

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING JOINTLY
WITH THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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HELD AT: Council Chambers
250 Broadway - Hearing Room,
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MARGARET S. CHIN
Co-Chairperson

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Finance Committee hearing. My name is Julissa Ferreras, and I chair this committee. Today's Finance hearing is joint with the Aging Committee chaired by my colleague and Co-Chair Council Member Margaret Chin, and Council members will be joining us shortly. We're trying to stick to the 1:00 o'clock time. So as they come in, we will be acknowledging them. Today, the Committee on Finance and Aging will need to consider Intro 243, which would increase the income level of SCRIE applicants from 29,000 to 50,000. A resolution calling upon New York State Legislature to pass legislation that would link income threshold increases from the SCRIE Program to changes in the Consumer Price Index. And the committees will also hold and oversight hearing entitled Strategies for Improving the Administration of SCRIE.

For the Intro and Resolution that call for income increases, the committee looks forward to hearing from the Department of Finance about the potential impact of the income increase on the number of people who would now be eligible for SCRIE, and

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2 whether DOF has the current capacity to process the
3 additional applications that would result.

4 For the oversight portion of the hearing,
5 the committee looks forward to hearing from the
6 Department of Finance to learn about the successes
7 and failures it has encountered when implementing the
8 SCRIE program since the program was transferred to
9 DOF in 2009. We also look forward to hearing from
10 the Department of Aging regarding their involvement,
11 if any, in the SCRIE program, including their
12 Outreach efforts. For the benefit of the public and
13 my colleagues, I will provide a brief overview of the
14 SCRIE Program.

15 In 2009, Mayor Bloomberg submitted
16 legislation to the Council to transfer the
17 Administration of the SCRIE Program from DFTA to DOF.
18 According to the Bill's memo in support, the transfer
19 of SCRIE operations to DOF was designed to achieve a
20 better customer service experience for seniors, as
21 well as reduce administrative burdens. Two years
22 following the transfer this assumption was proven not
23 to be true. On September 27, 2011, the Finance
24 Committee jointly with the Aging Committee held and
25 oversight hearing to examine DOF's implementation of

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2 the SCRIE Program. As a result of the hearing, the
3 committees learned that the DOF's process of
4 administering the program was inadequate and
5 inefficient. Specifically, the committees learned
6 that seniors have experienced delays in the time it
7 takes to process the initial SCRIE application and
8 the new application. Some delays have been as long
9 as seven months. DOF did not have dedicated staff to
10 deal solely with SCRIE issues. DOF does not have a
11 public phone number that SCRIE tenants or owners with
12 SCRIE tenants can use to contact someone directly at
13 DOF about the SCRIE program. A computer glitch
14 caused errors in landlord's property tax bills,
15 causing all 15,000 buildings receiving SCRIE benefits
16 to have erroneous tax bills, with the improper amount
17 of SCRIE credits applied, and no credits applied at
18 all.

19 Unlike DFTA, DOF did not have a
20 comprehensive manual that proved details, that
21 provided details about the SCRIE Program including
22 frequently asked questions, a glossary of terms, and
23 application procedures. And we also learned that
24 from July 2009 to November 30, 2010, DOF issued SCRIE
25 benefits on behalf of over 3,800 tenants who were

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2 deceased, totally \$11.8 million. Since that hearing,
3 many of these problems were remediated. The
4 Department of Families has since created a SCRIE Unit
5 dedicated to processing SCRIE applications; made
6 landlord's SCRIE Report available online; created a
7 comprehensive SCRIE brochure. And they now
8 crosscheck SCRIE open accounts with Social Security
9 death master file to ensure the benefits are paid to
10 individuals who are alive.

11 These are great improvements, and I
12 applaud DOF for making these strides. However, as
13 council member with a large senior population, I
14 still hear many complaints as do many of my fellow
15 council members. Many complaints include DOF's lack
16 of a dedicated phone line, the lack of SCRIE walk-in
17 offices in every borough. Currently, there is only
18 one SCRIE office and it's located in Manhattan. Lack
19 of Outreach about SCRIE -- about the SCRIE Program
20 even though an MOU were entered into by the DOF and
21 DFTA requires DFTA to provide Outreach in senior
22 centers, community centers indefinitely. The
23 committee looks forward to hearing DOF's progress on
24 the implementation of the SCRIE Program, and
25 DFTA/SCRIE Outreach efforts.

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Before I turn the mic over to my Co-Chair, Margaret Chin, I just want to take a quick moment to address the City's senior population, especially those who are here today. I know that the City's senior population is the fastest growing population in New York City, which is likely due to the many Baby Boomers reaching retirement. I also know that many seniors currently live in housing that does not adequately meet their needs.

Those that are fortunate enough to live in adequate apartments, may not be able to continue to afford them because of rising rents. It is my hope and the hope of my Co-Chair and the Council as a whole that we as city do better. Our first step in trying to do better is passing legislation to ensure that seniors are protected from rent increases through SCRIE.

We also want to ensure that the agency administering the SCRIE program does so in an effective, productive, and sensitive way that is responsive to our seniors' needs. The committees have a lot of questions today, and we also have a lot of people who want to testify. I want to thank the staff, who worked on this hearing today, and I want

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2 to thank you Counsel Tanisha Edwards; Kelly Taylor,
3 the Aging Counsel; Emera Etiv [sp?], Dohini Sampura,
4 and Sarah Gasselman [sp?] They worked hard in
5 preparing for this hearing. So I thank you very much
6 for all your hard work. Now, I will turn the
7 microphone over to my Co-Chair Council Member
8 Margaret Chin.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Chair
10 Ferreras. Good afternoon. I'm Margaret Chin, Chair
11 of the Aging Committee. I want to thank Council
12 Member Ferreras and the Finance Committee for joining
13 us today. This is a hearing that both of us have
14 been eager to hold since the start of the session.
15 And now that we're poised to expand SCRIE for the
16 first time in five years, this is the perfect
17 opportunity to take stock of the program, and how we
18 can ensure that SCRIE is accessible to all eligible
19 seniors, and it's benefitting the greatest number of
20 tenants possible.

21 SCRIE has been a lifeline for tenants and
22 thousands of seniors in New York City. As you all
23 know, SCRIE offers New York City's seniors, who are
24 low income, the opportunity to have their rent frozen
25 at its current level, and to be exempt from future

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2 rent increases. For years, the Council along with
3 some of our senior advocates has argued that the
4 income thresholds are simply too low. Earlier this
5 month, the State finally took action and approved an
6 increase in the income limit from \$29,000 to \$50,000.

7 Today, we will be hearing on Intro 243, a
8 bill that I sponsored along with Chair Ferreras, and
9 Council Member Williams that will allow that increase
10 level to take effect for New York City seniors
11 starting July 1st. Our timeline here is fairly
12 short. So I hop that the Department of Finance is
13 going to tell us that after we pass this bill, they
14 will be prepared and fully ready to start accepting
15 new SCRIE applications two months from today. While
16 we are thrilled that the State raised the income
17 limit for SCRIE eligibility, we need to be clear that
18 this is just a one-time increase.

19 The cost of living in New York City will
20 continue to go up, and in just a few years I imagine
21 we'll be back in the same place, fighting for the
22 State to raise the level again. So that needy
23 seniors aren't unfairly pushed out of the program
24 because they received cost of living adjustments to
25 their Social Security checks. We need a mechanism

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2 put into the SCRIE program that will automatically
3 adjust the income threshold.

4 So Council Member Koslowitz, Ferreras,
5 and I have introduced Res 0185, which call on the
6 State to pass legislation by Senator Bill Perkins and
7 Assembly Member Joan Milne that would provide for an
8 annual adjustment with the SCRIE income threshold to
9 reflect any increase in the Consumer Price Index. If
10 this bill is passed, seniors would rest easy knowing
11 that adjustment to their fixed income won't cause
12 them to lose SCRIE eligibility. And I want to thank
13 all the staff that helped prepare for this hearing
14 today, and thank you all for coming.

15 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, Co-
16 Chair Chin. I just want to say that we've been
17 joined by Council Member Cornegy, Council Member
18 Vallone, Council Member Rose, and Council Member
19 Rosenthal. Thank you to the Administration for being
20 here today, and you may begin your testimony.

21 SARA MEYERS: Hi, I'm Sarah Myers, and
22 I'm representing the Department of Finance.

23 CARYN RESNICK: And I'm Caryn Resnick
24 representing the New York City Department for the
25 Aging.

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2 SARA MEYERS: Good afternoon, Chairwoman
3 Ferreras, Chairwoman Chin and members of the
4 Committees on Finance and Aging. I'm Sarah Meyers,
5 Assistant Commissioner of Tax and Parking Program
6 Operations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
7 before you today regarding Introduction 243 and
8 administration of the Senior Citizen Rent Increase
9 Exemption Program, which will increase the SCRIE
10 income eligibility threshold from \$29,000 to \$50,000,
11 as of July 1, 2014. SCRIE is hugely important to
12 this administration. We support this bill. However,
13 the enabling state legislation sunsets in two years.

14 Therefore, we suggest amending the
15 language so that the Local Law also sunsets at the
16 same time. We are fully committed to continue SCRIE
17 at the higher income threshold, but we feel it is
18 crucial that the Local Law mimics what is in the
19 State law. We understand that there are concerns
20 about the SCRIE Program. And we are making every
21 effort to continually improve our administration of
22 the valuable benefit. We look forward to your
23 feedback today. Our new Finance Commissioner will be
24 starting in a few weeks, and he has already expressed
25 his commitment to SCRIE and his desire to work

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2 together to reach people who may qualify for the
3 benefit, but are not already taking advantage of this
4 crucial benefit.

5 Introduction 243 will increase the number
6 of SCRIE applicants and participants due to the
7 increase in the maximum qualifying income. We are
8 gearing up to handle these new enrollees, and we will
9 be prepared for this change. After we receive an
10 application, our first step is to verify that
11 applicants meet the requirements for the program. In
12 order to qualify for SCRIE in addition to meeting the
13 maximum income threshold, applicants must also meet
14 the Rent Income Ratio set out in the law.

15 This ratio requires that the monthly rent
16 for SCRIE participants must be more than one-third of
17 their monthly income. We determine the monthly
18 income by looking at the annual income submitted with
19 the application. Income includes all household
20 income, and takes into account the income of everyone
21 residing in the home, including Social Security,
22 income for taxable and non-taxable sources and
23 pensions. We require income documentation in order
24 to process an application.

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2 In 2014, applicants must submit income
3 documentation from calendar year 2013. When a
4 household member does not file taxes, we accept other
5 documentation that represents earned incomes such as
6 Social Security statements, pension statements, IRA
7 dividend statements, IRS forms, 1099 and/or a W-2.
8 If they do not have any of those documents, we will
9 accept a signed letter from the applicant stating
10 that they had no income in a certain year and why.
11 Once we determine the income, we look at the legal
12 rent on the applicant's lease to see if it's more
13 than one-third of their income.

14 For example, if the applicant's household
15 income is \$35,000 we will determine the monthly
16 income to be \$2,916.67. Their legal rent would have
17 to be more than \$972 in order to qualify for the
18 program. The legal rent for an applicant with a
19 household income of \$50,000 would have to be at least
20 \$1,389 for them to qualify for the program. To put
21 this in context, according to the Furman Center Rent
22 Stabilization Report from April 2012, the median rent
23 of rent stabilized apartments outside of the
24 Manhattan Core below 96th Street was \$1,132 in 2011,
25 including the Manhattan Core the median rent in 2011

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2 was \$1,480. Taking into account the monthly legal
3 rent to income ratio the Mayor's Office of Management
4 and Budget has estimated that an additional 6,000
5 households may be eligible for SCRIE when the
6 proposed increase goes into effect on July 1st.

7 The expansion of the SCRIE Program will
8 require us to add some new staff to help process the
9 new applications and support the program
10 participants. We expect we will need three new staff
11 for every 4,000 participants that are added to the
12 program. In addition this number, we anticipate that
13 we will need more staff to help with renewals and
14 program support in the future. It is our priority to
15 make sure we have the staffing capacity to maintain
16 our current customer service and operational
17 standards. It is also crucial to us that we have the
18 team in place that will enable us to continue
19 building upon these standards as we strive to improve
20 the program further.

21 To that end, I would like to highlight
22 the progress we have made since Finance first took
23 over the SCRIE Program from DFTA in 2009. Our last
24 testimony about SCRIE in front of the Council was in
25 March 2012. At that time, we spoke at length about

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2 the concerns elected officials, advocates, community
3 groups, and SCRIE participants had about the program.
4 We took these concerns seriously, and have
5 implemented a number of changes to SCRIE, which I
6 would like to highlight.

7 For example, two years ago, it took up to
8 30 days to process a SCRIE renewal. Now, renewal
9 applications are processed in nine days or less on
10 average. And initial applications are processed in
11 four days on average. We have achieved these
12 efficiencies by reorganization our SCRIE/DRIE Unit,
13 and by automatic parts of the process. We scan and
14 categorize all SCRIE and DRIE files so that we can
15 quickly access them when there's an inquiry or we are
16 working to process them. We established a SCRIE/DRIE
17 Customer Service group as well as a SCRIE/DRIE Walk-
18 In Center that is open from 8:30 to 4:30 p.m. five
19 days a week.

