4 2,500 calls. Over the majority of those calls  
5 were related to one, income supports, and two,  
6 trying to find an affordable housing unit in  
7 the city of New York, and so clearly we'd love  
8 to work with you to address this and to stem  
9 the tie of homelessness in the city of New  
10 York. And I thank you for all that you have  
11 done, and again, another shot out to a  
12 wonderful organization in my former district,  
13 SNAP, under the leadership of Doctor Close,  
14 who's done a great job dealing with Auburn  
15 before the article and with all the homeless  
16 shelters in downtown Brooklyn. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
19 Public Advocate James. I just wanted to ask  
20 actually, do you know if Dasani is still  
21 participating in the bartenders [phonetic]  
22 program, the fitness program that she was  
23 involved in?

24 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Dasani is a  
25 very active young girl, and she--they give me a

1  
2 update and she's still active and she's  
3 involved in our programs and we plan on  
4 involving her in many more including her  
5 siblings, and my last thought is I know that  
6 some of her siblings were disabled. Could you  
7 just, lastly, just talk a little bit about the  
8 status of those disabled siblings?

9 GILBERT TAYLOR: So we're not able to  
10 speak--we're not able to generally share case  
11 information because of confidentiality but we  
12 are--I'm personally watching that case very  
13 closely as is my Deputy, and as our staff, and  
14 I will tell you that their needs are being  
15 attended to.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
17 much, Public Advocate. We've also been joined  
18 by Council Member Ruben Wills. I want to thank  
19 him for joining us. Council Member Vanessa  
20 Gibson has questions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you.  
22 Thank you and congratulations Commissioner and  
23 Deputy Commissioners. Thank you for your  
24 presence and your testimony today. So I have  
25 always a lot to say around the crisis in New

York City on homelessness, so I will keep my remarks brief and certainly this ongoing conversation. This is not the last opportunity in which we will speak. And I do, you know, applaud the Administration for the efforts to reform Catherine and the Auburn facilities. Certainly we know that it highlights a greater issue and we certainly need to do a lot of the work in terms of reforming our facilities. I guess I frame my remarks on my past experience. I served as a member of the State Assembly. I sat on Children and Families and Social Services. I was a part of the effort to attempt to save the Advantage Program because I recognize that although it had hurdles and challenges, there were many families that benefitted from Advantage. I remember the old days of housing stability plus. I represent Bronx County. I represent the PATH Center when we used to call it the EAU before we invested millions of dollars into making it a facility that really caters to multi agencies and the fact that, you know, it's not just homelessness. It's healthcare. It's mental

1 health. It's education. It's a lot of other  
2 components. Again, so my general concern has  
3 always been with the siting of homeless  
4 shelters. The Bronx has shouldered the burden  
5 of a citywide problem for many years, and  
6 that's been problematic. My community accepts  
7 all homeless families. We have adult facilities  
8 for women and men. We have family shelters. We  
9 have everything throughout our community. And  
10 so you can imagine that my constituents always  
11 feel that the Bronx has been the dumping ground  
12 for what should be a five borough approach to  
13 sharing in a citywide burden and problem. And  
14 so as we move forward I really have to go on  
15 record in indicating my displeasure in the past  
16 of the fact that low income and minority  
17 communities have always been shouldering the  
18 burden of a problem, and there's been an equal  
19 distribution of what I think should be more  
20 fairly distributed. So we recognize there are  
21 21-22,000 children in shelters. Being that I  
22 represent the intake facility, I also  
23 represented all of the courts in the Bronx too.  
24 So a lot of times when families are in the  
25

1 shelter system and they are able to get into  
2 some sort of permanent housing and for many  
3 reasons they fall back on hard times, they're  
4 in housing court. So either way they come to my  
5 office, right, whether they're in housing court  
6 or PATH. As the public advocate has indicated  
7 it is extremely important that we collectively  
8 look at a new rental subsidy program, because  
9 for all the work, all the advocacy, all the  
10 intervention that we do, we have to recognize  
11 that many of these families that are working as  
12 the Deputy Commissioner has said they're under  
13 employed. They're low wage and minimum wage  
14 earners. So even if we get them in that  
15 permanent housing, the chances of them staying  
16 is very slim and so they're back in the shelter  
17 system and it almost seems like it's a  
18 recycling process of warehousing homeless  
19 families, and I don't want that to be the  
20 perception from anyone across this city as we  
21 move forward. And so whether it's advantage, I  
22 don't really care what we call it, I just want  
23 there to be some subsidy program that the city  
24 and the state o'tada [phonetic] can work

towards so that we can keep these families in permanent housing. Now I do know about the FEPS program because many of the families that were in Advantage that were basically told that Advantage was no longer in existence were grandfathered into FEPS, but FEPS in itself is an egregious process that many providers do not handle, and it's a lengthy process. So not everyone gets into FEPS, so we acknowledge that. The Public Advocate alluded to public housing. That's also something that we could possibly look at in terms of getting back to an emergency status. I'm concerned that with all the work we do it really is almost a waste of our time if we see that there's a recidivism in families returning back into the system. In addition, cluster programs, I forgot what--I used to call the scatter site housing. Many constituents across our communities do not like this program. I do remember during a time there was talk of minimizing the number of families that were in the cluster program. So I would love to know what the future plans are because instead of us focusing on creatively pocketing

homeless families and multi family buildings or shelters and hotels and motels, I think we have to look at the bigger issue, and the fact is is that the homeless population continues to grow and something is wrong. Something is not working and again, the rental subsidy is a huge component that I think I believe will make a difference in keeping people. We don't want them to just get into permanent housing, but we want them to stay and I guess because my office and many of my colleagues, we see it every day. We help them with renter rears and then a couple of months later they're back in the office, and so those cases are heartbreaking and it's really difficult because there is so few resources out there and a lot of the providers they're doing incredible work, but they are limited in the resources that they have. So I guess that's my biggest concern about scatter cluster sites, plans for a new rental subsidy, and I do recognize state and federal have to be involved, but we as a city could be a lead. There's nothing that prohibits us from leading the way, and then in addition

1 future emergencies and anything that comes  
2 about, the siting of these shelters must be  
3 more reflective of an equal process where  
4 minority communities are not hit the hardest,  
5 because the homeless population is not all  
6 minority and we have to recognize that it is  
7 diverse. The public advocate also talked about  
8 large families. That is a concern for me as  
9 well, and I've spoken to HPD about it and it  
10 has to be a part of a broader conversation. I  
11 represent the largest concentration of West  
12 Africans, and they have a large number of  
13 children. So most of our three bedroom  
14 apartments do not work for them, and do you  
15 know where they are? They're in one family  
16 houses with 30 and 40 people, and the only time  
17 you find out they're there, God forbid if  
18 there's a fire or some sort of an emergency do  
19 you find out that there's an overflowing number  
20 of residents living in one family houses. So  
21 that's another concern that I have, and I  
22 really appreciate the work that has been done.  
23 You know, obviously we've come a long way from  
24 homelessness many years ago dealing with street  
25

1  
2 homelessness, but I do think the fact that the  
3 numbers seem to continue to either be stagnant  
4 or growing in certain communities to me is  
5 cause for a greater commitment and a dialogue  
6 that we really have to continue to have and in  
7 particular around resources which will be key.  
8 Oh, sure. So I think the Public Advocate did  
9 raise it and you answered a little bit about  
10 the rental subsidy. Future siting of DHS and  
11 other provider shelters, is there going to be  
12 some level of consideration to make sure that  
13 minority communities do not shoulder the burden  
14 of a citywide homeless problem.

15 GILBERT TAYLOR: So, Council Member,  
16 I think I want to--I will answer that question,  
17 but I also just want to reference our  
18 preventive efforts. You had raised housing  
19 court and eviction cases and housing courts  
20 with your constituents, and just to let you  
21 know that we are looking at our preventive  
22 resources both home base as well as our anti-  
23 eviction programs within our agency and across  
24 the city to think about whether we can resource  
25 them more substantially than we have done so

1 in the past. So expanding prevention is  
2 something that I'm very interested in doing and  
3 really seeking to redouble in our efforts in  
4 that area. To your question about siting, I  
5 will say that in seven weeks I know where our  
6 shelters are. I know where they're placed. I'm  
7 well aware that there are more shelters in some  
8 areas than there are in other areas. And to  
9 your question about siting, it's something that  
10 I've asked my staff to work with me on, and  
11 learning from what the--I can't speak for the  
12 history because I was not at this agency  
13 before, but we can learn from the history.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

15 GILBERT TAYLOR: And we can think  
16 about going forward, what makes sense in terms  
17 of where we place shelters, where we open  
18 shelters, where there is a need, and we can  
19 really be reflective and thoughtful about, you  
20 know, how do we be--how can we be good  
21 neighbors? How can we, you know, add value to  
22 communities in which we're in in a way so that  
23 we're able to meet our mandates to provide  
24 shelter, but also do it in a way that's  
25

responsive to the concerns that you're raising.  
So I don't have an answer. It would be--it  
would be uninformed if I told you in seven  
weeks that I have an answer to that question  
because I don't have one. But is this really on  
my radar? It absolutely is.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And also just  
to make sure that the cluster siting is on your  
radar as well.

GILBERT TAYLOR: That is--

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
To look into that.

GILBERT TAYLOR: There are so many  
things on my radar right now. Cluster sites,  
they're yet another item, and you know, it's  
very interesting as I go and I learn and my  
staff who have been here for many years are  
able to tell me, you know, what had been  
before, and perhaps how we can do things  
differently and how we can think about our use  
of cluster sites and really ensure that we're  
bringing on capacity that meets our need,  
right? So, clusters meet some needs but not all  
needs, and we also have other sites that are

1  
2 currently in production that pre-dated my  
3 arrival and I know that there have been some  
4 concern expressed by communities in which those  
5 sites are slated and actually being constructed  
6 as we speak, and I'm meeting with constituents  
7 and meeting with other Council Members and  
8 having discussions with them about why it is  
9 that we're there, and hearing from them what  
10 their concerns are and trying to take that into  
11 consideration as we continue on course with  
12 these developments. So it is all being looked  
13 at.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Work in  
15 progress.

16 GILBERT TAYLOR: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you. I  
18 appreciate it. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
20 Council Member Gibson. Council Member Ruben  
21 Wills?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Good  
23 afternoon, Mr. Commissioner. Good afternoon to  
24 your two Deputies. Lisa Black [phonetic] good  
25 afternoon. I'm really happy to see you and I'm

1 glad that you were appointed to your post  
2 knowing your history and knowing that the  
3 issues of the Public Advocate. And Council  
4 Member Gibson brought up especially about the  
5 children will be addressed. We have full  
6 confidence that you would do that. Also, just  
7 to let you know that I know you're only seven  
8 weeks in, so we simply can't say what can't be,  
9 you know, the--wouldn't be giving us an  
10 informed decision now, but later that will not  
11 be an exception.