20 SCIRE Program participants, including
21 tenants and landlords can come to see us any time
22 they would like to ask us a question in person. We
23 help potential applicants who understand what is
24 needed to apply to the program and whether they
25 qualify. We accept applications and associated

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2 documents and distribute applications. The Center's
3 staff can quickly look up the status of an
4 application. We provide information about services
5 for seniors, and locations of senior centers
6 throughout the city. The three full-time employees
7 working the Center are part of the SCRIE/DRIE
8 Customer Service group. Their supervisor, who
9 oversees the whole SCRIE/DRIE Customer Service group,
10 has vast experience with customer service. One of
11 the center members is fluent in Spanish. All of the
12 staff have access to phone interpretation service so
13 that they can communicate with non-English speaking
14 customers. Our interpretation provider gives us
15 access to more than a hundred different languages.

16 In addition to the Center, our Customer
17 Service group responds to many SCRIE/DRIE emails and
18 311 service requests. We respond to SCRIE inquiries
19 sent to us by 311, or that we receive via email with
20 48 hours. In the case of a tenant or applicant
21 inquiring via phone through 311, we contact them back
22 by a phone call. Through much of this fiscal year,
23 this team has so far responded to more than 10,000
24 inquiries that we received either from 311 or by

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2 email. Two of the staff members charged with these
3 responses use to process SCRIE applications.

4 All of our SCRIE dedicated customer
5 service staff are knowledgeable and care deeply about
6 helping people get the information they need. We
7 have improved our customer service for SCRIE and our
8 area of Outreach as well. We now have a full-time
9 Outreach Coordinator for Seniors, who works within
10 our Outreach group. She has personal relationships
11 with groups that work with the aging population
12 including senior centers, advocacy groups and
13 community groups. She speaks frequently with DFTA to
14 share information and coordinate on Outreach efforts.

15 Earlier this week she attended DFTA's
16 Annual Housing Benefits and Entitlements Committee.
17 The Coordinator focuses on Outreach events that
18 specifically target seniors. All of our Outreach
19 staff can speak expertly about SCRIE, and our other
20 housing benefits -- benefit for seniors, the Senior
21 Citizen Homeowner Exemption. In calendar year 2013,
22 our Outreach team had 130 events. Of these, 37 were
23 specifically focused on seniors, and 20 were specific
24 to the SCRIE Program.

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2 We often received questions about senior
3 programs at all of our Outreach events, and we are
4 well equipped to handle these. Apart from Finance's
5 Outreach events, DFTA participated in approximate 180
6 community events, which were attended by more than
7 14,800 older adults where they also spoke about
8 SCRIE. DFTA and Finance continue to work
9 collaboratively to distribute SCRIE information. In
10 calendar year 2013, we sent SCRIE flyers via email
11 and fax to 335 aging service providers, which reached
12 17,000 home delivered meal recipients, senior
13 centers, case management agencies, caregiver
14 programs, homecare providers, and legal service
15 providers.

16 In addition to Outreach and customer
17 service, last year we published a Comprehensive Guide
18 to SCRIE and DRIE. This booklet has everything
19 tenants, landlords, and new applicants need to know
20 about SCRIE. It's also available in English,
21 Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Korean. We distribute
22 these booklets at all of our Outreach events. We
23 work closely with elected officials' offices to
24 ensure that you have the materials you need to help
25 your constituents.

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One of the tools that we provide is a monthly list of SCRIE tenants at risk of losing their benefits because they have failed to renew. Working together we are able to reach more people and provide the support that this vulnerable population needs, and we appreciate your feedback.

I would like to end my testimony by emphasizing that the new administration, including the new Finance and Departments of the Aging Commissioners is totally committed to providing these valuable benefits to all qualified New Yorkers. SCRIE is tremendously important to us, and we take very seriously the need to reach as many people as possible. We are developing new methods of Outreach to publicize SCRIE, and get additional people signed up for the program. Our new Commissioner is starting soon, and he is looking forward to leading this initiative. One project we are launching soon is to send letters regarding the income increase to all applicants who were denied for having the income above the threshold over the last several years. We will update you on all of our plans as they develop over the next few months. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you very much for your testimony. So, it's educating and actually answered a lot of our questions. So we won't be circling back on some things so you don't have to repeat, but it's nice to keep it on the record. So I appreciate you identifying the 60,000 - the 6,000 new applicants that this legislation will trigger. I want to talk about the data set and how - first, how you identified the 6,000. But also I know that in the May 20 talk -- communication with the Council DOF stated that it's working on developing a reliable data set and analytical methods for targeting seniors. And I'd like to know what's the progress, and how you got to today's number?

SARA MEYERS: Sure. Well, I'll answer the questions kind of separately, but they are connected. The 6,000 number is an estimate that OMB helped us come up with by using the Housing Vacancy Survey, which has a sample size of 19,000 units. There are a million rent regulated units. So this sample size is small, but is our best estimate of the number that are eligible. We think the -- we think it's reliable is the fact that the number is not

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2 going to be hugely significant because of the one-
3 third income ratio that's required.

4 So some people may think that because
5 we're adding \$20,000 onto the income limit, you would
6 go up in that same percentage in participants. But
7 we don't believe that to be the case, because you
8 have to leave the one-third income ratio. We have
9 spent a lot of time over the past couple of years
10 looking at trying to get a data set where we could to
11 targeted Outreach for new participants when it was
12 \$29,000. It has proven to be very difficult because
13 there is no master database that shows us everyone
14 who is in a rent regulated apartment who is 62 or
15 older, who makes less than \$29,000 and who pays more
16 than one-third of their income in rent.

17 That's why we have worked a lot of
18 Outreach events, and worked -- tried to work with
19 elected officials to get the word out. Because their
20 population to begin one million rent regulated units
21 we don't have a data set that shows us who these
22 people are, who may be eligible. So that number
23 still -- or the actual data still eludes us in order
24 to directly target. And we're always open to hearing
25 about ideas to get at this population.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: So, when we're talking about the data set, and hoping to get -- identify a more accurate number, I know that there has been talks about reaching out to HRA and the Board of Elections. Is there anything, any update in working with other agencies that might have this data?

SARA MEYERS: Well, we do -- I know we did do a mailing to food stamp recipients in previous years. So that was using HRA data. The numbers did not go up significantly because you have to be in a rent regulated building. You can't be -- you can't receive Section 8 to get SCRIE. And Board of Election data we were not able to use in any fashion that was helpful.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Okay. Well, since you mentioned food stamps, I wanted talk about probably the reverse of food stamps, and really trying to communicate who are currently using food stamps. But in reviewing the MOU, it was also highlighted that there was to be some sort of coordination with helping increase the food stamps eligibility to the seniors who are applying to SCRIE.

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2 What is your Outreach and your plan on that, and
3 that's in you MOU Point 10.

4 SARA MEYERS: Actually, our Assistant
5 Commissioner on Outreach is off today, which we did
6 make Council know in advance. So that specific
7 question I cannot answer, but I'm happy to get back
8 to you on that.

9 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Yes, I'd like you
10 to get back to the Committee.

11 [background discussion]

12 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: All right, did
13 DFTA have -- ?

14 CARYN RESNICK: We have been engaged in
15 several initiatives in partnership. We had a federal
16 grant. I have been working with the Council of
17 Senior Centers and Services and the AARP to do a big
18 SNAP Outreach campaign, and help eligible seniors
19 apply for SNAP Services who are not now receiving
20 them, with success. And we're continuing on to make
21 that a key part of the work that we do.

22 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: So when you say
23 it's success, do you have numbers?

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2 CARYN RESNICK: I did not come prepared
3 today with those numbers, but we can certainly get
4 back to you.

5 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: [interposing] But
6 you can verify them. Yeah, if you can get them to
7 the committee. In identifying these new potential
8 6,000 seniors, I just want to -- I'm sorry,
9 acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member
10 Koslowitz, who is actually a sponsor on one of our
11 legislations today with Council Member Chin, Chair
12 Chin. Are there new needs that we're going to be
13 seeing in the next Executive Budget to address? It
14 seems like it's like 2-1/2 people that you have to
15 hire because 6,000 people. So what are the new needs
16 we should be expecting in the Executive Budget.

17 SARA MEYERS: We are putting forth, at
18 least for the upcoming year, three staff members, and
19 we are going to wait to ask for additional staff
20 members for the renewal unit as we see what comes
21 through. But, yes, and we've already begun working on
22 that.

23 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Okay, I have two
24 more questions and then I want to open it up
25 obviously to my colleagues who have questions and my

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2 Co-Chair. But in your testimony, you spoke about the
3 -- obviously there's a thing from another borough,
4 not one of the outer boroughs. I think we're trying
5 to change the numbers. Having a site in Manhattan is
6 highly inconvenient, and I know everyone -- I think
7 for some people the perspective is that if you do it
8 in Manhattan everybody could get to it. That's not
9 true, and especially not true for a population like
10 seniors. And we don't even have to -- Access-A-Ride
11 is a whole other hearing. Right, that's a whole
12 other conversation. We're not going to go there.
13 However, when you talked about that there is a
14 staffer, or I guess there's a staffing -- the staff
15 person is -- speaks Spanish, which is an issue
16 because we have a large immigrant senior population
17 that's growing. So we need multi-lingual access,
18 which you've already identified. And then you've
19 identified that there's a phone -- the translator
20 line available. So why would we have a senior who
21 doesn't speak English come into the Manhattan site to
22 get on the phone for translation? Why would we do --
23 why? It just seems incredibly inconvenient from my
24 perspective. Why can't that senior call in a
25 hotline, which we've been asking for, that they would

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2 be able to do that from their home, which is
3 something that's going -- It's how they're going to
4 get the services provided at this site anyway?

5 SARA MEYERS: Well, we do have a -- in my
6 testimony what I mentioned is one of the things we
7 changed two years ago is any senior that creates a
8 service request with 311, we have people call them
9 back directly as opposed to -- Often what happens
10 with 311 is someone creates a service request. It's
11 forwarded to the agency. The agency puts their
12 response to the inquiry in 311's database, and then
13 that person calls back 311 to get the information.
14 But what we do is we call the person who's inquiring,
15 the tenant or the applicant back directly, and if
16 they do not speak English, we use a third-party phone
17 to use the translation service.

18 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Right, but there's
19 Outreach that says you can come to the office from
20 this time to this time. So if a senior gets this
21 information, they'll go to the office, and then have
22 to interact with the phone anyway for translation
23 services.

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2 SARA MEYERS: As of now, we only have
3 one. I understand your point about having multi-
4 lingual people at the centers.

5 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Or just have a
6 hotline where the person doesn't have to come all the
7 way to Manhattan to receive the services that could
8 be resolved from the hotline. I understand your
9 perspective from the 311, but you're saying that on
10 average you get about 10,000 calls on 311. I would
11 think that might trigger the importance of having a
12 dedicated line.

13 SARA MEYERS: That includes emails.

14 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: That includes
15 emails also to the Outreach?

16 SARA MEYERS: Yeah. So, I can give you
17 stats on actual calls. We get about 50 SCRIE 311
18 inquiries a day.

19 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Fifty a day?

20 SARA MEYERS: Fifty.

21 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I think that, you
22 know, I'm a proponent of creating a dedicated line
23 within DOF for this issue, and think that's something
24 that I'm going to always ask. And hopefully it will
25 happen especially when you're asking for new leads.

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2 I have two other questions, but I'm going to let my
3 Co-Chair ask and then I'll wrap it up at the end.
4 Thank you so much.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Madam
6 Chair. On the report about the -- even with the
7 center that you have for Manhattan, you only have
8 three full-time staff there?

9 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And one of them
11 speaks Spanish --

12 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: -- right? So what
14 -- the supervisor is that additional staff?

15 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So there's four
17 people on the site, or the supervisor is not there
18 all the time?

19 SARA MEYERS: She's there when she needs
20 to be in terms of if we need extra people there. But
21 currently the three people that are staffed there
22 meet the need of the people coming in.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Now, has DOF
24 considered partnering with other city agencies, or
25 like our borough president to have an Outreach office

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2 a borough hall or any other boroughs to provide this
3 kind of assistance or information? I mean that might
4 help save some costs, but then you would have some
5 personnel there. Or partnering with the other
6 elected official or other city agencies to really
7 provide more access to our seniors in every single
8 borough.

9 SARA MEYERS: I mean it's something that
10 we certainly can explore. We spent the better part
11 of the past two years really making sure that our
12 Manhattan office was running and it was running
13 successful. Is it possible that it's something that
14 we could expand? We certainly could look into it.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I think
16 that's something that I really think that DOF should
17 really explore to partner with other agencies in the
18 city the other government offices. That people go
19 to, or borough -- you know, our borough president's
20 office in a Borough Hall because the seniors really a
21 lot of times they like to go into an office to talk
22 to somebody to see somebody. And I just can't still
23 imagine -- see how the language line functions. It's
24 still not as good as having somebody who could speak
25 the language. And I think that the city really needs

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2 to continue to build that kind of capacity, hire
3 staff who are bilingual that speak other languages to
4 really help with this. The other question I have is
5 I'm glad that in your testimony you talked about
6 reaching out to people that applied that were over
7 income, and I think it's really good that you make
8 every effort to contact them. But there were so many
9 people, the minute they heard that we were
10 introducing the resolution to raise income, we've
11 gotten calls from constituents that we've got to
12 reject it based on I was three dollars over. I was
13 five dollars over. It's just so sad to hear stories
14 like that. So I think that is really a good idea to
15 really reach out directly to the people who apply and
16 got rejected. So I really applaud you for that
17 effort. I'll defer to my colleagues, and I can come
18 back later.