12  
13 GILBERT TAYLOR: Understood.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Okay. The  
15 last Administration really was disrespectful  
16 sending Commissioners before us that had the  
17 information but just never brought it, and that  
18 won't be accepted going forward. Just a couple  
19 of questions. You said that there were three  
20 main issues for families in shelter, domestic  
21 violence, eviction and overcrowding. Can you  
22 please give me a definition on overcrowding,  
23 because we have a lot of constituents that come  
24 into my office and they come from areas, and  
25 this is a two part question, they come from

1 areas that they have previously been living  
2 with the family or something like that in  
3 NYCHA, and they're told to go back to that  
4 apartment to stay or go back where they're at  
5 to stay, but those places are super  
6 overcrowded. So what does that mean that they,  
7 because of overcrowding they're in shelters?

9 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: When we go and  
10 look at a unit and the family is saying that  
11 it's overcrowded, we look to see, you know, how  
12 long that family might have been there and what  
13 has changed in the composition of that  
14 household, why that family can't live there  
15 anymore. For example, if they were there and  
16 the mother now has other children that have now  
17 come back home to live and that family can't  
18 live there, there's not a bed or a room for  
19 that family or the children, then that's what  
20 we consider overcrowding.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIS: So, then what  
22 precautions or protocols do you have in place  
23 with other agencies that may have to deal with  
24 some of these problems where NYCHA for  
25 instance, you wouldn't be able to have a male

1  
2 child over a certain age with a female child,  
3 but they come from this apartment and they try  
4 to get into the shelter, and when they can't  
5 they turn back. They say that they have to go  
6 into NYCHA. We've had three instances with  
7 that. Them as black (sic), has helped us went  
8 from Baisley houses. And it was successfully.  
9 She helped us successfully, but you know, going  
10 forward I want to know like what are we going  
11 to do about that.

12 GILBERT TAYLOR: So the issue of  
13 eligibility is yet another item that I've begun  
14 to inspect, and we try to get a sense of  
15 exactly how we are determining the same. I know  
16 that it is fairly prescribed. There are  
17 eligibility processes, but I don't know whether  
18 they were being consistently applied. I believe  
19 that they are but I want to make sure that that  
20 is true, and to your question, Councilman,  
21 about overcrowding and how it's being defined  
22 by our staff or being represented by those who  
23 are seeking entry into shelter, it's something  
24 that we're going to be looking at.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Okay. I only have about three more questions, Mr. Chair, because I know you have to have time to wrap up things. The family shelters, I know that the placement of family shelters is important, right? But we had an incident and I'm not going to get on the second part of the incident, but the first part of the incident was we had a family shelter that was in my district where the clergy community, the principal went above and beyond what they normally do. This principal actually put in, made sure that the children that went to this shelter had afterschool programming so if the parents were working they wouldn't have to find a safe place for their children to be afterwards, put in enhanced academic programs and different things like that. Through the guise of emergency declaration which the previous Administration used to use it as a lie all the time just to rip out and show up with no community input and hopefully you won't use that. They changed the shelter, but in changing that shelter there was no consideration for

1 those children. They had 10 special needs  
2 children that was in there and from what I  
3 understand they were scattered across the city.  
4 They never gave us where those children ended  
5 up and that's not a privacy issue. They just  
6 didn't want us to show how blatant the problem  
7 was, and the other children who went to that  
8 school would now move to different parts also.  
9 So that being said, what are we doing one, to  
10 make sure that that doesn't happen again, and  
11 two, what are we doing to partner the children  
12 or families in those shelters with points of  
13 confidence in our communities, clergy no matter  
14 what religion or faith they're part of, making  
15 sure that the principals at the school are  
16 taking a proactive approach to dealing with  
17 that and making sure that the services that  
18 these children and these families do need, not  
19 just social services but other things that can  
20 be supplied are being supplied by the community  
21 that you're asking to shoulder part of this  
22 burden.  
23

24 GILBERT TAYLOR: So I can't speak for  
25 the--to the specific example that you're

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: [interposing]  
I'm not even going to go. That'd be a whole  
'nother hour.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: None,  
absolutely none.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Why was it made is something that I'd want to learn more about and consider going forward. With respect to connections to communities and accessing or leveraging resources or building connections with community based organizations and faith based organizations that would be good--that



1 just a couple of weeks ago, a young lady had  
2 three children and we couldn't have her come  
3 into the shelter 'til like two days later  
4 because it was snowing and you know, the  
5 blizzard, whatever happened, but we were--we  
6 were not--we didn't feel comfortable about her  
7 traveling at night time with these three  
8 babies, you know, in public transportation in  
9 the cold and Common Ground didn't have enough  
10 car seats at that time to transport them. So  
11 that's another like way to partner these  
12 agencies and give them the supplies or  
13 something that they would need.

15 GILBERT TAYLOR: I mean, to the  
16 extent that can address that and look at it, I  
17 absolutely will. You know, car seats should  
18 not--the absence of car seats should not be an  
19 encumbrance in terms of getting--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: [interposing]  
21 No, it would be. Absence of car seats would be  
22 an encumbrance because the children can't  
23 travel by law.

24

25

GILBERT TAYLOR: Totally understood, but from my lens, we can find a way to get car seats.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Okay. That's what I'm--okay. That's--

GILBERT TAYLOR: [interposing] We can absolutely find a way to get them.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Mr. Chair, my last question is I have a resolution in now that we'll be introducing. Also we have some legislation trying to get pushed in the state to remove the language that was put in the last budget that bars us from using state dollars for these types of programs like Advantage and different things like that. I think that that was a deal cut, and I think it was a horrible deal. They did a real disservice to our community, and I'd like Council Member Gibson and others to sign onto that. But with that resolution and the state law makers that are trying to push this so that would enable us to do or enable you to do your job more effectively. You said that you were a active participant in a task force, would you or this

Administration be an active participant in trying to get that pushed?

GILBERT TAYLOR: This juncture, you know, I--it's certainly something that I'd want to learn more about. It's certainly something that I would believe would be necessary to--

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: [interposing]  
All of two sentences, all you have to do is remove the sentences.

[cross-talk]

GILBERT TAYLOR: in this regard, so I would want to talk to you more about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Okay.

GILBERT TAYLOR: and also talk to, you know, the Deputy Mayor about it as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Wills. Council Member Johnson?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's nice to be here at this first meeting of the General Welfare Committee and the Council. Thank you Commissioner Taylor and

1 Deputy Commissioners for being here today and  
2 for your testimony. I apologize that I had to--  
3 I had to sneak out, go to a committee meeting  
4 across the street and come back, so if I ask  
5 anything that was asked before, just let me  
6 know and I'm happy to follow up with committee  
7 staff where you can answer it more briefly. I  
8 just want to say that I grew up in public  
9 housing and my mother works at a homeless  
10 shelter and has for many years, not in New York  
11 City but in Massachusetts. She works at the  
12 only homeless shelter on the north shore in  
13 Boston, or north of Boston, and so this is an  
14 issue that means a lot to me given her own  
15 experience and compassion involved in working  
16 with the homeless population, and I just want  
17 to ask a few questions and I think the Public  
18 Advocate touched on some of this stuff. But  
19 before I ask, I just want to say I'm very  
20 pleased and happy to hear about the reforms at  
21 Auburn and Catherine, and I don't want to go  
22 back and particularly get into those. I think  
23 the plan has been a good plan. I think we'll  
24 see what happens and I hope that it's done with

1 a level of seriousness so that this doesn't  
2 happen again. I mean, I think one of the most  
3 damning things for me besides all the safety  
4 hazards for the general population and the  
5 children there was that if you look at these  
6 two shelters that were city run shelters they  
7 are considered, I believe, significantly worse  
8 than nonprofit run shelters with city money,  
9 which to me is a real shame on the city and my  
10 hope is is that we don't allow that to happen  
11 again. The questions that I have are I know  
12 that there's a complicated relationship right  
13 now and the Administration is still formulating  
14 the steps forward on a subsidy program, both  
15 given federal, state money and city money. And  
16 I know that the Mayor has talked sort of in a  
17 broad outline about what the plans are. I want  
18 to see if there's any more specificity around  
19 what the next steps are in the subsidy plan. I  
20 know that we're not completely under the gun by  
21 the budget cycle in Albany with the Governor's  
22 budget that came out a few weeks ago, but I  
23 want to learn more about that and then also  
24 just so you know, I'd like to know about are  
25

there any plans to reverse the policy regarding section eight and NYCHA priorities for reinstatement of homeless families outside of the shelter system but in more permanent housing?

GILBERT TAYLOR: So, I don't have more detailed information to give you about a proposed rental subsidy at this time.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Do you know when we'll have a more flushed out plan?

GILBERT TAYLOR: I'm hoping sooner than later. I mean, we're not ready right-- right now we're not ready in terms of being able to describe what the contours would be for you or for the committee. When we are, then, you know, we absolutely will share that information with you, but it's being discussed so that you know.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Well, I would just ask that before that happens, it's my hope that they'll be a constructive relationship with the Council and a collaborative relationship where it's not a singular policy announcement of this is what we

1  
2 are doing, but to hopefully work with the  
3 Council and some of the expertise here on that  
4 and I would again stress that I think the  
5 previous administration had a, to say it  
6 diplomatically, very adversarial relationship  
7 with advocates in the city who have worked on  
8 these issues and have a great deal of  
9 expertise, and my hope is is that DHS and the  
10 Administration work collaboratively with the  
11 Council and with stakeholders who have been  
12 involved in this before an announcement just  
13 comes out.

14 GILBERT TAYLOR: Well, any type of  
15 announcement would only be to share what a  
16 framework would be and what our thinking would  
17 initially be and then of course the voices of  
18 the Council and the voices of the advocates  
19 would be included in that discussion to inform  
20 it more fully. So to the point, I can--  
21 collaboration is something that's really  
22 important to this Administration as well as of  
23 our agency, and we have every intention of  
24 ensuring that it's a collaborative process in  
25 moving it forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And on section eight and NYCHA?

GILBERT TAYLOR: So with NYCHA, the conversations have begun with the agency about considering how do we relink the priority that does exist but that's not been used in the past. Again, I had mentioned before that the Chair has not yet begun in her role, but I'm intending to meet with her and I've already had conversations with her staff since I've taken my role, and we're looking at section eight to see, you know, what we can in terms of having it be available. Those are broader conversations that are still in the making.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So those conversations have started with HPD about section eight?

GILBERT TAYLOR: Well, with NYCHA is begun. With HPD it's actually beginning.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

GILBERT TAYLOR: It's beginning.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And so when you say the conversation with NYCHA is beginning does that mean that you guys are

1  
2 considering a reversal of the previous policy  
3 or that decisions already been made or you're  
4 sort of just figuring out how to handle this  
5 issue?