19 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, and
20 we've been joined by Council Members Treyger, Levine,
21 Van Bramer, Johnson, Deutsch, and we will begin the
22 questioning by Council Member Vallone followed by
23 Council Member Cornegy.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Madam
25 Chair, and to our Co-Chair. Thank you for working

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2 jointly, and I know we're all very happy when we see
3 increases especially for our seniors. Just to simply
4 say it gets me very nervous that we're into 2016.
5 So, I'd like to address what maybe some long-term
6 plans on the Department of Finance or for the budget.
7 After these two years, I would hate to see anything
8 building up to \$29,000. Do you have any thoughts of
9 long-term financing for this?

10 SARA MEYERS: It's not anything I can
11 comment on right now. I know that we're committed to
12 making sure that the program continues at threshold,
13 but we do think that the local law should be the same
14 as the state law.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, has there
16 been any conversations beyond the amendment?

17 SARA MEYERS: I mean, we can get back to
18 you. We would have to discuss it. As of now, the
19 State has offered the money, included for the first
20 two years. There is money from the State for the
21 financing of SCRIE with the proposed income limit.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I think my
23 second question would be in working together with
24 Commissions for Aging, for Senior Centers, what can
25 we do jointly as we go to the senior centers that's

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2 similar to increase enrollment. I know we've
3 addressed that not as much of that, but maybe expand
4 that program, a different Outreach we can do
5 together?

6 CARYN RESNICK: As Sarah mentioned in her
7 testimony, we do work very collaboratively and DFTA
8 has its own Outreach team. They go out to community
9 health fairs, elected official fairs, everywhere and
10 anywhere that we're invited. And I believe we did
11 about 180 community events last years. SCRIE is
12 always included front and center in the Outreach that
13 we do. And in our 250 senior centers the majority of
14 them are capable of doing case assistance, and
15 available to help seniors fill out and apply for
16 SCRIE as well as our case management agencies to help
17 those that are frail and homebound. And that would
18 be part of their in-home assessment. And I can say
19 that for our new Commissioner Donna Corrado, one of
20 her key pieces of the vision is access to benefits
21 across the board, and we just mentioned SNAP. So
22 there's a feeling that certainly with the raise in
23 income to \$50,000 we need to capture additional
24 seniors. And there are many benefits and
25 entitlements that are due to us so it will be really

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2 a key part of our vision moving forward to make sure
3 that everybody has access to the benefits for which
4 they're entitled.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, thank you
6 and I look forward to working with you and Donna has
7 been great, as with all our new commissioners on
8 spreading the word. So thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you Council
10 Member Vallone, and if we could just also reiterate
11 that question for our own to be directed during the
12 Executive Budget hearing, I think that would be
13 appropriate to get that in there. And now we will
14 have Council Member Cornegy followed by Council
15 Member Rose.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Council Member
18 Rose followed by Council Member Rosenthal.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you, Chairs.
20 I have to sort of echo Council Member Vallone's
21 remarks. I was really excited. It felt as if
22 Christmas had come. We were given this wonderful
23 gift of the increase only to find out a year and a
24 half later or so we have to try to put the gift back
25 in the box and return it. And I think in your

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2 conversations about going forward, you need to think
3 about that. How are you going to re-gift this
4 present because if people are getting these benefits,
5 how are you going to then take them away from them?
6 So my questions is that thousands of seniors get on
7 SCRIE already paying 40 to 50% of their income in
8 rent, which puts them on a financial cliff. Thirty
9 percent is the level set by the federal government
10 for affordability. Can the City implement a rollback
11 whereby everyone on SCRIE pays no more than 30% of
12 their income in rent? Could DOF do a cost benefit
13 analysis of this rollback idea?

14 SARA MEYERS: Well, there's currently a
15 statutory authority to do that. Could we embark on a
16 cost benefit analysis? I'm sure we could work with
17 the OMB to provide data about what that would cost.
18 But there's nothing in the statute that would allow
19 us to do that currently.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: So, my question was
21 could you, but now I'm asking would you seriously
22 consider it?

23 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you. And
25 then when a senior is taken off SCRIE their rent

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2 escalates overnight. How can the City put in place a
3 policy to stop seniors from beginning taken off of
4 SCRIE if they fail to recertify in time? And such a
5 policy from the Administration would help DOF keep
6 seniors on SCRIE.

7 SARA MEYERS: Sure. Well, let me start
8 by just telling you what we do to try and get every
9 senior to renew their benefit, which they must do
10 every two years. Sixty days before seniors SCRIE
11 benefit expires, we send them and their third-party
12 representative an application to renew. Every senior
13 is allowed to have one person on their case that
14 receives every piece of mail that they do. Often
15 times, it could be someone from the senior center or
16 it could be their child. Not all of our seniors have
17 this, but we always offer them the opportunity. It's
18 on all of our applications. We think it's very
19 helpful. So 60 days before the expiration of their
20 benefit, we send this application. If they -- there
21 is a six-month grace period that they have to renew.
22 So if they do not -- we do not receive their
23 application within 30 days after their benefit
24 expiration date, we send the tenant and the
25 representative another letter. And then another 60

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2 days later, if they still haven't renewed, we send a
3 letter to the tenant, their representative, and this
4 time we also add the landlord to hopefully get
5 another party interested in helping. And once that
6 letter goes out, they still have an additional three
7 months to respond. And that's when they give the
8 list to the Council. Every month we submit a list to
9 the Council of the tenants who have failed to renew.
10 And we're currently at very consistently a 94%
11 renewal rate. So we do have about 6% every month
12 that fail to meet the six-month grace period. Some
13 of them it's natural attrition. They would have
14 failed to renew their benefits for other reasons.
15 We've really increased, and I think improved upon our
16 efforts of getting tenants to renew because it's so
17 important. After the six-month grace period has
18 ended, we do not have any statutory authority to
19 renew a benefit for a senior who comes forth after
20 the expiration of that grace period.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Could anyone sort
22 of intervene for them at that point? As it say -- it
23 gets to the fourth month of the grace period, could
24 anyone other than the person -- the other person that
25 gets the notification, sort of intervene on their

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2 behalf? I mean because maybe it's now become an
3 issue of mental capacity is diminished or --

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SARA MEYERS: [interposing] Sure.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: -- they might be in
6 a hospital or something. Could someone other than
7 the actual recipient intervene at that point for
8 them?

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SARA MEYERS: Yes. We have advocates,
10 often time attorneys or people who are representing
11 adults with diminished capacity step forward on their
12 behalf.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Is the six-month
14 grace period is hard and fast, that's a hard number?

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SARA MEYERS: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: I have a question
17 about, of course, Staten Island. And I was looking
18 at the population served by SCRIE, and there's 342
19 folks who avail themselves of this program. So could
20 you tell me what that is attributable to? I know we
21 have a lot of private houses, but this number is --
22 it's alarming based on the fact that we have such a
23 large senior population. So do you know what this
24 number is attributable to? Are they Outreach
25 efforts?

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2 SARA MEYERS: I would say on the first
3 thing is kind of what you kind of mentioned. I do
4 believe that the rent rate there's not as many rent
5 regulated units on Staten Island, and you have to be
6 living in a rent regulated apartment. We certainly
7 can work to -- with any of our elected official in
8 Staten Island. We are open to working with any
9 elected official that wants us to come and do
10 SCRIE/DRIE Outreach. We are happy to do so and to
11 train staffers on SCRIE and DRIE.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: What has been the
13 traditional sort of Outreach that you've done in
14 Staten Island to get individuals to avail themselves
15 of SCRIE?

16 SARA MEYERS: Again, I don't oversee
17 Outreach. I have some Outreach staff, and I can see
18 if we have data on Staten Island. Let's see what I
19 have. Okay, all right. So we regularly participate
20 in senior affairs. Well, our Outreach, we have done
21 several Outreach events in the past year in Staten
22 Island, and I think we'd be open to doing as many as
23 her --

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: I would really like
25 to speak to you --

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SARA MEYERS: [interposing] Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: -- offline about that, and --

SARA MEYERS: [interposing] I'm happy to.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: -- help with the Outreach.

SARA MEYERS: Happy to.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you.

SARA MEYERS: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: And I would hope, and I don't know what the plan is reaching out to elected officials, because I know that you had mentioned it. But I'm hoping that the Outreach is proactive where there is someone that engages with elected officials especially now that we have a significant amount of new members that have joined the Council. Which means new -- different types of Outreach, different connections, different relationships that the agency is reaching out to the elected officials, and not waiting for the elected official to reach out to you. So I hope that that's part of the strategy.

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SARA MEYERS: Absolutely, and I know I speak for Assistant Commissioner Karasek who unfortunately couldn't be here who oversees Outreach, that she will be in touch. I know that we also have our coordinator on Senior Outreach efforts, Robin Camades [sp?] who's here, and I know that she would be happy to speak to any member and will reach out. I know that we did a training I believe in March. Maybe it was in April with Council Member staff on SCRIE and DRIE, and we look forward to do more of that.

*CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Yes, please that would be great, and I just wanted to thank you for the monthly updates that you do send. They are very helpful, and from the committee we do share this with our other council members.

SARA MEYERS: Right.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: So I also urge my council members to look out for those emails. So thank you, and Tanisha sends them out. Also, we've been joined by Council Members Miller and Arroyo, and now we will have questions from Council Member Rosenthal followed by Council Member Koslowitz.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Hi. Thank you
3 very much for coming today, and I very much
4 appreciate this hearing. To the chairs, thank you.
5 I just want to make two quick comments. First, I
6 want to thank the three Upper Westsiders that I see
7 here in the room. Thank you for coming to the
8 hearing, and I do just want to take this opportunity
9 to give a shout out to Council Member Deutsch for
10 traveling to the Upper West Side to my town hall last
11 night. I very much appreciated that, and Upper
12 Westsiders now know who you are. So, the three
13 questions that I have are first, in our office we
14 definitely use the information that you send over.
15 So thank you very much, and thank you Tanisha for
16 sending it over. And the last I looked at it over
17 half of the people on our list the contact
18 information is bad. So we had sent them out a
19 letter. The letter came back to our office. We
20 called, and the number disconnected or wrong number.
21 Now, obviously we don't know what happened to these
22 people, and I'm concerned about that. So I'm
23 wondering if you have any thoughts about -- I'm
24 surprised to have heard your number of 92% success
25 rate in reaching out to people. I don't know if

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there's a correlation between that and my 50% not contactable rate. Could you talk about that just a little bit?

SARA MEYERS: Well, the list that you're getting is people who have not renewed the benefit, and have received three notices. So to me it would - - there would be a correlation to that list. That list represents the less than 10% who haven't replied. So it would make sense to time that over half that list would -- You know, they're not renewing for a reason. They have moved away, passed away. It's so -- that doesn't --

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: [interposing] I see what you're saying. Yep, yep, yep, yep. So you've sent them three letters already?

SARA MEYERS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So, the letter that comes from that is the fourth letter?

SARA MEYERS: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, I'm just trying to think about how we could find them sooner, or find out that -- how we find out that they've moved or -- At which point they've dropped off the

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2 rolls altogether once you send them to us, and they
3 haven't responded to four emails -- four letters?

4 SARA MEYERS: After the six-month grace
5 period there's an opportunity for another email.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: How soon do we
7 get the list? Do we get it?

8 SARA MEYERS: You get it at the three-
9 month mark of their six-month grace period. So
10 essentially we're starting a renewal process two
11 months before they expire. We send our renewal
12 applications out to about 2,000 people every month,
13 and a lot of people renew by their expiration date.
14 And then the list keeps getting smaller.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yep, yep, yep.

16 SARA MEYERS: So the list we send you, or
17 to Council the master list, I think is less than 200
18 people when it gets divvied up amongst the Council.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah, the
20 reason I asked is because the most recent one
21 wouldn't that be on the three-month mark because
22 we're like two weeks away, and we were calling these
23 people.

24 SARA MEYERS: These are making their six-
25 month grace period we send it.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, so we should just check on that a little bit. That could be our office, but that was a little nerve racking. And then how many people -- So is there an effort on your office part to expand this to DRIE? I know it's up to the state to decide, but what are we doing there so for the disabled?

SARA MEYERS: For the income?

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Uh-huh.

SARA MEYERS: DRIE income in the -- in their governing statutes is a little different because it's currently linked to increases for disability, and that's -- The legislation that was passed by the State does not change DRIE income.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Is that something you guys are pursuing to try to --

SARA MEYERS: [interposing] There is a certain population of people who need the New York Cap as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Sure.

SARA MEYERS: I know there are bills in the Senate now that are trying to increase DRIE coming up. I'm sure there's a rally around that.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Wait, I --
part of what I'm expressing to you is interest in
making that high on your list --

SARA MEYERS: [interposing] Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: -- in terms of
what I'm hearing from the community.

SARA MEYERS: [interposing] Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Another thing
just real quickly is when you reach out to your list
of people who you've denied in the past, will you
send that list over to the Council as well so we can
make an effort?

SARA MEYERS: Sure, happy to.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, had you
planned to already do that or --?

SARA MEYERS: No, but that's a good idea.
We're going to be sending them a letter probably in
the beginning of June, and we're going to include an
application in the letter. So we can send you the
list.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I'm eager for
that to happen.

SARA MEYERS: Okay.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, great.

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Thank you very much.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, Council

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Member Rosenthal. In 2011, there were personal

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calls, or phone calls made for those people that did

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not renew. Is that something that we can revisit?

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When you see the difference especially with the new

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potential new applicants, but definitely with the

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renewal concerns? I know that the former

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commissioner had made it -- I think it was 1,200

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calls -- 12,000 calls were made for the number of

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people that had not renewed. Is that a practice that

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the agency can continue?

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SARA MEYERS: It would be something we

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can look at now that our non-response rate is so low.

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It's something we certainly can look into. We

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wouldn't -- I wouldn't say that we would commit to

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calling the 2,000 that we send renewal applications

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out for.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: But if you called

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12,000, 2,000 is a drop in the bucket.

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SARA MEYERS: Yeah.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Right?

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2 SARA MEYERS: We don't have the current
3 staff to call 12,000 but we certainly -- there's a
4 good enough amount of time that we can -- those that
5 don't respond we can looking to call.

6 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Well, I'd like you
7 to pose that to the new commissioner and we're going
8 to follow up as a committee. I think that if we
9 called 12, we can definitely call two. We're trying
10 to urge that people renew.

11 SARA MEYERS: Sure.

12 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

13 SARA MEYERS: A lot of people do renew
14 once we send them the application, though.

15 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Right.

16 SARA MEYERS: And I can give you that. I
17 mean many people renew right when we send them the
18 application.

19 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Okay, and we will
20 now have Council Member Koslowitz followed by Council
21 Member Cornegy.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Thank you,
23 Madam Chair. I'm looking at some numbers here, and
24 my mind is a little boggled. I mean, of course,
25 people who reach out to services, and I'm going to

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2 take Queens for instance. 11,156 people are getting
3 SCRIE in Queens. I think, though, that amount lives
4 in my district not counting all the other districts
5 in Queens. I have an enormous amount of people,
6 seniors living in my district that get SCRIE. They
7 call my office, and especially lately they have been
8 calling my office a lot because of the \$29,000 and
9 they've got an increase in Social Security, and
10 maybe it was like \$30. And they were taken off of
11 SCRIE.

12 Is it possible that we -- I mean my
13 office helps seniors everyday, every single day. Is
14 it possible that we have satellite offices in the
15 other boroughs so people have a place to go? Because
16 a lot of these seniors won't go into Manhattan. They
17 won't get on a subway. They won't get on a bus, and
18 a lot of them can't. So what I'd like to see are
19 services. You know, each borough has a borough hall.
20 If there could be someone placed in that place.

21 It doesn't have to be five days a week,
22 seven hours a day. It could be, you know, at certain
23 times where people can have access to the help that
24 they need. And have one person in that office be
25 able to help them. We help many seniors, many

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2 seniors and we can help them fill out their
3 applications. But we need city services in the other
4 boroughs where people have access. I have
5 introduced, and I happen to be one of the primes on
6 this bill, but I introduced legislation before I
7 voted the \$50,000 income, the \$29,000 to \$50,000
8 increase, which is wonderful. But in two years, I'm
9 worried. I'm worried what happens, and I had
10 introduced legislation that the legislation be linked
11 to the Consumer Price Index. As it goes up, so does
12 SCRIE. How do you feel about that?

13 SARA MEYERS: The Administration supports
14 that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: They do
16 support that?

17 SARA MEYERS: [interposing] They do.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Okay, now what
19 do we have to do? We have to go to Albany. We have
20 to speak to our friends in Albany, and tell them what
21 we want to do with this.

22 SARA MEYERS: We will implement it, and
23 we support that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Well, that's
25 very good to hear. It makes me happy as a senior it

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makes me happy. I'll never have SCRIE, but it makes me happy. So, okay, and also do you foresee any problems with that?

SARA MEYERS: I don't foresee any problems with the implementation and administration of it. We currently do some things more for the DRIE Program.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: For the -- ?

SARA MEYERS: DRIE Program --

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: [interposing]
Right, right.

SARA MEYERS: -- for people with disabilities.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Okay. Thank you very much.

SARA MEYERS: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you Council Member Koslowitz. Council Member Cornegy followed by Council Member Levine.

COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEGY: Good afternoon. So I as someone who prior to being a council member served as a Legislative Policy Analyst on aging for some time, this is exciting to me this move if increasing the threshold now in my district -- Well,

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2 in Brooklyn where you have the second highest number
3 of SCRIE recipients. So while I'm excited about the
4 increase, I know for a fact that a lot of the members
5 in my district and a lot of the constituents in my
6 district that are seniors will be able to benefit
7 from the increase. I'm concerned, though, about not
8 having them have access to the information like
9 having a walk-in center. And I'm also concerned
10 about the administration's capacity to deal with the
11 new applications that are coming because I promised
12 that I'm telling in my district. So you're going to
13 get a whole bunch of applications from Brooklyn for
14 sure based on me having dealt with this for a
15 protracted period of time in my district as Policy
16 Analyst. How did you or what is your methodology to
17 deal with the increase of applications that will be
18 flooded in from Brooklyn, I promise you.

19 SARA MEYERS: We look forward to that.
20 We have done a lot of data analysis on this. We've
21 spent a lot of time over the past two years staffing
22 up, doing an exceptional amount of training with our
23 staff. We have really strong leadership in the SCRIE
24 Unit, and we know exactly now what type of staffing
25 we need to process in a speedy amount of time, a set

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2 amount of applications that will increase. And we
3 have an expectation of what's coming in, and we've
4 already been in discussions with OMB about increasing
5 our staffing. And we're committed to doing that, and
6 making sure that we're staffed -- our response time
7 doesn't suffer, and our customer service doesn't
8 suffer either.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEGY: So I want to
10 hear on record say that I have desk space in my
11 office. So while you're figuring out how you're
12 going to ramp up, in Central Brooklyn there will be a
13 space available to you starting tomorrow.

14 SARA MEYERS: Thank you. We already have
15 desks available.

16 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: We've been joined
17 by Council Member Rodriguez. Now we will have
18 Council Member Levine followed by Council Member
19 Deutsch.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you, Madam
21 Chair. Good afternoon. Thanks for being here. I
22 have a few questions about a sister program to SCRIE
23 which is DRIE, Disability Rent Increase Exemption. It
24 might be more accurate to call it a poor step-
25 sibling. As you know, there's not parity between the

1
2 two programs. The cutoff income for DRIE is
3 currently \$20,000 for an individual, a single
4 individual, which is far less than what SCRIE was
5 even before this welcomed increase that we're
6 anticipating. I guess our first question is do you
7 support parity for these two programs?

8 SARA MEYERS: You mean in concept do I
9 support parity?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: In concept.

11 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay, so the
13 Administration doesn't have a position on that?

14 SARA MEYERS: I think the Administration
15 -- we have not spoke specifically, but I'm sure that
16 the Administration would support it. They're very
17 much behind SCRIE.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Not behind DRIE,
19 you mean, yes?

20 SARA MEYERS: Yeah. I'm sorry. They're
21 much behind SCRIE. So, therefore, I believe they
22 would be very much behind DRIE.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay, just to put
24 this in context, \$20,000. If an individual has
25 worked, had a career then their Social Security

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2 income alone would likely be higher than \$20,000.
3 So leaving people who are really on the margins by
4 any, I think, fair measure are excluded from this
5 program. And I don't have to tell anyone in this
6 room that there are neighborhoods in this city where
7 your rent alone could exceed \$20,000 a year. So this
8 is -- people who are in that in-between level are
9 really squeezed very hard. You spoke extensively
10 about your Outreach to potential SCRIE recipients.
11 Do you have similar robust Outreach to potential DRIE
12 recipients? Could you say a word or two about that?

13 SARA MEYERS:

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Sure, I mean when
15 I -- even though DRIE has much fewer participants in
16 the program, wherever we speak about SCRIE, we speak
17 about DRIE. We do similar mailings, similar follow
18 up. Our walk-in center and our customer service
19 group is SCRIE and DRIE combined, and we are trained
20 -- we are a sponsor on to them. The increase is the
21 same. So I want the administration of the two
22 programs to be identical, and we're fully committed
23 to them.

24

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: But you highlight
3 in your testimony Outreach to senior specific events,
4 which I applaud.

5

SARA MEYERS: Well, this hearing is about
6 SCRIE. I think that's why.

7

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Which is great,
8 but is there Outreach to events that might be more
9 targeted the state with New Yorkers?

10

SARA MEYERS: I don't have that specific
11 information, but I'm happy to get back to you.

12

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And you have a
13 staff person currently that's dedicated to
14 interfacing with DFTA and Outreach for SCRIE, is that
15 correct?

16

SARA MEYERS: We collaborate on events
17 together, yes.

18

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: But do you have a
19 staff person who's assigned to collaboration with the
20 Mayor's Office on people with disabilities?

21

SARA MEYERS: [interposing] With
22 disabilities. I don't know if we have a specific
23 staff person, but we certainly are in touch with
24 them, and they're in touch with me about questions
25 related to DRIE.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: In the Mayor's
3 Office it's known by its acronym and it's MOPED.

4

SARA MEYERS: Yes.

5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: It's very small.
7 I think they have a total staff of seven or eight.
8 Is it your opinion that they're adequately staffed to
9 now return to DRIE. [sic]

9

SARA MEYERS: Again, I can't answer that.

10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: What is the total
12 number of DRIE recipients in New York City currently?

12

13 SARA MEYERS: It's a little bit under
14 9,000.

14

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And you said --?

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SARA MEYERS: A little bit under 9,000.

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17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: 9,000 and could
18 you assess the total number of eligible New Yorkers?

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19 SARA MEYERS: I'm not sure of that. I
20 have not looked specifically at that because for --
21 you have to for the DRIE the eligibility there are
22 some similarities in that you have to be in the right
23 unit, and you have to have X amount of income and pay
24 one-third. But then you also have to receive SSI, or
25 SDI or some disability. So I haven't looked at the

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2 data bout people who receive those in conjunction
3 with the other requirements.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Is there newer
5 rate for DRIE comparable to that of SCRIE?

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SARA MEYERS: Yes.

7

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And you talked
8 about how your goals on turnaround time on initial
9 and newer applications. I think it was four and nine
10 days.

11

SARA MEYERS: It's the same.

12

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: That's the same,
13 okay. Thank you very much, dear.

14

SARA MEYERS: You're welcome.

15

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: And we're going to
16 be following up with you in our letter after the
17 Committee on getting similar information. Thank you.
18 And now we'll have Council Member Deutsch followed by
19 Council Member Rodriguez, but I think he'll be back
20 in the room by that time.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you, Madam
22 Chair. Good afternoon and thank you for the
23 attending this thing this afternoon. What,
24 specifically or how specifically is the Outreach for

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2 the renewal process. What is exactly done? Is it by
3 mail? Is it by email --

4 SARA MEYERS: [interposing] For renewals

5 --

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: -- for renewals?

7 SARA MEYERS: -- and we have the three

8 letters that we send to the tenants and the tenants'
9 representatives and then to the landlord. We also
10 send a list to people who don't -- who are close to
11 losing their benefits to the Council. We also have
12 lists on our website that list when people's benefits
13 expire, and if they have a pending application with
14 us. So those are our efforts.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you, and
16 how many different languages does it go out by mail?

17 SARA MEYERS: By mail the letter is in
18 English, but we have insert with the letter that is
19 in Chinese, Spanish, and Russian that says something
20 to the effect that this letter is very important
21 about your benefits. And encourages people to
22 contact someone to help them translate it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Is there also an
24 Outreach for possible applicants that are qualified
25 for this program to get a 1062 and they may be

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2 eligible to be part of the program for SCRIE. Do you
3 have an Outreach for that?

4 SARA MEYERS: Yes, we have an Outreach
5 unit in Finance, and we have an Outreach coordinator
6 for seniors, and we also work in conjunction with the
7 Department for the Aging on trying to get the word
8 out to anyone who may be eligible about the program.
9 So all of our Outreach events we talk about SCRIE and
10 the Department for the Aging events are all related
11 to opportunities for seniors. And for Finance we do
12 specific events for seniors, and even at our general
13 events we'll bring SCRIE into their applications.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: What database do
15 you use to do the Outreach for potential people that
16 qualify for this program?

17 SARA MEYERS: Database? I'm not sure.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, how do you
19 get the names of the people that are 62 who come up
20 here as well?

21 SARA MEYERS: [interposing] We don't do -
22 - we don't have direct information about who may be
23 eligible. We spoke a little bit about this earlier.
24 We've had a difficult time identifying specific data
25 sets of people due to the multiple criteria that you

1
2 need to meet to be eligible for the program. Which
3 is why a lot of our efforts have been public Outreach
4 events, or people who are already receiving benefits
5 for people who are low income.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So there's no
7 database that, well, that you have access to, of how
8 got who might be eligible if there is an eventual
9 area or something like Aging has?

10 SARA MEYERS: No, their criteria for
11 SCRIE is that you have to live in a rent regulated
12 building, of which there are a million units in New
13 York City. And you have to be 62 and you have to
14 make less than currently \$29,000, but in the future
15 will be \$50,000, and then you can't -- you have to
16 pay more than one-third of your income in rent. And
17 so unfortunately there is no database that helps get
18 at that population. So if you have any ideas, we'd
19 love to hear it, but there's no data set that kind of
20 brings those four criteria together in a targeted
21 way.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, I'd just
23 like to make one recommendation. I have a very large
24 -- I have a very diverse district, and I think I have
25 a very large Russian-American population. When they

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2 receive let's say Con-Ed bills, or from Keyspan, they
3 already know that this is phone bill or gas bill
4 because it's monthly. If they would receive
5 something from SCRIE, and a lot of times people get
6 junk mail and they just throw it in the garbage.
7 Maybe on the envelope there should be something in
8 different languages just letting them know what's
9 enclosed, what's in the envelope. This way it
10 doesn't get thrown out. And maybe that will prevent
11 the 6% of new occupations for the communities might
12 just throw it in the garbage saying what's enclosed.
13 So, thank you very much.