6 GILBERT TAYLOR: How to handle the  
7 issue and understanding what's available, what  
8 we can do differently that might be useful to  
9 attend to the needs of those who are in our  
10 shelter system and, you know, understanding  
11 there's a very long, as you know, waiting list  
12 for NYCHA. There are shelter residents who are  
13 on that waiting list, and you know, perhaps  
14 starting there or if that's not the place to  
15 begin then consider how do we look at what  
16 might be available and how could we perhaps  
17 have opportunities to leverage resources that  
18 may be there. But again, it's to think about  
19 how we move it forward.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And one  
21 final question, what do you see the  
22 Department's relationship being between  
23 advocacy groups and stakeholders given that I  
24 think in some of the documents that have come  
25 out in the past year, year and a half, two

1 years on talking about a way forward on  
2 preventing homelessness in our city. There  
3 seems to be a pretty wide agreement on most  
4 issues. There's consensus on, I think, a lot of  
5 the big issues. I think the subsidy issue is  
6 one that people are still figuring out, but on  
7 a lot of these other issues that make financial  
8 sense and have been studied and looked at how  
9 they've worked in other cities, what do you see  
10 the Department's relationship being between  
11 local advocacy organizations and providers that  
12 have been doing this work for years, and  
13 together as a coalition I've come up with that  
14 I think are thoughtful common sense solutions?

16 GILBERT TAYLOR: So I want the lines  
17 of communication to be squarely open. On my  
18 first day in this seat I did reach out to Legal  
19 Aid. I did reach out to the Coalition for the  
20 Homeless, and I've had meetings with both leads  
21 for both organizations and we're going to have  
22 ongoing meetings and you know there's a real  
23 power in the dialogue. I think we can perhaps  
24 speak with each other to inform where we are,  
25 because I think we all have our client's best

1  
2 interest at heart. And so I'm--I want there to  
3 be a very strong relationship between the  
4 advocacy organizations and DHS and I'm going to  
5 do everything in my power to ensure that that  
6 is the case.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Well, with a  
8 new Deputy Mayor and a new Commissioner, I am  
9 hopeful that things are going to change moving  
10 forward to help, you know, the record amount of  
11 families and people living in the shelter  
12 system, and I'll just say that I have a  
13 significant number of providers that are in my  
14 district on the west side, the Bowery Residence  
15 Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> Street is a significant  
16 shelter that moved in a few years ago and you  
17 know, in any of these situations there are fits  
18 and starts and ups and downs, but I look  
19 forward to working with you and the  
20 Administration and the department on finding a  
21 way forward, both in individual communities and  
22 in the city as a whole. Thank you, Mr. Chair  
23 for allowing me to participate.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
25 much, Council Member Johnson. I thank you for

1 your advocacy and for your participation in  
2 this committee and in this issue. Thank you.  
3 Commissioner, I am--we have about 15 maybe 20  
4 minutes left on questions then I'm going to  
5 have the public testimony. So I want to  
6 encourage my colleagues if you have any further  
7 questions to jump in at any time. But I want  
8 to go kind of as much as I can in terms of  
9 categories. One thing I wanted to follow up on  
10 with regard to the rental subsidy question. I  
11 don't want to--I know that DHS is not really  
12 able to as this point discuss the details of a  
13 proposal, but I want to actually ask about more  
14 of mechanical issue. If--what is, what exactly  
15 is the process now? So the state has in their  
16 budget language prohibiting the city from  
17 drawing down funding, state and federal funding  
18 for a rental subsidy program. Is that correct?

19  
20 GILBERT TAYLOR: That is my  
21 understanding.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, does the  
23 state have to in their budget set aside a  
24 budget line for a rental subsidy program or can  
25

that be drawn down by the city after the state budget is passed if the city has a program?

GILBERT TAYLOR: I was made to understand that it's the former and that being the case, we would have had to have sought an amendment to the state preliminary budget within a certain time period that we did not make within a 30-day time frame. We didn't make it because we weren't ready. We weren't ready to have a discussion with the state about what a rental subsidy would look like--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
Right.

GILBERT TAYLOR: in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, but there's the--it's been my understanding that the state does not necessarily have to set aside a budget line, is that--are we clear about that? Because the state budget hasn't come out and I think there's still an opportunity perhaps.

GILBERT TAYLOR: So I was--I'm being told that it was never appropriated as a line item.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

GILBERT TAYLOR: It came down as municipal aid.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Municipal aid, okay. So then there is an opportunity then prior to the state budget being passed and being finalized to have a--as long as the language is stricken from the state budget prohibiting the city from drawing down funds for a subsidy program. It allows the--the city will have the flexibility to do that. Is that your understanding?

GILBERT TAYLOR: I believe that to be the case.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I would strongly encourage DHS and the Administration prior to our budget hearing on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March to have something well under way, not just because it's our budget hearing, but because the state budget has got to be passed by April 1<sup>st</sup>, and going back three years ago to when the Advantage program was ended, by the time we got to our preliminary budget hearing it was too late. The state budget was too far along for us to have a meaningful impact at

1 that point in time. So I would encourage--now  
2 is kind of crunch time on that and I think that  
3 it behooves us to have this all sorted out  
4 within the next two weeks or so. So I'm going  
5 to--I want to follow up on going back to the  
6 question of support services, because I think  
7 that this is a very important part of what  
8 we're talking about today, and then I'm going  
9 to ask some questions more about conditions  
10 within the shelters, plan for Auburn and  
11 Catherine, some of the school stability plans,  
12 if we can get to issues around next step  
13 shelters we will. But the first--going back to  
14 this issue of employment services, education  
15 services, do we have a sense of what the  
16 percentage is of tier twos that have education  
17 services or specialists on site, employment  
18 specialists or services on site and kind of  
19 broken down by category of tier two. So, DHS  
20 run, not for profit run, do we have just a kind  
21 of a--it would be helpful to have it in hard  
22 numbers what, you know, what percentage of the  
23 shelters have this type of specialist, that  
24 type of specialist?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: No, we could get you the exact numbers, could get that to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. That would be very helpful. Now, do you--does it differ by whether it's contracted or noncontracted?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It does, so contracted programs have greater number of support services than non contracted?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that would be even say between contracted not for profit run tier twos, and non-contracted not for profit run tier twos. So some of them are contracted, some of them are not contracted, correct?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So there's a--so there would be--is there a difference even on that level in terms of the level of support services that are available?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Most of the contracted are contracted services, are

contracted tier twos provide the most intensive case management services in our shelter system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then for cluster sites and hotel sites which are the growing--that's what's growing in recent years, are there--how does that work exactly? I know that we talked about it a little bit during our hearing back in October around cluster sites, but can you just explain briefly what level--how the support services are implemented on cluster sites? Are they onsite? Are the offsite?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: There are some that are onsite and there are some that are offsite. The contracted cluster sites do have services, case management services on site and some have a social service headquarters where, you know, clients will come for services and the case managers also will do case management services in the units because they do have to visit the units. So they do complete the independent living plan meetings in the units at times.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that's also the case in hotels?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: In the hotels? The hotels have less services than the clusters and of the tier twos, and there are some onsite case management services on hotels and the others have maybe a roving service. Like there might be one case manager for, you know, two hotels. It depends upon the size of the hotel also.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we have a sense of which model is better or, I mean--I mean, I would imagine that--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Well, clearly--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
more services are better.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But is there a-- have we been able to determine through objective metrics length of stay for example, whether that is different in contracted tier twos versus hotels and clusters?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Well, clearly our contracted tier two providers, you know, provide the best services because they have more case management services on site.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And when somebody--when a family goes into PATH and they receive their assessment, is it factored--is it randomly assigned whether they go into a tier two or whether they go into a hotel or a cluster? Is it based on availability or is it based on the needs of the family?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Well it's based on the needs of the family. We first look at the youngest child school district. We also look to make sure that there are no bars of exclusion because there's a domestic violence situation. We also look at any medical issues where as the family may need to be near their medical clinic. And we also have to look at the size, also the size of the families.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but beyond those issues, some of which are kind of geographically, those are geographical issues--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: whether there's a domestic violence case or the borough of location for the youngest child, youngest child's school. Is there like for instance if a family comes in and they have more barriers to employment, is then determined well, this a family that should be in a contracted tier two because they're going to need more services than a family that say is currently employed or under, you know, two parents are underemployed and they have two children then there's an assessment done that says maybe they don't need all of the wrap around services. Is that type of adjustment done?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: That's not determined at PATH, you know, that's determined once the client has been assigned to a particular shelter and if we find that that client may--that family may need more services, you'll then rework to transfer that family to an appropriate shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So then that is kind of still under consideration. There's an opportunity to transfer.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So that does happen, then?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes, it does.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. For families that have mental health issues, or substance abuse issues, what types of services are available in tier twos and in clusters and hotels and city run tier twos for those families?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Well there are not a lot of onsite mental health services. Some providers that have medical services on site may be affiliated with mental health services, and if it's not on site, then they would refer to, you know, to their main clinic.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: But if it's not on site, then the case management, it's responsible for finding services within that community for the family.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So there is--so that's part of the objective of the--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing] it's part of case management to make sure that that family, if the family is not linked to make sure that they are linked to services that they need and if they're already linked to services when they come into the shelter to make sure that that service, the services continues.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Do we know how many units are avail--like how many units are available right now within the various categories? How many tier twos are currently available right now or hotels or clusters? Do we know--

GILBERT TAYLOR: [interposing] So we track that every day in terms of what our vacancy rate are, what our capacity is by type of shelter placement. I don't have the number on me right this--right now. We can get that to you, but it's also--I believe it's publicly reported or is just generally?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: It's just generally.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Just the aggregate number is reported our website, but the details are placement unit hero. They actually know where the sites--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing] The vacancies are.

GILBERT TAYLOR: where the vacancies are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, it might be helpful for us to know what, broken down in terms of category.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: About 180--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Not, I mean, we don't, you know, we don't have to know specifically what's, you know, what's, you know what shelter has how many vacancies. That's not really what we're after. I think it would just be helpful to know in terms of the category.

GILBERT TAYLOR: We can.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how it's broken down.

GILBERT TAYLOR: We can. I will tell you that right now we're averaging a one percent vacancy rate.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Across the board.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Across the board--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Across the board.

GILBERT TAYLOR: for families with children which is very low.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I did ask before but I wanted to just reiterate. So there is--do we track the difference in the length of stay between the different types of family shelters, the tier twos?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes, we do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And as an average, so do you know off hand what the range is in terms of the length of stay at tier twos, length of stay at hotels, length of stay at clusters?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Right. The length of stay for tier twos are currently 422 days. Clusters is 402, and our hotels is 366 days.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sorry, could you repeat that one more time?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Sure. Our tier twos are 422 days. Our clusters are 402 days, and the hotels are 366 days.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So hotels are the shortest length.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we know why that would be?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Because we work with families and if there are families with issues that would need, require more intensive case management, we would transfer those families out of the hotels and you know into the system where they can receive more services.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So then that's not the length--is that the length of stay within--I'm sorry, the--each category, but that's not--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Each category.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: the length of stay within the entire system.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Right.

GILBERT TAYLOR: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we know the-- are we able to track the re-entry rate of families that were once in the system based on their categories for leaving the system prior? So if they left because they left on their own or they left because they were--they went to live with family or they received a section eight voucher or something like that.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we have a sense of the re-entry rate based on those kind of categories of why they left in the first place?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Why they left the system in the first place?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: We are able to track that and we can provide that information from our policy and planning unit and send that to you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Okay, that would be helpful as well. I want to--I'm going to change--oh, one last thing just about cluster sites. Because cluster sites average roughly 3,000 dollars a month are we considering how to transfer that over? I'm sorry, Council Member, did you have any other questions? Sorry, Public Advocate James, excuse me. Do we have--I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought. Sorry? Oh, yes, okay. For the cost, do we have a--are we considering moving those over to permanent housing units, since they are already in the system, I mean, there's a broader issue about rent stabilization which is something that we talked about at the last hearing, but do we have a--are we looking at a plan as to whether or not it might be possible to convert those to permanent housing units which would obviously cost a lot less per month?

GILBERT TAYLOR: Yes, I'm looking at that. I'm looking to understand exactly how we're using clusters and thinking with my staff

as well as with our providers about how we can best use them. So to your--we're looking at it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great.

GILBERT TAYLOR: We're definitely looking at it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Okay I'm going to ask a little bit about shelter conditions. So DHS produces a report on the conditions report for family shelters, correct? It's been a couple of years since that's happened. I think the last time was--the family shelter rankings, there's different scores that are provided to family shelters. I noticed that the last one was going back to the first quarter of 2013. Is there a plan to do another one of those rankings anytime soon?

YIANNA PAVLAKOS: You are referring to the inspections, the physical inspections that we do the RSRI's that the Commissioner mentioned earlier. Is that what you're referring to?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's called the shelter performance record. It's on the DHS website.

YIANNA PAVLAKOS: Okay, I'm not--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yeah. The--right, the shelter performance report doesn't look at the physical condition. The indicators for that is the--it's the number of families in that facility that's employed, number of families that might be on public assistance, the length of stay and it looks at the placement. That's the shelter performance report.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That, so that's-- we're not look--that does not take into account the physical conditions of the shelter?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: No. No, no. That's--alright, that's basically the performance, all case management.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. It's still helpful. It doesn't necessarily address the physical conditions, but obviously very important to know. The last time it was done was in the early part of 2013 is the last one that we have access to which actually covers, I think, it was the last quarter of 2012. So I was wondering--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]

No, we do have--yeah. We do have--I think we just sent one out, and we'll get that to you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. In the last one that I saw Catherine Street was in the bottom ranking. It was a number six. It was-- I'm sorry, Jamaica, excuse me. Jamaica was a number six. I don't think Catherine Street was actually ranked in the report, but Auburn was ranked in the category four out of--so it's-- can you explain a little bit why those rankings were--if they were DHS run shelters why they were in the kind of bottom tiers of ranking.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: What I can say now is that, you know, we have worked very hard with the directly operated sites, you know, to improve their placements, to improve the number of families that are on public assistance and that are maintaining their public assistance. We are working with them to make sure that clients that can move to permanency that, you know, that they do move as soon as possible. So I think that when you look at our new shelter performance indicators you'll see a difference.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I wanted to speak directly about Auburn and Catherine Street and again, we're very appreciative at the speed with which the Administration is working on this. There was, as indicated, in the Invisible Child series a state office of temporary and disability assistance OTDA consistently cited both facilities for violations, physical violations, and even threatened at times the state funding for the facilities. They didn't necessarily prompt-- that didn't necessarily prompt major overhauls in the conditions at the time. It clearly by the time the article was written there had been many violations that had come in over previous years. What's the protocol for DHS's response to OTDA violations that are given out?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: You want to talk about the physical?

YIANNA PAVLAKOS: Yeah. So OTDA does their inspections and they do submit to us by what they call violations which range from physical conditions violations to administrative types of violations, you know,

1 something was not in the file, etcetera. For  
2 all of those violations what we do is we  
3 provide a written response to them with a plan,  
4 a corrective action plan, and then we follow up  
5 to ensure that we do the correct plan and  
6 remedy whatever the violations are.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I  
9 wanted to ask with regard to Catherine Street  
10 and Aubrun, the families that have been moved  
11 out and are currently moving out, where are  
12 they now going? Where have they gone? Where  
13 are they going? How many families have been  
14 removed from those facilities to date?

15 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: We've placed--  
16 we've transferred over 40 families from Auburn  
17 and we have transferred them to other shelters  
18 and a number of them have moved to permanent  
19 housing.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What type of  
21 permanent housing, or just out of the system  
22 entirely?

23 JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes, permanent  
24 housing, yes.  
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What type of shelters of the ones that are currently in the system did they go to, clusters, hotels, or tier twos or a mix?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Tier twos.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Tier twos. Then what steps is DHS taking to make sure that both families are staying within the same community school district of the youngest child?

GILBERT TAYLOR: So that's a requirement before they're transferred to another shelter. The staff are actually looking at what becomes available within our shelter stock and it has to be in a place that would allow that child to continue going to the school in which they were enrolled. That's something that we prioritize. It's something that I've required. So that's why we gave ourselves until the end of the school year because we have to wait until such time, as there's more vacant units that we can consider re-sheltering the families in sites that are within the school district of the youngest child, so.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And if a family decides that they want to keep their child in a particular school that's not within the community school district, is busing available or is that--how is that decision arrived at? How does--what's DHS's role in that?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: We would work with the DOE liaison to help the family assess bussing or transportation.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now are they able to re--I mean, is it--do they have a right to that busing or is it a case by case basis? How is that a decision?

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: they have a right through the Mckinney Rental [phonetic].

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So there's--so no matter what there's--because in going back to the invisible child article when Dasani's family was placed at new facility in Harlem they had to--the initially were denied that, the busing and so I wanted to make sure. I wanted to make sure that DHS is--

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: [interposing]  
Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: When that happens, DHS is taking a proactive role, because in that case I think a lawyer from Legal Aid actually had to intervene.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Yes, we are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay. I would encourage you as that continues to happen in any instance, if that's happening, if you wouldn't mind kind of letting the council know or keeping track of that for us.

JULIA DAVIS MOTEN: Sure, yes we will.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do--Council Member Gibson, do you have any further questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Just one question. Just one question. I think one of the Deputy Commissioners alluded to AIM [phonetic] money that comes from the state of New York. Is there some level of that funding that's used for preventative services for the agency? I heard AIM money and my eyes popped up.

[off mic]

GILBERT TAYLOR: I said aid.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Oh, A I D?

GILBERT TAYLOR: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Oh, okay. I thought you meant the local AIM money. Okay. Does that--that's a concern. That's a separate issue that we're working with to try to make sure that New York City gets its fair chain, fair share in AIM money. Okay, thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you very much Council Member Gibson. Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, I want to thank you very much for your testimony and for again for your willingness to work with this committee and the council and the advocates throughout the city who care very deeply about all of these issues. I am very hopeful that we are turning over a new leaf in New York City, and I think it is, I think, a very important time and we have kind of this opportunity to make this work. One last question that I have is, if--has DHS made a determination, going back to your statement earlier Commissioner about in order to change the equation we need more families to exit the system than are coming into the system.

1 Obviously we want to make sure that those  
2 families that are exiting the system are  
3 exiting the system because they're being placed  
4 in permanent housing with the help of DHS, with  
5 the help of OTDA, with the help of all of us in  
6 terms of a subsidy program, permanent housing  
7 that they can afford. Does DHS have a sense of  
8 how many families must--how many different  
9 types of subsidies must be provided whether  
10 it's through a new program, section eight,  
11 NYCHA, some housing subsidy program, how many  
12 families must receive that in order to start--  
13 in order to reach level because I think before  
14 we start thinking about how we're going to  
15 decrease the number of homeless families in New  
16 York City. We need to make sure that it's not  
17 increasing any more. So do we have a sense of  
18 how many families would need to receive a  
19 subsidy to make it just level at this point?

21 GILBERT TAYLOR: So we are looking  
22 now at all of our families who are in the  
23 system and trying to ascertain based upon  
24 previous subsidy programs that had been  
25 administered through the city and through DHS,

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looking to best understand how to make this work.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Alright. Thank you very much Commissioner. Thank you Deputy Commissioners very much for your testimony. So we are going to call up panels now. I thank you all very much for your patience and we're going to first call up from DC 37 local 371, Rose Longellio [phonetic], I believe. Lovaglio? Thank you. Ms. Lovaglio, thank you very much. Make sure the light is on.

ROSE LOVAGLIO: Thank you. I usually talk very loud anyway, but. We want to thank you, Chair Levin, and Committee Member Gibson for allowing us to participate in this meaningful and welcomed discussion. You have my written testimony that really is kind of a background, but sitting here today and listening to the testimony that was given prior to us, I would just like to add a little bit to it if it's okay. Okay. So my name is Rose Lovaglio Miller, I'm the Vice President of Negotiations and Research for the Social

Service Employees Union Local 371. This union has a long standing history of interaction with DHS formerly HRA and the delivery of services to the homeless people of this city. This involvement has kept us very true to our mission, which is representation of our members and advocacy for the people we serve. So in diverting a little bit off of the written testimony, we want to thank you all for your questions and concerns on making sure the families in the shelter system are not only housed but also have a quality of life, which comes from social services. Many of the programs suggested such as rental subsidies or preparing the clients once they exit housing to assist them in not returning would be the function of case workers or social workers in the Department of Homeless Services, and there are currently only approximately 80 case workers in the entire system. What we are asking is for DHS to really look at their staffing. They went from having approximately 35 direct run shelters and in the mid 90's went down to about 13. We believe, unfortunately,

1 that this has had a negative impact on the  
2 homeless population. We are asking for  
3 additional staff to be hired in DHS, in  
4 particular in the case worker and social worker  
5 title series so that these programs that have  
6 been suggested can become a reality that can be  
7 a successful endeavor for the city and we also  
8 believe many of these issues came about when  
9 the contracting out of privatization of the  
10 shelter system came about. We believe if DHS  
11 ran more direct service shelters the city would  
12 be better able to monitor and service the  
13 homeless population. When individuals become  
14 employed by the city of New York they become  
15 dedicated civil servants. Unfortunately, when  
16 people go to work for private shelters, the  
17 salaries are not necessarily adequate or the  
18 benefits, medical and pensionable things of  
19 that nature are not necessarily there. So their  
20 turn over rate seems to be higher than in the  
21 city of--when you're a city employee. Because  
22 of the turn over rate sometimes it gives little  
23 consistency to the social work, case work  
24 practice that are happening. So I listened here  
25

1 today and heard that in the private run  
2 shelters the social services actually are  
3 better than in the direct run service shelters  
4 and unfortunately, what we've experienced in  
5 DHS is a decrease in funding for them.  
6 Unfortunately, under Bloomberg's  
7 Administration, DHS was his dirty little  
8 secret. He cut the budget to DHS.  
9 Unfortunately, they were not able to fill  
10 vacancies. They had to cut staffing. There's a  
11 shelter that actually only has one case worker  
12 that works in the entire shelter, which is  
13 ludicrous because then you can't provide the  
14 necessary resources and programs that are  
15 needed for these families to function and  
16 obtain permanent housing and maintain permanent  
17 housing. I just want to add that since the de  
18 Blasio Administration has taken over, we have  
19 had much better communication. Commissioner  
20 Taylor has actually reached out to us as a  
21 union to say things like we are making plans to  
22 make changes and we want to makes sure you're  
23 aware how it will impact your staff because it  
24 will impact the clientele that we deal with and  
25