14 SARA MEYERS: Sure.

15 [Pause]

16 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, Council
17 Member Deutsch. We will have a follow-up question by
18 Council Member Rosenthal. We're actually just
19 chatting so we're going to ask the same questions.
20 So I'll have my colleague - -

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Exactly. This
22 is on behalf of tears for us tonight. We both
23 noticed something at the same time, but thank you for
24 giving me the privilege of asking. This is about the
25 recent audits, and this is new to me as a new council

1
2 member. So part of this is bringing me up to speed.
3 But the audits that took place in 2009, 2010, 2012
4 about school benefits that went to deceased
5 individuals, are you familiar with those audits?

6 SARA MEYERS: Yes, I am.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, new to
8 me I guess, but not to everyone else so good. So
9 just a practical common sense question, and the
10 information I have here shows that it totaled \$11.8
11 million, which in my mind pays for half of the free
12 lunch program that we'd like to give out. Is the
13 case that those checks are cashed -- were cashed?

14 SARA MEYERS: Well, let me explain a
15 little bit about how the works, how the benefit is
16 given. We don't actually give checks to anyone. The
17 SCRIE benefit is given as a tax credit --

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: [interposing]
19 Yes.

20 SARA MEYERS: -- on a landlord's property
21 tax, and in the case of the audit, one of the things
22 that as you may be aware when the administration of
23 the program from DFTA to Finance happened, when the
24 transfer happened in '09, we had some stumbling
25 blocks along the way. And we certainly have spoken

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2 about that publicly, and have really committed to
3 making this what I think is one of our best run
4 programs. So one of things we weren't doing was
5 doing an audit of people who had been -- who were
6 deceased who were getting benefits. Benefits stop
7 when their new application is not submitted. So they
8 weren't going for years and years and years, but if
9 they had passed away between -- within the two-year
10 renewal period, and no one came forth and told us
11 about this -- Which we do as an aide, we do have a
12 lot of people that are proactive and tell us. And we
13 were audited in 2010 by the Controller's Office, and
14 they identified this money that had been given.
15 Subsequently, we went and took all the money back,
16 and the money didn't stay as allocated. And ever
17 since then, we match on a monthly basis with the
18 Social Security DFTA Master File. We were audited
19 again, and they found -- the Controller found that we
20 were really doing that. So we do that monthly now.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So I want to
22 thank Tanisha Edwards, who has really paid more
23 attention to this, on the staff here at the City
24 Council. I mean what she's showing me is that with
25 the first audit -- I understand what you're saying

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2 that it's a lower tactic basically is what happens.
3 But there was still after the cross-check \$8.3 mil --
4 \$8.5 million that was left on the table. And the
5 response from DOF was that the Controller overstated
6 the number of deceased tenants. However, that was
7 not documented, that there was, in fact --

8 SARA MEYERS: From the first audit.

9 CARYN RESNICK: This is the first audit.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL I understand.

11 It's the first audit.

12 SARA MEYERS: [interposing] Right, from
13 the first audit what happened --

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Moving onto
15 the second, but --

16 SARA MEYERS: [interposing] With the
17 first audit --

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: -- but
19 whatever.

20 SARA MEYERS: -- they said \$11 million.
21 We came back with \$8 million because what ended up
22 happening is when someone dies in a SCRIE household,
23 they can transfer their benefit. There's a benefit
24 transfer to let's say a spouse, who's been in the
25 apartment. So we can identify -- they could -- the

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2 Controller's Office identified that the wife had
3 passed away. But then we worked to make sure that
4 the husband, who was eligible for the benefit, was
5 transferred. It's been a few years, but I believe
6 that it was the \$11 million that became really \$8
7 million, if that makes sense.

8 [background discussion]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I move on and
10 I can multi-task, but not really.

11 SARA MEYERS: Okay.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So what I'm
13 hearing -- so moving onto the second. All right,
14 good, if we can.

15 SARA MEYERS: Sure, I have it here.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you. So
17 the death matches -- excuse the crassness of the
18 language -- needs to go against all the open
19 accounts, right, because you're talking about spouses
20 that might be able to pick up the benefit, right? But
21 what we're hearing is that for -- that you're not
22 doing the same thing for the renewals, that you're
23 doing the matches.

24 SARA MEYERS: Yes, we are.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: But yes we
are. Okay. However ...

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TANISHA EDWARDS: Tanisha Edwards, Chief
Counsel for the Finance Division and the Finance
Committee. We just need clarification because in the
second audit the Controller noticed that the cross-
checks that you do with the -- against the DFTA
master file for the initial applications, the same
wasn't done for renewal applications. So he
recommended --

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SARA MEYERS: It was not. I'll just
clarify. Yes, in the initial versus renewal that had
nothing to do with that. What it had to do with is
with current versus inactive. We were running a list
every month against current recipients, but what they
found was -- and we -- this is what we agreed. They
were correct with that. We weren't expanding our
match to it because sometimes two people who had
received a benefit were no longer receiving the
benefit, but then subsequently they appeared on the
list. So let's say -- Because sometimes the Social
Security data that we get, their data they may come a
year later and have someone appear on the list, and
they may show us that someone had passed, who is no

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2 longer currently receiving SCRIE, but they passed
3 away two months before their SCRIE benefit expired.
4 And we thought that was a good point by the
5 Controller. So we expanded our query at that time,
6 but we weren't just matching against current SCRIE
7 recipients. We expanded it to match against everyone
8 who had been given a credit even if they weren't
9 currently receiving SCRIE.

10 TANISHA EDWARDS: Okay, so that's okay.
11 So lets see, just so we're clear on the record. So
12 after the Controller's recommendation you implemented
13 --

14 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

15 TANISHA EDWARDS: -- what he suggested in
16 that letter?

17 SARA MEYERS: Yes.

18 TANISHA EDWARDS: So, then now -- Okay,
19 so excellent. So you're now doing the cross-checks.
20 Perfect. Good job.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENAL: Thank you, but
22 that also brings to mind so the retroactive, were you
23 able to call back any money?

24 SARA MEYERS: Yes, we take it back as a
25 debit against the landlords' property tax.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: How much were
3 you able to call back in the debit?

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5 COUNCIL MEMBER: Well, I guess -- I don't
6 have specific numbers. We debit annually about \$8
7 million in comparison to \$150 million, but that's not
8 all necessarily related to death. Because we pay --
9 the way SCRIE works is that a landlord gets six
10 months of credit in advance.

10

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

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12 SARA MEYERS: So if someone moves let's
13 say in month three, we'll take back three months. So
14 it's not all related to people passing on. [sic]

14

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. Is
16 there anything that we could be doing to make sure
17 that these -- both call backs and the cross-checks
18 are happening?

18

SARA MEYERS: I mean I think --

19

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That we could
21 do in the Council. Do you need -- I don't know.

21

22 SARA MEYERS: I mean I think we do our
23 data matches with the master file every month opening
24 up to everyone who is receiving the benefit, and
25 anyone else who moves. You know, landlords are
required to notify us. Often they do. So just if

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know of anyone who's vacated their apartment let us know.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, Council Member Miller would like me to also ask could there be another reason -- God bless them all. Could there be another reason that somebody might rightly drop off the roll that we're not capturing. So it's possibly moving, possibly deceased, possibly an increase for some reason in their income. I don't know.

SARA MEYERS: That wouldn't have anything to do with the debit that we were speaking of. But it just would be someone who --

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: When they reapplied, that they would --

SARA MEYERS: We would find that their income was too high, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So those are the only two reasons. Any others possibly that you can think of? Are we not capturing any population?

SARA MEYERS: I'm not quite sure of the question.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Are we capturing all the population of people who should no longer be continuing on SCRIE?

SARA MEYERS: You know, people who are I guess -- whose income is no longer -- I mean --

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Moved, income?

SARA MEYERS: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you very much.

SARA MEYERS: You're welcome.

COUNCIL MEMBER: [off mic]

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member, Rodriguez, do you still have a question?

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thanks a lot. Thank you. I'd also like to thank the chair, and I'd also like to share my disappointment to the previous administration knowing that we are in a new day in New York City. But definitely when it come to the Outreach and data, this is something that we have to be accountable. I know that the Chairman -- the Chairs they will follow up. But I think that we have to work with a plan. There has to be a specific. I think that we have to make a commitment in a six-month period we need to know how many senior citizens

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2 are eligible to SCRIE, and they are not enrolled in
3 this program. Like this is so critical. This is
4 something like this program might make it different
5 with someone who will be pushed out of their
6 apartment, and now they're living in a livingroom or
7 being homeless. So I think that -- and for me, I'm
8 personally so frustrated because I was at the hearing
9 at 250 Broadway, and I was I think last year, two
10 years ago.

11 SARA MEYERS: Two years ago.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: And we asked a
13 question like -- the same question and knowing that
14 two years have passed, and still we don't have that
15 data is so frustrating. So hopefully, with the new
16 administration I hope that -- and with the new
17 leadership, I think that I would like to work
18 together. And for you to really see it as a
19 priority. We need to know -- we need to know where
20 do they live. We need to know what is the plan to
21 enroll every single senior citizens who can benefit
22 from the SCRIE Program. Something with the Outreach.
23 How many staff do you have doing Outreach.

24 SARA MEYERS: I think four.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Four. That's not enough, right? And I'm unhappy that I heard that you said that you are in conversation with the OMB increasing the numbers. So I think are you -- do you have any particular number that you're asking OMB to increase to?

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SARA MEYERS: We currently don't have a request in for Outreach staff. That's something that we can discuss. I would say that four staff is just for the Department of Finance. The Department for the Aging has people who work on Outreach, as well.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: So I would like to now suggest to my Chairman of this committee also that when we continue in legislation with the administration, that we think about what particular number of staff doing Outreach so that we can get back to the administration that this is important. We cannot rely on board of election. We cannot rely -- We need to have a plan, and this is not -- we don't have to take in to like, you know, we come back like two years before. We don't enough people to start to go and do Outreach. We need to have a -- we need to provide the men and women power that you need so that we can have a group plan on how to do

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2 Outreach. So that every single senior citizen who
3 quality, who are eligible for the SCRIE program can
4 really be enrolled. So this is my recommendation
5 because as I said it's a new administration. It's
6 new leadership, more inclusive, more committed on
7 working together, but I believe that we need a plan.
8 I believe that data has to be provided in a good time
9 frame to all of this committee. We need to increase
10 the number of staff of the Outreach, too. Thank you.

11 SARA MEYERS: I will say that although he
12 hasn't officially started, and he did want to be
13 here, our Commissioner that starts on May 12th,
14 Commissioner Jiha, Sanara Karasek [sp?] and I did
15 meet with him last week, and he's very committed to
16 not only Outreach, but increasing the number of
17 people who get the benefit. And we're going to be
18 working closely with him on a plan. So I just wanted
19 to reiterate that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Next, Council
22 Member Treyger, a question?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you,
24 Chairs, you're welcome. I just want to first echo
25 the comments from my colleagues that it's really

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2 important for us to have a clear picture of those
3 seniors who are eligible, but are on SCRIE. Because
4 we will be a part of that Outreach effort, and I do
5 think that the agencies must do their part. But that
6 data is critical for us to obtain. I also, you know,
7 again, I have a district with a very large immigrant
8 population. And I want to make sure that we break
9 through any language or cultural barriers to make
10 sure that all families -- all seniors are notified of
11 these benefits and these rights. So I just want to
12 echo that. I am curious to know about does the
13 Department of Finance have any data because the
14 majority of Sandy victims, the majority of those who
15 were affected were actually tenants. Do you know --
16 do you have any data about the number of SCRIE
17 recipients that were displaced by the storm?

18 SARAH MEYERS: I do not. I can -- we can
19 certainly try and look at something, but you'd have
20 to give us the right direction about what you're
21 looking for.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Because I'm
23 making sure that -- there were programs put in place
24 that were for Sandy victims who were displaced. Most
25 of them were tenants, and many of them didn't know

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2 about for example, TDAP, Temporary Disaster
3 Assistance Program to help renters, and help them.
4 But, of course, there were also a high number of
5 seniors in Coney Island and other parts of the city
6 that were hurt by the storm. Whether their SCRIE
7 benefits traveled with them wherever they ended up.
8 And I'm just wondering if there's any information
9 that your office could share with mine or the
10 committees about making sure that everyone is
11 receiving benefits that they're entitled to even
12 post-Sandy. So right now, you don't have any data
13 with you available?

14 SARAH MEYERS: Not with me. I mean, but
15 we do obviously know the buildings that were affected
16 by Sandy, and I could do some data analysis based on
17 SCRIE tenants in those buildings. If someone just --
18 so you know, if someone wants to move to another rent
19 regulated unit, they can take their SCRIE benefit
20 with them. There's allowance for that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But I mean there
22 are temporary housing situations going on. I'm not
23 sure if they were subject market prices. And quite
24 frankly, if they're a SCRIE recipient, they should be
25 receiving those benefits anywhere they go especially

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2 during those difficult times. So any data that you
3 would have on that, I would truly appreciate. And
4 again, just to go back to my original point, we must
5 make sure that every senior gets every bit of
6 assistance, which they're entitled to. And I would
7 gladly open up my offices. I know Council Member
8 Cornegy mentioned as well we'll be resource centers,
9 but we need to get the word out. This is a
10 significant addition to capture more seniors into
11 SCRIE. Of course, our goal is to make this
12 permanent, and not just a two-year program. But I
13 first want to make sure that we're capturing every
14 eligible senior, and making sure that this process is
15 smooth, and make sure it gets done right. I thank
16 the Chairs for having this hearing today. Thank you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. I guess
18 as Council Member Treyger said, All of us, all the
19 council members are more than willing to help with
20 the Outreach effort. I really want you to reach out,
21 and really work with us. One last question I have is
22 that I know that in your testimony it was really good
23 to hear that DOF is being flexible, that in terms of
24 collecting documentations for income, you mentioned
25 about that you accept a signed letter from applicants

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2 stating that if they have no income in that year and
3 why. And even just a letter. I think that's great.
4 What happens in a case where you might have an
5 applicant who provided income documentation, but did
6 not provide a Social Security number? Are you still
7 going to be able to process that application?

8 SARAH MEYERS: Yes.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes? Okay. Thank
10 you.

11 SARAH MEYERS: You're welcome.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Any other
13 questions? I guess not. So we have a lot of people
14 waiting to testify. So I wanted to thank you for
15 coming today, and we looking forward to working with
16 you on getting the word out there to increase more
17 SCRIE applicants. Thank you.

18 SARAH MEYERS: Thank you very much.

19 [Pause]

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, we want to
21 invite up the first panel. Mary Ann Rothman, Council
22 of New York for Co-op and Condo; Bobby Sackman - -

23 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Camilla Sojourn.

24 [sp?]

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2 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Camilla Sojourn,
3 and Mary Fox.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: [off mic]

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6 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, within my left,
7 okay. We have a lot of people waiting to testify so
8 we're going to put this panel, everyone on the clock
9 three minutes, but we're going to allow more time for
10 questions. Thank you.

11

[Pause]

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[background discussion]

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14 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Are you ready?
15 Just press the button and please state your name.

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17 MARY ANN ROTHMAN: Good afternoon. My
18 name is Mary Ann Rothman. I'm the Executive Director
19 of the Council of New York Cooperatives and
20 Condominiums, which is a membership organization for
21 co-ops and condos located throughout the five
22 boroughs of New York City and beyond. More than
23 170,000 New York families make their homes in our
24 member buildings, which span the full economic from
25 very modest housing to some very upscale --

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27 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Can you pull the
28 mic closer to you?

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MARY ANN ROTHMAN: -- to some very upscale dwellings. Our organization offers strong support for Intro Number 243, which raises the income eligibility cap for seniors citizens to qualify for SCRIE. This program appropriately provides government help for low and moderate income seniors who rent their homes. Many coops and condos have seniors who opted to remain in their homes when the buildings were renovated and were converted or co-ops or condos.

In a number of instances the sponsors who owned these units defaulted or walked away leaving the co-op or condo responsible for administering these units. Higher SCRIE thresholds will help the rent regulated seniors in our member co-ops and condos to continue to live affordably in their homes. New York City has a program that's parallel to SCRIE for senior home owners. It's called the Senior Citizen Homeowner's Exemption, and the representatives of the Department of Finance did mention it in passing, but not as much as I would like to see it mentioned.

It shields low and moderate income homeowners, shareholders, and unit owners from

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2 increases in their costs. We respectfully point out
3 that these seniors are equally deserving of an
4 increase in their eligibility threshold so that they,
5 too, can afford to continue to live on in their
6 homes. Please amend this legislation or introduce
7 follow-up legislation to include a parallel increase
8 to our senior homeowners. Thank you for this
9 opportunity.

10 [background discussion]

11 BOBBY SACKMAN: My name is Bobby Sackman,
12 Director of Public Policy with the Council of Senior
13 Centers and Services. And first, this is a wonderful
14 moment to have this hearing, and thank you everybody,
15 Councilwoman Chin and Ferreras, and everybody here.
16 We're thrilled that it's gone up to \$50,000. As an
17 advocate I have to admit that was even higher than we
18 asked for. So this is a rare moment, and we are, of
19 course, concerned that -- I can't imagine this would
20 go backwards in two years. But obviously we're
21 already talking about it, and I'm sure we will be.

22 So I just thought what I have in my
23 testimony in front of you, we did a major housing
24 policy paper released in February. So a lot of the
25 facts of the rent burden of seniors is really in the

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2 report and it's in here. I'm not going to go through
3 it now. I assuming you all saw the New York Times
4 article a few days ago that covered the whole -- the
5 rent burden of seniors across the city. So just to
6 sort of follow up on some of the things that were
7 said today.

8 One of the questions that was raised by
9 Councilwoman Rose was about this idea of a rollback.
10 And it is an idea of CSCS has had, and we're not the
11 only ones. If you get in and you're already that 40%
12 to 50% level, you're really living at an
13 unsustainable level. So it's the rent, it's the
14 food, it's the medication that meets that scenario.
15 Is there a way for the City to go back? It's not a
16 cheap item. Nobody says it is, but just to look into
17 and see if there's something the City can afford to
18 help seniors go back once they're in.

19 I think that would make a huge difference
20 for people. We've heard a lot of talk today about
21 the need for Outreach and enrollment. SCRIE has been
22 under-utilized since SCRIE has existed, and it's been
23 a shame forever. And so, how do we all work
24 together? And I think one of the things is there's
25 no Outreach. There's no public awareness campaign,

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2 and it's not just targeting older themselves. If I
3 was sitting on a subway, and I saw an ad, Do you want
4 to freeze your mom's rent?

5 Boy, I would take the number down really,
6 really quickly. So I think we have --there are
7 things we can do as a city on a very community base
8 level, as we've discussed today. But also, this is
9 part of the Affordable Housing Plan that the City
10 should have. You can't build your way out of a
11 crisis. This is part of preservation. So any way
12 the City or anybody could use its resources to target
13 all kinds of populations, again, not just the older
14 adults themselves.

15 The other thing it was about, and I don't
16 know if someone else might be discussing this today,
17 but could there be -- even though it may not be
18 overall a lot of seniors that don't need to be
19 certified. For those who don't, could there be
20 what's known as sort of a one-shot where you pay your
21 rent and the City helps you pay your rent in arrears.
22 So you keep people on the program if they fall
23 behind. Because if you lose SCRIE, that's the death
24 mode. I mean overnight your rent has escalated.

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And then to consider renting the number of years for recertification. That might be a state issue. We could look into is it also something the City could do because that's [bell] the problem. One more thing and I'm done. Right to Counsel in Housing Court. There's a couple of bills floating around now. There's a coalition that's come together, and really I think what we all want to see is some kind of legislation Right to Counsel where many populations but, of course, seniors will get their fair share in that. Thank you.

MARY FOX: Chairs Chin, Ferreras, council members and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak about Intro Number 243, the Resolution relating to linking income threshold increases for the SCRIE Exemption Program to changes in the Consumer Price Index, in general oversight of the SCRIE Program. My name is Mary Fox, and I'm a Senior Staff Attorney at the New York Legal Assistance Group. I am joined by Camilla Shedin, Associate Director of the Housing Law and Member of NYLAG's Legal Health Division; and Elizabeth Essex [sp?] Stewart, our Special Projects Coordinator.

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We commend all of those who have worked on both Intro 243 and the above resolution, and strong urge the passage of both. NYLAG has hundreds of clients who are seniors, many of whom lived in rent stabilized or otherwise subsidized apartments from whom this increase in yearly income would be a great relief who SCRIE is the only means to remain in affordable homes, which they've occupied for decades. This increase in income for SCRIE eligibility is a great stride towards keeping seniors housed, as well as maintaining New York City's dwindling affordable stock for a little longer.

In order to strengthen Intro 243, we urge the Council to amend the language to allow for retroactive benefits at the rate at which the benefits were previously frozen to anyone who had SCRIE in the past, but who was no longer eligible because of his or her income was over the current cap. For example, NYLAG is currently assisting an elderly cancer patient with an income of \$31,000. She and her husband have lived in a rent stabilized apartment for over ten years. With SCRIE they pay \$1,800 and -- I'm sorry. \$1,085 a month since 2009. Their income rose slightly, and now they do not fall

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2 into the protections of the current law.
3 Unfortunately, their grace period is ending one month
4 before this law will go into effect. And as such,
5 they will have to pay the rent with the increases
6 from the past five years, which will total -- The
7 legal regulated rent will now be \$1,419 a month,
8 making her monthly rent go up almost 40%.

9 The problem is particularly acute for the
10 elderly, low income people with serious health
11 problems. As medical bills are not included as a
12 deduction in calculating SCRIE income eligibility
13 many seniors with incomes above the current threshold
14 are struggling to remain in their homes and pay their
15 medical bills. In addition, many seniors may appear
16 as if they have disposable income because they're
17 slightly above the income threshold to qualify for
18 Medicaid. However, as Medicare only covers 80% of
19 many medical expenses, we see many seniors at our
20 legal clinics paying out-of-pocket for home health
21 care, doctor's appointments, and other life saving
22 medical needs. [bell] Thank you. And, therefore,
23 by greatly reducing their actual disposable income.
24 We have several other suggestions for the Number 243,
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2 which are in our testimony, and we appreciate the
3 opportunity to testify here today.

4 FEMALE SPEAKER: Yeah, I'll just point
5 out. We have four points specifically that we were
6 hoping might be implemented by SCRIE very quickly.
7 Generally speaking, SCRIE is a wonderful program, and
8 we commend everybody for it, all the advocates, and
9 all the Council for working on this, and increasing
10 the amount. It's wonderful. So, our gripes are
11 small. I just wanted to point them out in the hopes
12 of making this wonderful program even better. And
13 one of the things we see as a huge problem is the
14 lack of forms being available in languages other than
15 English. And I think that needs -- that's been
16 talked about today. It would be great if that could
17 be addressed sooner than later. And then if all the
18 forms could be available online, regardless of which
19 agency that somebody might be working with, and, of
20 course, not being able to access SCRIE through 311
21 properly has been a huge problem. So I know that
22 that was discussed earlier as well. So we just
23 wanted to point that out. But if we can help in
24 working out a solution to any of those things in our
25 agency, we'd be happy to do so. Thank you very much.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you very much for your testimony. I just want to follow up on two things. Mr. Rothman, we are clearly in agreement. Any time we can do additional savings, we're on the right -- on the same page with you. I would just urge, and we can figure out. We need to hear from the Council level, but clearly this is state legislation. So any capacity that you would be able to engage with this State Legislature would be greatly beneficial. And we can also do resolutions and other types of advocacy, but, of course, I would urge to send the thing to the State Legislature.

MARY ANN ROTHMAN: We'll work on it, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, and also for our wonderful NYLAG reps, Ms. Fox. I know they're retroactive. I would say the same thing, the state legislation. If we could change it, we would do it tomorrow or yesterday probably. And in many ways what you have mentioned with the language we both -- we have immigrant backgrounds. We both speak other languages, and you do as well, as you just said. And so we understand the urgencies from the perspective of our own families, but also we

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2 represent New York City, and we understand we
3 celebrate our diversity all the time except we have
4 to interact with agencies, and that's what we need to
5 get better at.

6 MARY FOX: Okay, thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think we also
8 want to -- I know that we have DOF people still here,
9 staff, right? So I would love to look at the insert
10 that you sent out in different languages, and maybe
11 there's a way that we can improve upon it to make it
12 more clear in terms of this is a renewal
13 applications, and these are agencies that they could
14 reach out for help. So if we could take a look at
15 what you have now, and maybe we could help to make it
16 better. Thank you.

17 MARY FOX: Thank you.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you all for
19 coming. Okay, we're going to call up some seniors
20 who are here. Private, Debbie, if I pronounced it
21 right. Norma. I can get it from Norma. What's your
22 last name, Norma.

23 NORMA SHRIER: Shrier.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, Shrier, okay.
25 Then Connie? Martin Cornfeld, and Patricia Steel.

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[background discussion]

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: You could press the
4 button there and then state your name. Thank you.

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PRAVATI DEVI: Hi, my name is Pravati
6 Devi [sp?]. Over the years I've testified as a young
7 disabled person on Rent Increase Exemptions. Today,
8 as a senior I'm back again voicing my objections to
9 the Intro before in its current form. I can
10 understand that there are families who do need the
11 increase proposed. But, if for example, the
12 individual or couple receiving the limit of \$50,000
13 yearly, paid \$50,000 of it on rent and \$25,000 would
14 be left to live on. Unless there are unusual
15 expenses such as medical, wouldn't \$25,000 be enough
16 for most people to live on?

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Does the Legislature remember that SCRIE
was intended for the very poor such as myself. I am
expected to live on \$9,696 a year. From that, I pay
\$5,592 for rent. That leaves me \$4,104 for
everything else for the entire year, and I do have
SCRIE. I wonder how many here have thought about the
poor. There are many of us on the verge of
homelessness. I propose that this Intro be expanded
when the income after paying rent is so low, like

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2 mine, a rollback in rent to 30% of our income can
3 make all of the difference in preventing
4 homelessness.

5 Without this, we will have more seniors
6 becoming homeless, and I still support the younger
7 disabled community on DRIE whose income limit remains
8 at \$20,000. The disparity is shameful. Ultimately,
9 the poorest on DRIE or SCRIE will become homeless
10 costing the government far in the end. Wouldn't it
11 be more pragmatic to roll back our rent so this does
12 not happen. Please, do not pass Intro 243 as is.
13 Rather, pass an expanded SCRIE program that will make
14 a significant impact in preventing more homelessness.
15 It is my contention that this Intro should be
16 modified to include a rollback in rent to 30% of the
17 income when the frozen rent doesn't leave a livable
18 amount to survive on. Thank you.

19 NORMA SCHRIER: I'm Norma Schrier, and I
20 live in a rent controlled apartment on the Upper West
21 Side in co-op building of 70 apartments. I am the
22 only rent controlled tenant in the building. I have
23 lived in my apartment since 1962. When we moved in,
24 there was my husband, my mother, and one daughter.
25 Then another daughter was born. Now, there is only

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2 my daughter and myself. I would very much appreciate
3 being allowed to speak to you about my circumstances
4 and my more seniors like me who have lived in their
5 apartments for a lifetime.