1 we want to make sure people are not hearing it  
2 for the first time on the news, which of course  
3 shows a more compassion not only for the staff,  
4 but for the clientele, and we want you to  
5 understand that we are always vigilant in  
6 trying to make sure that our members are  
7 treated with respect, but that the clients are  
8 also treated with respect, and we just want to  
9 say it was a--it was refreshing. It was  
10 refreshing to have the Administration come in  
11 and start work so quickly, start taking an  
12 active role in making sure that the facilities  
13 are taken care of, but I will submit to you for  
14 the past 12 years it has been very difficult in  
15 working with DHS, and you know, we look forward  
16 to working with them and moving forward, but I  
17 really wanted to express to you today that if  
18 we can bring back resources and have direct run  
19 shelters or provide the shelters that they do  
20 have with the staffing that they need, then I  
21 think the homeless population will benefit and  
22 the city of New York will benefit as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
25 much. I appreciate your testimony. I appreciate

1 the work that your members do every day in the  
2 system and I'm hopeful that we can make sure  
3 that there are more resources put into the  
4 services that are so important in the--as we  
5 had said throughout this hearing today, and  
6 start to undo some of the damage that's been  
7 done over the last few years. It's not easy.  
8 There's a tough road ahead, but I'm thankful  
9 and grateful that the Administration is a  
10 willing partner in this. So, I want to thank  
11 you very much for your testimony. I want to  
12 thank you for your patience, and I look forward  
13 to working with you in the future. Council  
14 Member Gibson has a question.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you  
17 very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your  
18 presence and testimony today, and I guess for  
19 my personal experience, I have seen you know in  
20 the previous Administration a shifting of, you  
21 know, more privatization and the fact that  
22 there are a lot of, you know, private entities  
23 that are now running shelters. So I guess it  
24 would be helpful for me and the rest of my  
25 colleagues on the committee as we start to have

1 preliminary budget conversations here in the  
2 Council, if we were able to get some specific  
3 numbers, because we realize case workers  
4 undertake a lot of responsibility. My office  
5 in the Bronx is right next to an HRA center, so  
6 I know first hand some of the work that goes on  
7 and it's extremely challenging because every  
8 case is different. So I guess as we move  
9 forward I would love it if you could provide  
10 some specific numbers on what we think would be  
11 a target goal that we could achieve in terms of  
12 changing some of these numbers around. We know  
13 that, you know, it's a difficult path ahead,  
14 but certainly increasing staff and man and  
15 woman power is always a good thing to really  
16 address a lot of the critical challenges that  
17 many of our families face.

19 ROSE LOVAGLIO: Yes. Definitely we  
20 would be willing to work with you on that, 100  
21 percent, and we could provide that to you.  
22 We'll definitely be in touch to share that with  
23 you. Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
25 much. Thank you, Council Member Gibson. Let me

1  
2 call up the next panel. Arnold Cohen of  
3 Partnership for the Homeless, A.J. Kahn of  
4 Children's Health Fund, and Georgianna Glose of  
5 Fort Greene SNAP. Thank you very much. You  
6 can go ahead.

7           ARNOLD COHEN: Thank you. Thank you.  
8 I want to thank the Committee for inviting me  
9 here today. I provided you with copies of my  
10 testimony along with a piece I've written that  
11 you may have gotten earlier entitled "Promises  
12 Broken" and it really is a chronicling of the  
13 Bloomberg Administration's failures over the  
14 last 12 years to confront the root issues that  
15 are really driving homelessness today. And I  
16 think it's fair, you know, the past is a  
17 prologue, but I think it is fair to look at the  
18 last 12 years and learn from those failures,  
19 but I think we can also go back decades as well  
20 to explain why we're here today and how we've  
21 simply failed to invest in the infrastructure  
22 to support long term solutions. Instead relying  
23 on shelter to simply manage the problem, to  
24 keep a lid on the growing crisis and we are  
25 indeed in a crisis. I think you've chronicled

the numbers, the statistics of 52,000, 22,000 children, but those numbers and those statistics don't account for the countless number of families who are homeless but sleeping on the couch of a family member or friend of those who are out on the street struggling in the city's parks and streets, or those who are on the precipice, paying more than 50 percent of their income toward rent about to fall over the brink into homelessness. So and perhaps it's more important even to look beyond the statistics, look at the people who I see every day, the people experiencing the trauma of homelessness, how it inflicts itself on families and children and single adults, the displacement they experience, the loss of home, of community, of school. I can go through and I don't have the time, some stories that I've--of the people I've met, a brave woman who took a giant leap forward to save herself and her children from abusive relationship only to be without a place to call home. The senior who lost his life partner and then with no safety net of support fell into a shelter and the

1 child we see that 22,000 of them, more than  
2 22,000 who when the school bell rings often  
3 doesn't know where she'll be at the end of the  
4 day. Their faces are the faces often of  
5 despair, and despair because of life, daily  
6 life in crowded shelters. And so what I'd like  
7 to talk a little bit about is moving forward,  
8 and we're hopeful. We're really hopeful with  
9 this new Administration and it's heartening as  
10 we've all been talking about how they've  
11 already taken a position to remove children and  
12 families from the Auburn family shelter and the  
13 Catherine Street shelter. We think that's a  
14 terrific first step and I think these two  
15 shelters truly have been a symbol of our city's  
16 failed strategy with respect to family  
17 homelessness. And while recognizing that these  
18 two shelters are not fit for children and their  
19 families, we're also hopeful at some point soon  
20 that we can close these two shelters so that no  
21 one experiences life there. And with that,  
22 we're especially hopeful that perhaps the  
23 Mayor's position on these shelters also signals  
24 a paradigm shift in our homeless policy, that  
25

the frame in which we have historically viewed homelessness will change so that we place homelessness within the context of the larger anti-poverty struggle, that we use a social justice lens where housing and not shelter is seen as a fundamental right. And I think this just may be one of the most important efforts that this committee undertakes. For too long emergency shelter has been our primary approach, and while shelter remains a critical safety net, it's certainly no substitute for a long term investment in housing. Indeed, we see today a record numbers of families and children consigned to shelter with virtually no way out. And we know it's also fiscally untenable. We've spoken about the cost, right? We're spending over 500 million dollars to shelter families each year and add to that the numbers we're spending for single adults and as the Commissioner reported, one billion dollars. And more importantly our on the ground experience and research in the field confirms that housing rather than shelter is the locus from which all other positive outcomes can flow. And this is

1 so whether we're working with that young mom  
2 and her child languishing in shelter or that  
3 fellow on our street corner who is struggling  
4 with mental health issues. So as--so with this  
5 as our backdrop, I think it's really very  
6 important for this committee to focus on some  
7 essential on the ground questions that should  
8 be asking the Mayor and officials and  
9 Administration. And the first and foremost is  
10 to what extent does the Mayor's affordable  
11 housing plan going to address the needs of the  
12 people who are homeless or at risk. Housing is  
13 the only way we're going to get out from under  
14 our reliance on costly shelter system. And  
15 another question to ask that's related to  
16 housing and that you've been talking about  
17 today is also related to our rent subsidy  
18 program, and we know that the Administration is  
19 in the midst of developing a new rent subsidy  
20 plan and it does indeed provide some immediate  
21 relief to the dramatic shelter increases. And  
22 while the shelter will certainly ease the  
23 pathway out of -- the subsidy will certainly  
24 ease the pathway out of shelter. The question  
25

1 remains and is an important one for this  
2 committee is how do we avoid the problems of  
3 the past subsidy program? Well we have to make  
4 certain that the rent subsidy that will surely  
5 be time limited is not just a means of delaying  
6 an inevitable return to homelessness, and that  
7 means this committee needs to ask how that rent  
8 subsidy is connected to significant community  
9 supports so that in the end of the subsidy we  
10 can ensure that those receiving the subsidy  
11 have achieved a degree of economic independence  
12 and are not teetering back on the brink. In the  
13 end, it may mean as the Commissioner suggested  
14 that it has to be more of a flexible subsidy  
15 program that accounts for the challenges and  
16 there can't be a one size fits all.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you could  
19 summarize.

20 ARNOLD COHEN: I'll summarize.  
21 Yeah, and then just quickly with respect to the  
22 subsidy, there's two big issues that came up  
23 during the subsidy program as well. And one  
24 that we saw was that families were being pushed  
25 into housing that often had serious code

1 violations. With that subsidy we in essence  
2 created a public market for housing,  
3 uninhabitable housing where there's no--  
4 otherwise, no private market, and it was really  
5 immune to unscrupulous landlords and the city  
6 really unfortunately was willing party to that  
7 subsidy. And secondly, because the subsidy did  
8 not meet market rents, there were these side  
9 deals and I won't go into that at this moment  
10 And finally, just to summarize because you've  
11 asked question about the services in the  
12 shelter. I think the significant questions are  
13 what are the services being offered? How  
14 effective are they? Do we know how effective  
15 they are or why not? What data are the shelters  
16 collecting? What outcome measures are they  
17 using to measure success? And is there a  
18 consistency in how the shelters are actually  
19 measuring the effectiveness of the shelters, of  
20 their services. So you have my testimony and  
21 you have a piece. So thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very,  
24 very, very much for your testimony. It was a  
25

lot of great points. I look forward to continuing the dialogue as we move forward.

ARNOLD COHEN: Yeah, I think that's really what it requires is a further conversation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

A.J. KAHN: Hello, I am Doctor A.J. Kahn, a pediatrician and medical director of Children's Health Funds, New York City based mobile healthcare program for homeless families. Children's Health Fund was founded by singer Paul Simon and pediatrician child advocate Doctor Irwin Redlener in 1987. Today our fleet of mobile medical and dental units serves nine family shelters in the boroughs of Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan. I welcome and appreciate this opportunity to testify before the committee on General Welfare. I want to start by saying that our goal is for all children to grow up able to fulfill their potential. They need a healthy, nurturing environment from the moment of conception. They need a good start by age four

and a quality pre-k program followed by an opportunity to attend a good school, and for children growing up in poverty, they need basic support for nutrition supplementation and the availability of relevant social services. And for children who spend time in the city's homeless shelter system, children like Dasani, the trauma of displacement and disruption adds risk, increases vulnerability, and requires special attention from a host of special services. We need to understand however, that as a general rule, homelessness and prolonged shelter stays can be extremely hazardous to the health, mental health and wellbeing of children. It is our mission to provide a medical home to children and family members in transition, helping them stabilize their health and mental health so that they have one less thing to worry about as they seek stable housing. Good pediatric care requires the capacity to diagnose and treat acute and chronic illness, provide preventive services and health education, referral to specialists as needed and 24/7 availability for triage or

care. This cluster of services is referred to as a medical home. It is the model of care needed by every child and is particularly critical for poor and homeless children. The new city Administration is facing an unprecedented challenge as it inherits a rising and record level of family homelessness in New York City. Nearly twice the number of children stay in homeless shelters every night than was the case when we started our program in 1987. Here are some of the challenges we face. According to a 2007 chart review, 30 percent of CHF's homeless pediatric patients had asthma, 38 percent of our 10 to 19 year old patients are overweight or obese. Of our pediatric patients with a mental health diagnosis an overwhelming 43 percent are diagnosed with an adjustment disorder and nearly 30 percent with developmental disorders. Annually, we refer 100's of our children to such specialty care for numerous medical conditions. So I am deeply concerned about the challenges faced by the family shelters in dealing with homeless children and families who have tremendous

needs, complex lives, and major health conditions. I would like to share with you the story of one of the families we serve. Their home in Queens was destroyed by super storm Sandy over a year ago. This mother and three children have been recently moved to an unfamiliar environment in the Bronx. Two of the children have persistent asthma and when we saw them had not had their prescriptions refilled since they last saw their primary care provider in Queens. The youngest child, 18 months old, had been cared for by a family friend and fell off the bed and fractured both legs. Mom without medical insurance had been struggling to find a specialist to see her infant. The two older children do not have a safe place to play and are gradually becoming overweight due to a lack of physical activity. Children's Health fund strongly supports efforts to respond to the critical shortcomings of the shelter system. While I have our recommendations and the rest of the testimony, I just want to give a few of our recommendations here. First and foremost, DHS