6 I want to thank Council Member Chin for
7 introducing this SCRIE to the City Council. Allowing
8 income qualifications for SCRIE to increase from
9 \$29,000 to \$50,000. I also want to thank Assemblyman
10 Brian Kavanagh for getting this passed by the State
11 Legislature, and to express our deep gratitude to him
12 and to Council Member Chin. This year, 2014, we
13 received a 7.5% rent increase as well as a monthly
14 fuel pass-along charge. My rent increase is \$171.40
15 per month retroactive to January 1st. My fuel pass-
16 along charge is \$187.19 per month retroactive to
17 January 1st as well.

18 I am the only resident in my building to
19 pay this fuel charge. My daughter, who is disabled,
20 and on Social Security does contribute to the rent as
21 much as she can. She has increased this amount for
22 2014 in view of the increases. I am retired and on
23 Social Security as well. If I do not receive SCRIE,
24 I don't know how much longer I can manage. As senior
25 citizens, many of us have Social Security as our main

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2 source of monthly income. This year, our Social
3 Security income was 1.2% while our rent control, MCR,
4 was 7.5%. There may be some of us seniors who will
5 not be able to afford these increases.

6 What will we eliminate from our budgets
7 to cover this disparity? Should we cut our food
8 budgets or our medicines? How do we choose? I have
9 looked carefully at all the items in my budget to see
10 what else I can eliminate, such as travel, new
11 clothing, books, theater, et cetera. These have
12 already been eliminated. I frequent the library for
13 reading material, but perhaps I will be able to fill
14 my new eyeglass prescription. If I qualify for
15 SCRIE, the quality of my life can improve, and some
16 of the stress I feel each month will be eliminated
17 because I will know that I can afford to pay my rent.
18 Thank you.

19 MORGAN VANTONI: My name is Morgan
20 Vantoni [sp?]. I'm 74 years old. I've been in the
21 SCRIE program for 12 years. I have a -- Well, I
22 received a letter from them that I was going to be
23 audited in October, and I sent them my 1044, my 1099,
24 and that was my only income. I received a letter
25 from them that I was terminated because I was \$470

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2 over the amount. I then went to the SCRIE office
3 down on John Street, and there instead of getting a
4 welcome, a lady as the desk said, Sir, you're over by
5 \$1.00. You've been terminated.

6 At the same time, there was an elderly
7 gentleman there maybe 80 years old who was crying in
8 the office, and the lady told him, Sir, you have to
9 leave now because if you don't leave, we'll call the
10 police and have you escorted out of the building. I
11 don't know what kind of welcome or who these people
12 are that are down there, but that's a public disgrace
13 how they run the office down there. You get no
14 welcome. I go back to the Department of Aging to ask
15 for help, and they tell me, Yes, you can go and seek
16 legal aid. Once a month there's a meeting at the
17 borough houses up near Harlem.

18 I go up there. I speak to a lawyer,
19 Diane Lutwak, and I said to her, I'm one dollar over
20 the system. Can you please help me? And she turned
21 around and said, No, nothing can be done, and I had
22 to leave up there. Where do you get help? I don't
23 know where you get help. I wrote them a letter, a
24 four-page letter explaining to them that in 2010, '11
25 and '12, I submitted -- Excuse me. I had a prostate

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2 operation. My doctor was off Blue Cross and Blue
3 Shield. It cost me \$8,000 for the doctor.

4 Six months later I get a doctor for
5 \$12,000 for my teeth. I mail all the doctor bills to
6 the SCRIE Program and I get a letter back from the,
7 Sir, we are not interested in your medical expenses.
8 At the same time, a friend of mine passed away, and I
9 contributed \$5,000 to the funeral, and they also
10 said, Funeral bills also are not deductible. So now
11 that I'm out of the system, like this lady said my
12 apartment went to fair market value from \$562 now
13 it's up to \$1,500 with the fuel pass-along.

14 That's going to be my total income. My
15 Social Security is only \$647 a month. I don't know
16 how these people run this place over here. Nobody
17 should be terminated, and excuse me. I only have 14
18 seconds. What I want to say is, Chin, somebody has
19 to make an amendment that all the seniors that were
20 bunked out from 2009 because the SCRIE program froze
21 the system, should be now reinstated with open arms,
22 and with love and say, No problems. You're back into
23 the system.

24 [Pause]

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MARTIN CORNFELD: My name is Martin Cornfeld. I'm a -- My name is Martin Cornfeld. I'm a homeowner in Greenwich Village for 50 years, a war veteran, and an artist. I will confirm what he said about SCRIE. I was with him. I went down there. He's a neighbor of mine and a friend, and he also was an electrician that did more pro bono work in the neighborhood to people who couldn't afford it. A genuine good guy. We go down there.

You're worried about them speaking Spanish. You should worry about common courtesy. We're going to call security because a man is crying because he's out of control. He's getting thrown out of his apartment. Something is wrong, and the two ladies who were here who painted a beautiful picture of what they're going to do, they don't even have the wherewithal to stay and hear what people have to say. Okay. In 2005 --

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: We just -- I'm sorry, we're going to add -- we'll add to your time. I just want you to know that there is staff here from the agency that's listening and they're going to be reporting back to the Commission.

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MARTIN CORNFELD: Okay, in 2005, the limit was \$25,000. It went up to 29 and then it died. Nobody in the City of New York could say why it wasn't increased. Social Security went up. The income tax went up, Verizon went up, Time-Warner went up. Everybody went up except that. The only reason is that it benefitted the landlords. Now here is a problem that nobody is going to address unless I know about anything. The landlords who come into a building like a Morgans at 270 West 11th Street, half are in co-op, the other half couldn't afford the co-op so they're under rent control.

These people come in. They buy the apartments. They pay the maintenance. They collect the rent control for people like you, and their mission in life is one thing: just to get rid of these people. He called me up and he said, You've got to come over here. The lady is hysterical. We go over there. The woman is like 80 years old. We have an eviction notice. They go up to another lady with a number on her arm who was in a concentration camp in Germany that's throwing us out. He gets a brain wave, and says, Let me go back. He checks his

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2 checking account. They didn't cash the last two
3 month's checks.

4 These people come in. They collect their
5 money, and then they don't cash the checks. Then
6 they go to Housing Court, and they get eviction
7 notices. They go back to the people. The people are
8 hysterical. Okay, we'll give you another month, and
9 they throw them out. They're preying on the most
10 vulnerable people ever, and the system is rewarding
11 the landlords. Now, Bloomberg is gone. This is no
12 longer supposedly a bottom line city.

13 There is something wrong we have a SCRIE
14 where the people come here, and paint a beautiful
15 picture and then walk out and Bloomberg goes to
16 Goldman-Sachs and hires a John Rayer [sp?], who's
17 claim to fame is for NYCHA I spent \$8 million to
18 fight old ladies who want heat and hot water.
19 Something is wrong with this picture. John Kennedy
20 said, Life is not fair, but government can and must
21 make it fair. And you people have to make it fair,
22 because rent control -- I want to say one more
23 thing.

24 You people are probably too young to
25 remember. 1943 my mother came home from work and

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2 said, Hooray, there is justice. They just froze all
3 the rents. Why did they freeze the rents in 1943?
4 We're at war with Germany and Japan. It is not a
5 done deal. Who is going to win the war? People were
6 streaming into cities to work at the munitions
7 factories and at the Navy yard. No place to live
8 because the rents are too high. So they froze the
9 rents because of the war. These are the people that
10 we have to deal with, and these people are vultures
11 and they're sharks.

12 [background discussion]

13 MARTIN CORNFELD: So what happened when
14 they couldn't collect -- they couldn't increase the
15 rent? When I lived in the Bronx, an apartment opened
16 up. In those days it was \$60 a month. You want the
17 apartment? \$720 under the table. This is the
18 lowest. I can't generalize. The lowest form of life
19 living, my mother should rest in peace said is a New
20 York City landlord. She said they're on the same
21 level as people who sell heroin to eight-year-old
22 kids. They are vultures. This woman with the number
23 on her arm. You know what happened to her? She
24 killed herself from taking too many pills.

25 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I want to --

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2 MARTIN CORNFELD: Hitler couldn't kill
3 her and a New York City landlord did.

4

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

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MARTIN CORNFELD: And nobody will address
6 this.

7

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you for your
8 testimony. You may begin.

9

PATRICIA SKILL: Thank you Council Member
10 Chin for bringing this to the City Council. Mine is
11 very short. My name is Patricia Skill. I am 68
12 years old, and I live in a rent controlled apartment.
13 Many people believe that rent control means a
14 fabulous apartment at almost no rent. Unfortunately,
15 not true. I do live in a decent apartment, but with
16 rent increases as much as 7-1/2% each year, my rent
17 is higher than monthly income. Each month, I use
18 savings to enable me to stay in my home. This year
19 my Social Security payment increased \$17 while my
20 rent increased \$186. Although my taxable income has
21 been under the \$29,000 income limit for SCRIE for
22 years, once Social Security was counted, I was always
23 a few thousands dollars over the limit. Raising the
24 SCRIE limit \$50,000 means I will be able to remain in
25 my home. While I still will not be able to buy new

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2 clothes or eat in restaurants or go to the theater, I
3 might be able to spend a little bit on my twin
4 grandchildren who were born last years. For me that
5 would be a benefit with SCRIE.

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7 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well,
8 congratulations, Grandma.

8

PATRICIA SKILL: Thank you.

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10 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But this is only a
11 beginning step, and I hear the testimony that you
12 raise. I really encourage you to reach out to your
13 council member and then we can connect you.

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MATTIN CORNFELD: May I interrupt you a
15 minute?

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes.

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MARTIN CORNFELD: If you happen to see
18 Corey Johnson --

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Hand him the mic.

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MARTIN CORNFELD: If you happen to see
20 Corey Johnson, tell him if one of his constituents
21 calls him ten times, and the best they could get is
22 the gatekeeper who says, Have you tried Catholic
23 Charities? Tell him that's not a sure way to get re-
24 elected.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think we are --

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MARTIN CORNFELD: That's Mr. Johnson who
2 put in a five-minute appearance and then left.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Now, we have --

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MARTIN CORNFELD: And Morgan called him a
5 dozen times, and the woman says, Have you tried
6 Catholic Charities.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But give us your
8 name, because we can connect you with the legal
9 services that are here today that can really help you
10 advocate on your case. Right now the way this
11 legislation, we have to go back to the State. And
12 all the points that you raised her, if we could do
13 it, we have done it years ago. But, we need to get
14 to the State to do that. But we need your story so
15 that we can tell them and the governor how urgent it
16 is for them to amend the law that they passed, so
17 that we can fix it here. So I really thank you for
18 coming out, but give us your information and your
19 testimony is really helpful.

20

MARTIN CORNFELD: SCRIE is one of the
21 most -- I've deal with a lot of City agencies being a
22 homeowner in my life. SCRIE is probably the most
23 insensitive I've ever seen in my life.

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2 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, we're going
3 on it, yeah.

4 MARTIN CORNFELD: You better work on it
5 because you're dealing with scared old people that go
6 down there and get frustrated. Like plastic bag
7 they're thrown away. Not nice.

8 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you, and --

9 MARTIN CORNFELD: But you know what,
10 people went to war and put their lives on the line to
11 come back to it. Not nice.

12 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Yes, and we
13 acknowledge your testimony, and it important. Like I
14 said, there are people here from the agency, and they
15 will be taking your sentiments back. Thank you.

16 MORGAN BARTONI: Can I just say one
17 thing? In all of the communications in 12 years from
18 the SCRIE office, if you notice the big letter
19 writing the Department of Finance or something, but
20 there is nothing underneath here, and all of the
21 letters that I received, and I have about 30 of them,
22 that mentioned: Warning. Do not go over \$29 by \$1
23 or you'll be thrown out. How come they never
24 notified any seniors, and I have papers just a few of
25 them here today. None of them mentioned any of that.

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I was never aware of it, and I was put out. That doesn't make sense.

MORGAN BARTONI: Thank you. Sorry to bother you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: No, no, no, can we have -- we'll have a staff get with you. Don't leave. We're going to get your contact information, and we'll work on the case. The next panel Shortman --

JACK STRIKEMAN: Streitman [sp?].

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Streitman, Paul Sawyer, Adelle Bender, and Peter Gee.

[Pause]

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: You can start.

PAUL SAWYER: Can I start?

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes, just identify -- your name.

PAUL SAWYER: [off mic] Good afternoon. My name is Paul Sawyer. I am here to deliver testimony on behalf of --

[background discussion]

PAUL SAWYER: Yes, oh, there we go. Good afternoon. My name is Paul Sawyer. I'm here to

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2 deliver testimony on behalf of Assembly Member Linda
3 B. Rosenthal. Good afternoon, I'm Assembly Member
4 Linda B. Rosenthal, and I represent the 67th Assembly
5 District, which includes the Upper West Side and
6 parts of Clinton, Hells Kitchen, and Manhattan. I'm
7 here today to testify in regard to Intro 243-2014,
8 which would raise the annual household income limit
9 for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption to
10 \$50,000, and improving the operations of the SCRIE
11 program as administered by the New York City
12 Department of Finance.

13 As a member of the New York State
14 Assembly Committee on Housing and an elected official
15 who has assisted hundreds of SCRIE applicants and
16 recipients, I have been fighting for years to raise
17 the SCRIE income limit, which stagnated at \$29,000
18 for five years. Now that we in the State Legislature
19 have voted to include seniors earning up to \$50,000
20 in SCRIE eligibility for the next two years, I am
21 pleased to see the City Council taking up legislation
22 to adopt the new income eligibility criteria here in
23 New York City.