1 approach to program planning development and  
2 delivery of services should reflect an  
3 understanding that the significant challenges  
4 facing homeless children and families can best  
5 be addressed by providing access to a service  
6 rich environment to enhance stability and help  
7 boost the homeless to self-sufficiency. Number  
8 two, we must ensure that all homeless children  
9 have access to the best possible health and  
10 mental health services to meet their needs. We  
11 recommend that shelters continue to facilitate  
12 access to a medical home for all homeless  
13 children. Medical home is essential in  
14 providing optimal coordination of care to meet  
15 the complex health, psychosocial and emotional  
16 needs of homeless children.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sir,  
19 unfortunately I'm going to have to ask you to  
20 summarize because we have 20 minutes and a  
21 number of other folks to testify.

22 A.J. KAHN: Okay, my last two  
23 recommendations. We recommend that childcare  
24 facilities in family shelters be considered for  
25 reconstructing [phonetic] and upgrading,

1 converted to provide high quality pre-k  
2 education to eligible children at all  
3 facilities, and the last one I'm going to  
4 mention here is that we must ensure a secure  
5 shelter environment that promotes and protects  
6 children's health and safety. Every child  
7 deserves an environment that is safe, clean,  
8 free of garbage and vermin. Needless to say  
9 the real prescription is preventing an endless-  
10 -ending homelessness period. We applaud the  
11 mayor's preliminary New York City budget for FY  
12 2015.  
13

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank--thank you  
15 very much.

16 A.J. KAHN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We have your  
18 entire testimony--

19 A.J. KAHN: [interposing] Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: for the record.  
21 So it's here in the committee and we'll make  
22 sure that it's entered into the record.

23 A.J. KAHN: Thank you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
25 much for your testimony.

GEORGIANNA GLOSE: Good morning.

Councilman Levin and members of the Committee, we're very pleased for this opportunity to present this testimony today. My name Sister Georgianna Glose. I'm the Executive Director of Fort Greene Strategic Neighborhood Action Partnership. You have my written testimony, but I'm going to highlight a few important points in that testimony. We still have significant concerns, especially as the city transitions the Auburn facility to housing adult families, those who are not pregnant or with children and who unfortunately may garner less public sympathy than families with children. We will continue our efforts to ensure that adult families just like families with children and all other people experiencing homelessness are treated with respect by the city that they live in. Under Mayor Bloomberg Auburn functioned intentionally or not as a punishment facility, and for a short period of time it also housed single women. In 2009, the New York Times local blog quoted Steve Banks of Legal Aid as stating that families are

frequently threatened with placement there at Auburn as punishment even for the most minor infractions. Our staff at Fort Green SNAP have often worked with families that have experienced Auburn as punishment. The facility has in the past housed so-called next step residents, those that DHS has determined difficult to work with or in need of intensive services, who often experience the next step process as punitive and one of harassment. But well beyond those having experience with the next step process, the sense of punishment has always pervaded the facility. Under Mayor Bloomberg, DHS did all it could to avoid almost any accountability for the conditions at that facility. When it came to addressing conditions officials, some still on the DHS staff, were often contentious, unresponsive, blaming or unwilling to acknowledge the deplorable circumstances that the invisible child series so clearly documented. This approach meant that advocates like Fort Greene SNAP were left issuing ongoing information law requests to provide proof to community members, the

community board and at points, the press to--in order to publicize a glimpse of just how bad things were at Auburn. So here are our concerns with changing populations. DHS has stated plans to shift over into an adult facility. We applaud the Administration for removing children who are inherently very vulnerable from the shelter. With this, unfortunately, child families are often a more marginal population within an already marginalized population. They enter through the family intake center at 30<sup>th</sup> Street, the men's shelter where advocacy can be difficult and where they receive very little sympathy for their hardships. We have some concerns about shifting this facility to an--for adult families because over the long term when the press dies down this may lead to less accountability for conditions that could again substantively decline in the context of budgets and DHS priorities. So we hope that the city will treat these residents with the utmost respect and dignity in the environment and service provision as long as they are housed in the

1 facility. Our immediate concerns, we have  
2 concerns about social service staff. The city's  
3 plan says--is very vague about how many social  
4 service people will be left, employees will be  
5 left at the facility after the transition to  
6 serving adult families. It's not clear to us  
7 about how long term social services will be at  
8 that facility. We think that the DHS must hire  
9 housing specialists for families who currently  
10 reside there and because you need a specialist  
11 to find housing. I understand what general  
12 social work is. You need a housing  
13 specialists. Another concern about the  
14 changing under Mayor de Blasio's--

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I'm  
17 sorry, Ms. Glose, we're going to need you to  
18 summarize.

19 GEORGIANNA GLOSE: Okay. I have to--  
20 no, I have to do the next page. Sorry.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

22 GEORGIANNA GLOSE: Okay. We're  
23 concerned about the building conditions, the  
24 renovation plans are not yet clear. They have  
25 renovation--they want to renovate the bathrooms

1 in the residential facilities, and I have to  
2 tell you that every single time we brought up  
3 the conditions at their facilities, they  
4 painted. That's it. And then it went back to  
5 the same vermin and leaks and heating problems.  
6 There are major heating problems in that  
7 facility.

8  
9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you know when  
10 it was built by the way?

11 GEORGIANNA GLOSE: It was the old  
12 Cumberland Hospital, so it was built in the--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] 18-  
14 -18 something?

15 GEORGIANNA GLOSE: It opened as a  
16 shelter in 1985, but it--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] The  
18 building, I--the building's clearly over a 100  
19 years old.

20 GEORGIANNA GLOSE: Yes, the building  
21 is very old.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to thank  
23 you very much for as the Public Advocate  
24 mentioned, your work on this long term and I  
25 think that SNAP deserves a tremendous amount of

credit for keeping this on the front burner and being there when the rest of us caught up to her.

GEORGIANNA GLOSE: Well, we appreciate that. And we will continue to do that. My--I have a number of interns who stand outside the facility and talk to people to find out what's going on.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. Thank you very much to the panel. I appreciate your time and your patience. So we're going to have to really keep everybody on time. So I apologize for that, but we do have another hearing starting at around 15 minutes. Joshua Goldfein of Legal Aid Society, Patrick Markee of Coalition for the Homeless, and I'm going to also call Edwin Pearson, and I'm going to ask that everybody try please to keep to the three minute time frame so that we can--three. If you could try, please, please try to keep to the three minutes, we'll--we want to be contentious to incoming committee. Mr. Markee?

PATRICK MARKEE: Council Member Levin, thank you so much for this opportunity

1 to testify. My name is Patrick Markee. I'm  
2 Senior Policy Analyst at Coalition for the  
3 Homeless. We in the Legal Aid Society have  
4 submitted joint written testimony and I won't  
5 actually read from that testimony, but I just  
6 want to highlight a few points and I understand  
7 that the time is limited. We applaud the really  
8 historic move that Mayor de Blasio, Deputy  
9 Mayor Barrios-Paolis, Commissioner Taylor have  
10 taken to relocated children from the Auburn and  
11 Catherine Street shelters. I think it's  
12 important to recognize really how historic this  
13 is, these shelters have been around for nearly  
14 30 years. Four mayoral Administrations over  
15 those 30 years have not taken this step, have  
16 allowed those facilities to be neglected and  
17 let's recall that those facilities were never  
18 suitable for the placement of homeless  
19 children, never at any time. We actually  
20 operate an afterschool program at the Catherine  
21 Street shelter and have for many years. We know  
22 firsthand from the work that our staff are  
23 doing in that shelter and we located the  
24 program in that shelter specifically because of  
25

1 the lack of services and the poor conditions  
2 there. We wanted to make sure that children  
3 were getting some extra services to help them.  
4 It is really amazingly good news that this is  
5 happening and I think we need to applaud the  
6 Administration for taking that step. At the  
7 same time let's recall that as we've heard  
8 there are more than 22,000 children who are  
9 homeless in New York City now, the highest  
10 numbers in the city's history, an all time  
11 record high homeless population, an 83 percent  
12 increase in the number of homeless families  
13 since the last Administration took office, and  
14 it's important to recognize how we got there.  
15 We got there because the last Administration  
16 took away permanent housing resources which  
17 were designed to move homeless children and  
18 facilities from shelters like Auburn and  
19 Catherine Street into stable permanent housing.  
20 Not only did the Administration take away those  
21 proven and successful long term housing  
22 resources. They replaced them with short term  
23 housing subsidies which failed to do the job.  
24 The last of those short term subsidies, the  
25

Advantage program, more than half of all Advantage families who lost their housing assistance under that time limited program have ended up back in shelter, 9,000 families with more than 18,000 children made repeated trips through the shelter system at a cost to tax payers of around 300 million dollars in avoidable shelter costs. So let's recall that there is a path forward that we know works. It worked under previous Administrations by targeting long term housing assistance to help the neediest families in this city. We're therefore very glad to hear that the de Blasio Administration is in discussion about two important and critical elements of such a path forward. One, resuming the policy of priority referrals for homeless children and families to NYCHA public housing to section eight vouchers, the kinds of long term proven housing subsidies that had worked so well in the past but that were taken away from these vulnerable families and second, negotiating a long term, hopefully long term rent subsidy program with the state. Finally, I just want to say something. If we're

going to do something about changing that calculus that Commissioner Taylor talked about where we have more families entering shelter than we do families exiting shelter. The only way forward and the only way to address the substandard conditions that do persist in some shelters is by beginning to reduce family homelessness in the city. The other thing I'll say is that the last Administration compounding the error of taking away permanent housing resources added to the problem by expanding the shelter system with for profit shelter and right now we have a situation where the majority of homeless families in this city, 51 percent, are residing in for profit shelter arrangements, commercial hotels and motels and cluster sites. So in closing, I'll say it also good news to hear that the Administration is contemplating the notion that we could take the nearly 3,000 families who are homeless at this time but actually living in apartments but being--those apartments are being financed at exorbitant rates. It is used as temporary shelter. We could take those cluster site

apartments, transfer them back to--convert them back to what they should be, permanent housing resources for these families. So thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Thank you very much, Patrick, and I seem to get from the Administration that they're even considering that, which is like a 180 degree change from where we were three months ago. So, thank you very much for all of your advocacy, all your hard work on this. Thank you.

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: We--My name is Joshua Goldfein. I'm a staff attorney in the homeless rights project, the Legal Aid Society.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Were you the attorney that was--that made the call about the busing issue?

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: I am, and I appreciate the shout out. We--I should say that when we solved that problem we got a call from the DOE's students and temporary housing office who said, "How did you do that, because we have that problem all the time and are unable to fix it." and the people who

1 administer the buses said that's a problem that  
2 should never even occur. So they're--in  
3 addition to all the other issues we've  
4 discussed today, certainly within DOE and other  
5 agencies that deal with problems of our  
6 clients, there's a level of interagency  
7 cooperation that we look forward to occurring  
8 now with a new Administration. You referred  
9 earlier to undoing the damage of the last 12 or  
10 20 years and that's really a heavy burden that  
11 this Administration has inherited and we're  
12 very encouraged that they are anxious to take  
13 that on and we've heard today about if  
14 different interagency task forces. As the  
15 Commissioner mentioned, he reached out to us  
16 early on and we're very hopeful in looking  
17 forward to working with him with the Deputy  
18 Mayor, with their staffs to undo the damage as  
19 you said. I just also want to thank the Public  
20 Advocate for keeping these issues on the front  
21 burner and for all of her work on the Auburn in  
22 particular over the years. I wanted to mention  
23 also in response to a question that Council  
24 Member Wills asked about the Housing Authority  
25

1 in particular with regard to eligibility there,  
2 we did bring a case about that problem, and in  
3 response the Department of Homeless Services  
4 has set up a new procedure to identify families  
5 who potentially have other legal impediments to  
6 returning to addresses that they've identified  
7 including in the New York City Housing  
8 authority. So, we'd be happy to provide that  
9 information to him as to how that's supposed to  
10 work. But just to add what Patrick said, and as  
11 he mentioned we work very closely together on  
12 these issues. Our number one concern remains  
13 that there be an adequate supply of housing. We  
14 understand that the Administration is working  
15 on that, and if we can begin to get that  
16 flowing, then I think a lot of these problems  
17 will very quickly fall into line. So thank you  
18 very much to the committee for your time.

19  
20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
21 much.

22 EDWIN PEARSON: My name is Edwin  
23 Pearson. I think I bring a unique perspective  
24 to this hearing. I can't talk about anything  
25 going on in the shelters, but what I can tell

you my background is, I'm a retired Administrative Law Judge with O'teda [phonetic] as you may or may not know they run the fair hearing system in the city and I worked for O'teda about over 15 years holding prior fair hearings. Am I--is the hearing okay? Okay. And all I can say is that what we really need here is to look at the whole system and what as my written presentation talks about, a more holistic approach. As the Commissioner from the homeless services said a certain percentage of the people who get into the homeless system come from the public assistance system. And as the article actually said that was in the New York Times regarding Dasani, that the people-- they were quoted as saying the people at the shelters do not treat them with the proper respect. In my entire experiences in administrative law judge is that the HRA does not treat their applicants or recipients with proper respect. They assume they are not telling the truth when they come to them. They put a lot of burden on them when it comes to the sanctioning process, and that often gets

1 people into the homeless system. Their case  
2 either gets reduced per rata [phonetic] or  
3 discontinued because they didn't keep an  
4 appointment. Yet, they have terrible  
5 requirements as to how they prove why they  
6 didn't keep the appointment. If there was only  
7 more contact between HRA and the homeless  
8 agency, and of course, as you may or may not  
9 know, the homeless agency was once part of HRA,  
10 and then it was broken away. And a good example  
11 is there's a center called The Intensive  
12 Services Center and it's referred to in this  
13 excellent report called Guilty Until Proven  
14 Innocent by the Federation of Protestant  
15 Welfare Agencies. It talks about how that  
16 center which once a household has had a  
17 sanction imposed then they get after the end of  
18 the sanction period they get called in and if  
19 they miss that appointment or if they don't to  
20 the satisfaction of Center 71 tell them why,  
21 how could they have existed with that sanction  
22 in place, then their case will be entirely  
23 closed. And these are the--I would--I don't  
24 know what percentage are in the homeless system  
25

1 but if I had to guess a good third of the  
2 people in the homeless system are in a shelter  
3 come from the public assistance system or were  
4 HRA recipients and there just has to be some,  
5 as I said in the beginning, a holistic approach  
6 to consider what's going on. There's no reason  
7 that HRA has to treat these people in the  
8 manner that they treat them assuming that  
9 they're just going to--that they're just trying  
10 to beat the system, which is not true at all.  
11 So I would urge that under the new  
12 Administration that there be some more  
13 communications between HRA and the homeless  
14 system. Thanks for your time and I have  
15 submitted something in writing.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
18 much Mr. Pearson, and just to let you know,  
19 we're working on a piece of legislation right  
20 now to create an interagency task force as we  
21 speak. So we're right there with you but thank  
22 you, but thank you very much for your  
23 perspective. Thank you to this panel for your  
24 testimony. I look forward to working with all  
25 of you in the coming months and making sure

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DANIELLE STELLUTO: Good morning, my name is Danielle Stelluto, member of Picture The Homeless, a grassroots organization based in the Bronx that organizes homeless and formerly homeless people for social justice. I want to start by thanking the Committee on General Welfare for having this hearing. I also want to thank on behalf of Picture The Homeless, General Welfare Committee Chair Stephen Levin who supported us in a recent action to ensure homeless people on the subway were not pushed out into the cold or harassed by the New York City Police department, and

most of all I want to thank God for bringing us all here today. I'm a single mother of two toddlers residing at Jackson Family Residence, which is a shelter I've been in since March of 2012. I am 26 years old. My son is six and my daughter is three. I'm going to start off describing the living conditions. I reside in a unit that is probably half the size of a studio apartment. I also live on the third floor where there is no elevator. So it is no walk in the park when I have to do laundry or grocery shopping, especially during the summer time. Heat rises, so during the summer the people living on the third floor are suffering the worst. We are not allowed to have air conditioners, not even the portable ones. So during both summers living there I had to constantly wet cloth rags to keep us cool, carry spray bottles, wet my baby's sheets so they can be cool when the lay down and constantly giving us cool showers just to not go insane. The windows in the staircase are sealed shut so every step up gets hotter as if you're journeying up the levels of hell. The

shelter does have a park with sprinklers and you would think we would have access all the time, but the director constantly closes the only relief we have away from this treacherous heat. But when DHS comes to visit they open up the park just to look good on their part, and one quick thing I want to mention with DHS too is the several times when they came to inspect it I did tell them my concerns. They just kind of glanced at me and walked out the door. Didn't seem like they really cared. The place is also highly infested with mice, roaches, gnats, and bedbugs. An exterminator comes once a week but this place is so infested that whatever they are spraying does not do anything. I even bought Combat, roach spray and mice traps, but no matter it's a never ending cycle of battling within this infested place. All the windows are barred and so small you can barely catch a breeze. So it sometimes feels like one is living in a prison. The paint is chipping all over. Mold growing on the ceilings, walls, shower and all over the building. In the facility I do have a stove and

personal bathroom, but there is only a small showerhead without a bath tub. About eight months ago I had mold on my bathroom wall. There was also mold in the room we sleep in. I put a work order in to get it fixed and removed, but when I returned home I noticed they painted over it. This is a safety hazard because I have my kids and they can get sick. In fact, my kids have never been so sick or so frequently since I've been in here. Another concern of mine is there are no fire escapes in the facility, which knowing my laws, that is illegal and a safety hazard. It bothers me so much not only as a mother, but also simply as a human being. It's just so nasty to be in such a place. Nobody deserves to be living within these circumstances, especially the innocent children who never did anything to deserve such treatment. Secondly, I would like to discuss the staff and how we are treated or mistreated as residents. Not even three months into this shelter experience they were breathing down my neck to demand that I find an apartment and I find a full time job and move out as quickly as

possible. Mind you I was working before I even entered the shelter and I had a three bedroom house that was covered by the child advantage voucher, but due to the vouchers being terminated and having a low paying job as a cashier, I was evicted because I could not afford to pay the rent and I spiraled right back down into the shelter system. I also had to let go of my job in Far Rockaway because the commute was almost impossible to get to from there to the shelter all the way in the Bronx. The staff had no remorse, no compassion, and no heart to truly care or sympathize with my situation or even care to help. I was also pressured to do my own job searches, my own apartment searches and basically climb my way out alone by own bootstraps. My housing specialist was not providing me with low income housing nor applications to submit to be put on a waiting list for housing, and essentially no support whatsoever. All I was giving every week we met was unnecessary lectures on how important it is I find a place and threats that if I don't find a place I can be homeless again

1 and a list of brokers that charge fees that I  
2 could not even afford in the first place. In  
3 conclusion, the two years that I have been here  
4 has been nothing less than a journey of blood,  
5 sweat and tears. I am a witness to what it's  
6 like to live in a shelter as a single mother  
7 with children, nobody will truly understand  
8 what it feels like or what it really means to  
9 live this way until they have trooped in a  
10 homeless persons' shoes like myself. It's been  
11 a tremendous struggle trying to raise two kids  
12 on my own with no help, making it my fulltime  
13 job to try to secure a fulltime job just to  
14 hope to even afford a rent in New York City.  
15 Searching for housing in every crevice of the  
16 city and going through multiple losses,  
17 including my three bedroom house I had prior to  
18 being recycled back into the shelter system. I  
19 am also a writer and an advocate for the  
20 homeless, so the little free time I do have  
21 goes into trying to pursue my small dreams and  
22 passions. If I could be granted one simple wish  
23 it would be truly affordable housing and decent  
24 paying jobs for all, because housing is a human  
25

1  
2 right and jobs are desperately needed by many  
3 simply to survive. None of these things should  
4 even be something we have to battle for, but  
5 since it is I am here writing my testimony on  
6 behalf of all those going through this same  
7 struggle, and together as one we shall rise  
8 above this and reach a higher ground, and in  
9 God I trust. Thank you guys so very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for  
11 your testimony.

12 BOBBY WATTS: Good morning, Chairman  
13 Levin. Thank you for this opportunity. I'm  
14 Bobby Watts, the Executive Director of Care for  
15 the Homeless, a healthcare shelter and human  
16 service agency that has as part of our mission  
17 fighting to end homelessness. I'd like to  
18 direct my remarks mostly around the importance  
19 of healthcare which several of you have raised  
20 questions about. At Care for the Homeless we  
21 operate more than 30 outreach sites and  
22 federally qualified health clinics, serving  
23 homeless people in four boroughs of New York  
24 City, and last year we served more than 8,000  
25 homeless men, women and children. Before

1 talking about healthcare I want to say that  
2 more than any time in more than 25 years I sit  
3 before you with a great deal of hope and I want  
4 to thank this committee for your understanding  
5 of the importance of healthcare. This  
6 committee for the last three or four years has  
7 restored funding for health services in single  
8 adult shelters because you see the importance  
9 of it. Healthcare to families and individuals  
10 experiencing homelessness has a lasting impact  
11 and saves the system money and saves lives and  
12 it's so important that you do that. So I want  
13 to thank you for that. And the same dynamic  
14 that exists for single adults also exists for  
15 homeless families. In the much quoted, much  
16 cited article in the New York Times, it was--we  
17 were captivated by the conditions in the  
18 shelter and I applaud this committee, the de  
19 Blasio Administration for their recent step to  
20 remove children from the Auburn Family Shelter  
21 and the Catherine Street Family Shelter, but my  
22 favorite quote in this whole thing was in the  
23 New York Times an article stating that this was  
24 going to happen was the quote from Dasani's  
25

1 mother, and she said, "It takes all of this for  
2 something to happen? Why was it so hard to do  
3 this three years ago?" And the answer was, it  
4 wasn't. what it took and what it is taking is  
5 imagination and political will and as I move  
6 towards the end of my remarks, I just want to  
7 talk about the importance of health and the  
8 importance of housing and healthcare. The New  
9 York State Department of Health, the Medicaid  
10 redesign team's affordable housing work group  
11 on which I sit has seen the importance of  
12 housing as an important way preserving health  
13 and providing healthcare on site as a way of  
14 moving people out of homelessness, stabilizing  
15 them so that they can stay out of homelessness.  
16 As we move to fight and work to end  
17 homelessness, I want to commend the  
18 Administration for considering a restoring a  
19 housing subsidy, a rental subsidy. I want to  
20 implore that that must happen, but also that we  
21 use research to figure out and understand that  
22 we cannot have a one size fits all approach,  
23 but that we should use research to figure out  
24 which approach is needed for which  
25

1 subpopulations and for which individuals. I  
2 also want to thank Chairman Levin for working  
3 on legislation for an interagency council task  
4 force on homelessness, and we look at all the  
5 systems that contribute to homelessness, we see  
6 they must be coordinated. So thank you very  
7 much.  
8

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
10 much for your testimony.

11 LIBBY MATHEWSON: Hi, first off--  
12 excuse me. I want to thank you for the  
13 opportunity to testify and thank you to the  
14 General Welfare Committee for holding this  
15 hearing. I know we're kind of running out of  
16 time so I'll try and be brief as possible. My  
17 name is Libby Mathewson and I'm an advocate at  
18 the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project.  
19 The Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project,  
20 SNP, is New York City's advocate for economic  
21 justice combining direct legal services,  
22 affirmative litigation, research and policy  
23 making to achieve economic justice for all New  
24 Yorkers. SNP shelter advocacy program  
25 represents homeless families who have been

denied shelter by the NYC DHS. We accompany clients to the intake centers PATH and AFIC [phonetic] and assist with all aspects of the application including issues with their placement. We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the General Welfare Committee on DHS conditions and operations in family shelters. We're concerned about DHS's routine failure to address unsafe conditions in family shelters forcing families and young children to live in units plagued by black mold, severe infestation and lack of heat. We're also concerned about issues of shelter staff creating dangerous and hostile environments for residents, ignoring maintenance reports and taking liberties with their authority. I will be providing testimony on behalf of three SNP clients who are currently residents in DHS family shelters. So I'll just kind of summarize the issues. I've provided photos that my client took of her shelter unit at the Filance [phonetic] Family Residence. As you can see her unit is plagued by mold. There are holes in the walls. It's severely infested by roaches,

1 bed bugs, and mice. You can see mice feces all  
2 over the apartment. She has two young children.  
3 There's also a faulty lock. She has actually  
4 recently been transferred to a new facility,  
5 but sadly it is affected by the exact same  
6 issue. So she hasn't been able to escape that.  
7 And then two other clients of mine are living  
8 in shelters with absolutely no heat. One of  
9 them has been in her shelter placement since  
10 December 2012 and has never had working heat in  
11 her apartment. So she's had to live through two  
12 winters with minor children with absolutely no  
13 heat. She uses her stove to heat the apartment.  
14 And then the other one through our advocacy was  
15 able to get her heat working in February, but  
16 during all of the huge snow storms and the  
17 horrible weather conditions had no heat, and as  
18 you know that is extremely dangerous especially  
19 if there are children living there. So in  
20 response to what we've--to the concerns raised  
21 by our clients we've come up with three fairly  
22 basic suggestions that can help remedy these  
23 issues. One, do rigid assessments of family  
24 shelter units before moving families in, which  
25

1 I know they do to a certain extent, but I don't  
2 think it's good enough. Two, provide  
3 information to all residents about the  
4 procedure for addressing issues with conditions  
5 and repairs in the rooms. Post this  
6 information in facility common areas and  
7 provide written information to each family.  
8 Three, provide copies of reports filed about  
9 conditions issues to the shelter facility, DHS  
10 and an additional city agency such as the  
11 Office of the Public Advocate to ensure  
12 transparency and oversight. So in conclusion, I  
13 want to thank you again for the opportunity to  
14 testify and we welcome the opportunity to speak  
15 further with the City Council and members of  
16 DHS.  
17

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so very  
19 much for your advocacy and for your testimony.  
20 I thank this panel. I look forward to working  
21 with you all and your organizations in the  
22 months ahead. Thank you. Okay, last panel,  
23 Stephanie Gendell from CCC and Bonnie Stone  
24 from Women in Need. And thank you to all of  
25 those that are testifying for your patience.

BONNIE STONE: Hi, thank you for taking this time to talk about this incredible issue. My name is Bonnie Stone and I'm the President and CEO of Women in Need, which is one of the shelter providers for families. We housed 3,400 people every night. So last night we had 3,400 people in eight of our shelters, eight family shelters and one women's shelter, and of those people 2,000 are children. So we know the issue of children in shelters intimately. I'm very proud to be part of the system that responds to this issue. We have 1,000 units of housing. Most of them are shelters for families, and a good portion, 250, are supportive housing, permanent housing for families who leave shelter in need, and these supported housing units have subsidies in them for rent and services. So we are intimately involved with issue as it begins and then as it resolves in a fantastic way. The families in our supportive housing are there. They're stable. We have them for years and our most important concern is for the children. So, we are perhaps in a inevitable position. We spend

an enormous amount of time and effort raising money to provide services for the children in the shelters. We have an extensive set of programs for children and I think what I want to make a point that when we talk about children, you really have to dig down and see what we're--what do you mean by children. We have--we divide the children in our shelters into groups by age. So you have toddlers, zero to five years old. You have school age kids who are six to 12 and you have teenagers. And each of those groups has a special need for attention. And we spend, again, we raise quite a bit of money to make this happen. For children of toddlers, those under five years old we do developmental needs assessments to make sure that they are developing as they need to. We have referrals for medical and social care. We have therapeutic daycare on site for all kids, and we will do placements in outside daycare facilities as well. Children six to 12, they do go to school. The Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services have a wonderful program of making

1                   sure the kids get to school. So we shouldn't  
2                   forget that. That is crucial. We have  
3                   recreational programs, homework help programs,  
4                   camp programs, day camp programs for children  
5                   when they're out of school, field trips to keep  
6                   them active. And interestingly enough for  
7                   children 13 to 17, these teenagers are in a  
8                   particularly vulnerable part of time of their  
9                   lives. They are subject to bullying and shame  
10                  for being in a shelter. They have no place to  
11                  air that and we've, in a way, we're fortunate  
12                  we have them in our arms, and so we're able to  
13                  provide services for them about avoiding  
14                  domestic violence, about avoiding bullying and  
15                  violence, empowering girls to control their  
16                  relationships with boys and any sexual  
17                  relationships. We have programs for substance  
18                  abuse prevention, HIV prevention, and we have  
19                  mentoring programs for boys who particularly  
20                  strong needs with most of the families not  
21                  having fathers. So I--we, as I said, we're at  
22                  an enviable position because we work very, very  
23                  hard at getting extra money, but I would like  
24                  to see that this kind of attention is paid in  
25

1 all the shelters, whether it's city money or  
2 private money. There is hope and there are  
3 some wonderful interventions that could be  
4 done. My only last point is on supportive  
5 housing. As I said, we have over 250 units of  
6 supportive housing. When the last New York,  
7 New York three program was put together, 90  
8 percent--it was a great program, but 90 percent  
9 of it was for single people and only 10 percent  
10 for families. So I hope when the new program  
11 comes in which I hope will happen that most of  
12 the attention will be paid to families. So I  
13 thank you.

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very  
16 much. Thank you for your patience and your  
17 testimony.

18 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Good afternoon.  
19 I'm Stephanie Gendell. I'm the Associate  
20 Executive Director for Policy and Government  
21 Relations at Citizens Committee for Children  
22 and I promise to stay in my three minutes. This  
23 is an exciting time to be an advocate for  
24 homeless children and families in New York  
25 City. We congratulate you on becoming the Chair

1 and the new members. We're looking forward to  
2 working with you and we're also looking forward  
3 to working with the new Commissioner. It was  
4 really great to hear him talking this morning  
5 about improving life outcomes and that you  
6 can't help children unless you help families.  
7 And we're really looking forward to working  
8 with the new Administration. In just a very  
9 short time the Commissioner has made some  
10 dramatic changes to the system and we look  
11 forward to them going forward. I'm not going to  
12 reiterate all that the Public Advocate  
13 testified to earlier about the impact of  
14 homelessness on children, but that's in our  
15 testimony, and so I'll just second everything  
16 she had to say about that. We are grateful that  
17 the Administration has looked into the  
18 conditions at shelters, including the two that  
19 they're moving children out of. We encourage  
20 them to be sure to look at all shelters,  
21 including the cluster sites to ensure that  
22 they--that children, that they're safe for any  
23 children in any of them, and consider no longer  
24 placing children in shelters where there's  
25

1 shared bathroom facilities. And we are also  
2 looking forward to hearing about the city's new  
3 housing subsidy program and preventive  
4 services. We like many of the other advocates,  
5 and this committee, and the city council at  
6 large have supported them for some time and we  
7 look forward to putting them back in place. We  
8 feel that that's really the way we're going to  
9 be able to help keep families out of the system  
10 and then once they're in the system get them  
11 out, and once they get out of the system we  
12 need to continue to provide services to make  
13 sure they don't come back in. And I'll sum it  
14 up there. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so very  
17 much both of you for your testimony. Thank you  
18 to everybody that came here today. I want to  
19 wrap up the hearing now in the interest of the  
20 new hearing that's coming in, the Civil Service  
21 and Labor Committee, but I wanted to thank you  
22 both for your very thoughtful testimony. I look  
23 forward to working with you both as we move  
24 forward with this Administration. I think that  
25 we have one great opportunity here and we can't

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

mess it up. So thank you very much and thank  
you all for attending this hearing. The hearing  
is adjourned.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date 03/13/2014