24 This 72% increase will provide thousands
25 of seniors with access to this critical benefit,

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2 which will help them remain in their homes. Many of
3 my constituents, especially rent controlled tenants,
4 are paying nearly 100% of their income toward their
5 rent, but have been ineligible for SCRIE because
6 their annual rent exceeds \$29,000. With a \$50,000
7 income maximum these tenants and many others could be
8 exempted from truly unaffordable rent increases. I
9 know that I'll be working hard to ensure the State
10 Legislature renews the \$50,000 limit when it expires
11 and applies it to the Disability Rent Increase
12 Exemption in order to create parity between the two
13 programs.

14 Increasing the income limits, however, is
15 only part of the solution to the dwindling number of
16 SCRIE recipients. While the administration of SCRIE
17 has markedly improved since the disastrous transition
18 from the New York City Department for the Aging to
19 the Finance, the hundreds of constituents who contact
20 my office each year for help with any number of
21 problems with their SCRIE applications are a
22 testament to the need for further reforms. I have
23 seen constituent's applications denied because
24 Finance staff did not follow the requirements of the
25 authorizing state law.

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2 Because Finance staff applied agency
3 policies inconsistently, because of human error that
4 often takes months to undo. Additionally, although
5 Finance has issued a helpful brochure on SCRIE and
6 DRIE, and unfortunately has yet to promulgate a
7 comprehensive set of rules and regulations that
8 clearly explain specific policies regarding how
9 income is calculated, how rent is frozen and other
10 critical areas. While I inform constituents who
11 contact my office about many of these rules, and sure
12 that errors made by Finance staff are corrected,
13 there are undoubtedly hundreds of tenants who remain
14 in the dark about their rights for every tenant who
15 seeks help.

16 Change is needed in many aspects of
17 Finance Administration and the SCRIE and DRIE
18 programs from broad policies to streamlining and
19 clarifying forms and applications. I have,
20 therefore, included a list of recommendations that
21 address the myriad of issues I and my constituents
22 have encountered in recent years. I urge Finance to
23 implement these changes immediately to make the
24 administration of SCRIE and DRIE truly fair and
25 accessible to all eligible tenants. Thank you.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Yeah, we also want you to bring back the assembly member to thank you for her testimony. But really a lot of the testimony that you've heard today, we need state law to amend that, and also to put into the state law in terms of deducting medical expense to income issues like that. We heard people talking about retroactive. People who got kicked out of the program because their income was a couple of dollars higher. That we need to bring them back, and we need state legislation to do that.

PAUL SAWYER: And the last one is to an MRC to pass state legislation. I will certainly take all of that back to her.

CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you.

PAUL SAWYER: Thank you.

ADELLE BENDER: Good afternoon. My name is Adelle Bender, and I want to thank you for holding these important hearings. I'm not yet on SCRIE, but I certainly do qualify for it. I procrastinate sometimes. It doesn't mean that I don't need it. I do, but society is judged by the way it treats its elders. So I don't want society to fail on this issue. It is really important, and I don't want to

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2 have to have many of my friends who are seniors who
3 just may not qualify for SCRIE because they make a
4 few dollars -- have an income of a few dollars to
5 much.

6 And some of them say, I go live in
7 Florida. I go live in another state because it's
8 cheaper to live there. We need the stability of the
9 neighborhoods, and the seniors do give that
10 stability. Younger people who -- I love younger
11 people, I like older people, but some of them can
12 move around because of their jobs or whatever it may
13 be. But the seniors many of us are the stability of
14 the neighborhood of the community, and this is what
15 is so important.

16 And I want to be able to once in a while
17 to go out for a bagel and coffee, and not have to
18 worry can I manage to have this. Because if I can go
19 out for that bagel and coffee, and I just talk -- I
20 don't talk about myself. I talk about other people,
21 this is a few bucks coming into the economy. So all
22 of these things are very important. It's the
23 economy. It's our quality of life, and I'm hoping
24 that this city and this state will understand this
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because I think in the end everybody can benefit.
Thank you.

[Pause]

JACK STREITMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Jack Streitman. I'm living in the East Village in a rent controlled apartment for 40 years, and I've seen my rent go up steadily from a very modest start to what is now just short of unaffordable. I didn't worry about this problem while I was employed, but I retired in 2007, and subsist now on Social Security and a small annuity. I've been subscribing to Cooper Square Community Newsletter for over ten years now, and I read in it about three years ago an article about SCRIE.

I visited the committee office, and workers graciously helped me calculate if I was eligible to sign up to receive SCRIE to lower my rent. I was ecstatic to find out I was qualified to sign up, and the Cooper Square Committee got my application out. For the next few years, I happily had my rent frozen in an amount I can afford about \$827 a month. This situation was short-lived because in early 2014, I found my Social Security income for

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2 2013 to be \$25,018 and my annuity to be \$5,232 for a
3 sum of \$30,250.

4 A short time later, SCRIE notified me
5 that they were discontinuing my membership because my
6 income was \$1,250 a year above the SCRIE maximum
7 allowable amount. My landlord, therefore, raised my
8 monthly rent by \$200 a month to \$1,030 a month. I
9 hope this bill goes through so that I can continue to
10 live in a neighborhood that I love. Seniors deserve
11 to live in New York just like anybody else. Thank
12 you.

13 PETER GEE: Good afternoon. My name is
14 Peter Gee. I am the Chief Program Officer at Pratt
15 Area Community Council. I'm here on behalf of
16 Stabilize New York City, and New York Citywide
17 Coalition that have come together to fight the
18 depletion of affordable housing in New York City at
19 the hands of predatory equity. Thank you for the
20 opportunity testify this afternoon about our support
21 for this proposed legislation. Our Anti-Predatory
22 Equity Coalition is made up of 12 community-based
23 organizations and one legal service provider. CAV,
24 the Community Development Project at Urban Justice
25 Center, AAFE, CHICDC [sp?], Casa New Settlement

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2 Apartments, Fifth Avenue Community, Flatbush Tenant's
3 Coalition, Good Old Lower East Side, Norval [sp?],
4 Mothers on the Move, Northwest Bronx Community and
5 Clery [sp?] Coalition; PAC and Woodside on the Move.

6 I thank you for those who have already
7 expressed support for initiative especially Chair
8 Chin who has been one of our champions. And we are
9 all saying in support of Colleague Donna Chu [sp?],
10 who will be speaking a little bit later from MFY
11 talking about access when it comes to language
12 access. Over the past seven years New York City's
13 affordable housing market is severely destabilized
14 because of predatory equity companies purchased large
15 numbers of rent stabilized buildings at inflated
16 prices, and then push out rent stabilized so that
17 they can then increase the rents and eventually
18 charge market rates. Using a wide range of harassing
19 techniques from frivolous lawsuits to failing to
20 provide heat or conduct necessarily repairs.

21 Low and moderate income senior citizens
22 are disproportionately affected by these tactics
23 because many of them cannot afford rising rents, or
24 simply cannot stay in the buildings where there is no
25 heat in January. Those on fixed incomes who make

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2 just over \$29,000 a year may end up paying half or
3 more of their income towards housing as rents
4 increase. Even in rent stabilized apartments,
5 landlords can legally increase the rents up to 6% a
6 year on top of regular increases authorized by the
7 Rent Guidelines Board by making or claiming to make
8 major capital improvements to the buildings and
9 passing costs along to the tenants.

10 Increasing SCRIE's threshold from \$29,000
11 to \$50,000 would provide and preserve affordable
12 housing for seniors who are already the backbone of
13 our communities. Having established roots and
14 invested in this city when many others did not. They
15 spent their lives here in building neighborhoods,
16 starting businesses, and raising families, and
17 deserve to stay. The Coalition of Stabilize NYC
18 stands behind this and will continue to advocate for
19 senior citizens. Thank you.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you very much
21 to all of you for coming out to testify, and we are
22 going to get this bill passed as quickly as possible.
23 But we are also going to work on all the amendments
24 that we heard today. Okay, so we're going to call up
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2 the next panel. Valerie Rosenberg, Katie Goldstein,
3 Diane Dutwack, and Lisa Newman.

4 [Pause]

5 VALERIE ROSENBERG: Okay. So I'm Valerie
6 Rosenberg from United Neighborhood Housing. Thank
7 you very much for convening this hearing today. We
8 really appreciate the opportunity to speak. UNH is a
9 federation of 38 settlement houses, but collectively
10 benefit over half a million New Yorkers from infancy
11 to old age with a variety of services at 400 sites
12 throughout the city. We are here to express our
13 support for both the Intro and the Resolution under
14 discussion at the hearing today, but also to provide
15 a couple of recommendations for how to improve the
16 administration of the program.

17 One is, and this one I haven't heard
18 today at all, which I'm really interested by, to
19 change the post-mortem benefit transfer process. As
20 of right now, if a married person who is receiving
21 SCRIE and the benefit is in his or her name passes
22 away, his or her spouse is required to notify the
23 Department of Finance within 30 days of that death
24 that the benefit needs to be transferred on to a
25 surviving spouse. As far as we've heard from all of

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2 our organizations that provide assistance with SCRIE
3 and other housing issues, it's a really unreasonable
4 expectation that any older person or any person who
5 is grieving the loss of their spouse should remember
6 to transfer the benefit within 30 days.

7 So our recommendation is that this just
8 gets completely simplified to transferring that
9 benefit at the time of recertification. Secondly, if
10 a senior's increase -- income rather increases
11 temporarily disqualifying him or her from the
12 program, we think that he or she should be allowed to
13 return to the program at the same level of rent from
14 before the increase, the temporary increase. And
15 Linda Rosenthal and Bill Perkins have legislation
16 right now in committee that would all for this
17 provision.

18 So we're just registering our support
19 that, and encouraging the Council to support as well.
20 Also, establishing provision for seniors to re-enroll
21 in SCRIE, if they fail to recertify for a good reason
22 basically. There are other good cause regulations in
23 other public benefit programs that could be a great
24 basis on which to create this sort of provision for
25 SCRIE, but if an older adult forgets because of

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2 dementia to recertify within the six months. And
3 then they have a relative who comes along and reminds
4 them, they should be able to re-enter the program at
5 the prior level, and also to have any sort of
6 difference credited from those months where the
7 benefit might have left.

8 And finally, this issue of medical
9 expenses out of pocket. We think that they should be
10 removed from the income eligibility because it's not
11 fungible income. You can't use it for anything else.
12 You have to use it for medical expenses. [bell] So
13 that's all I had. Thank you very much for hearing us
14 today.

15 KATIE GOLDSTEIN: Hi. Good afternoon.
16 Thank you Chair Chin and Chair Ferreras for holding
17 this important hearing. My name is Katie Goldstein.
18 I'm the Executive Director of Tenants for Neighbors,
19 the grassroots citywide tenants rights organization.
20 And I'm just here to express our support for the
21 Intro and the Resolution. We hope that it passes
22 very swiftly so seniors are able to access this
23 benefit as soon as possible. Our membership are low
24 and moderate income tenants. Many of them aren't
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1
2 regulated. Many of them feeling the pressures of
3 displacement in their communities.

4 And so we are really happy that this is
5 able to pass through at the State level. And we're
6 looking forward to working with the State
7 Legislature, and you all to make sure that this is a
8 benefit that doesn't expire just after two years.
9 But it's a thing that's permanent for seniors. We
10 also wanted to express our support for making sure
11 that the income expansion also reaches DRIE, and we
12 plan on working with the State Legislature to make
13 that in effect as well because we know that that's so
14 important for the disabled folks in New York City as
15 well. So thank you very much for holding this
16 hearing, and we look forward to working with you in
17 the future.

18 DIANE LUTWAK: Thank you Council Member.
19 My name is Diane Lutwak. My name was actually
20 mentioned a little bit earlier by one of the seniors
21 who testified. I'm here from the Lenox Hill
22 Neighborhood House, a 120-year-old settlement house
23 on Manhattan's Upper East Side, which serves
24 approximately 20,000 community members a year of whom
25 over half are seniors. I am the Director of the

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2 Legal and Advocacy Department there now. When I met
3 this gentlemen I was at Volunteers of Legal Service,
4 which runs monthly clinics a senior centers around
5 the city providing information about SCRIE, answering
6 questions.

7 And at the time this gentleman met with
8 me, my answer that unfortunately was the only answers
9 that I could give, which was that he had exceeded the
10 income limit, and there wasn't anything I could do
11 about that. So I, of course, fully support the
12 proposed bill to raise the income limit, and having
13 worked with seniors throughout my 26-year-career, in
14 legal services, I'm very familiar with many of the
15 issues that have been talked about, and have a number
16 of suggestions. I'll just limit it to two.

17 Actually, Valerie mentioned one of the,
18 which is the idea that we need to have a statutory
19 mechanism. Because Deputy Commissioner Meyers
20 mentioned that the six-month grace is statutory and
21 there is nothing that they can do about it. Well,
22 many government programs have exception to policy
23 provisions for good cause whether it's SSI, food
24 stamps, Medicaid, Section 8. All these programs have
25 -- it's an escape valve, and we need that in the

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2 statute so that when someone gets into the -- gets
3 knocked off the program for the reasons that Valerie
4 described whether it's health or other similar
5 emergencies, and they miss that six-month deadline.

6 Because even though these three notices
7 are going out, there are always going to be people
8 that miss the notices, that miss the deadlines for
9 one reason or another. And we need to have a
10 statutory mechanism in there that would allow the
11 agency to have the discretion that they need to
12 examine the factors. And if good cause is shown, to
13 put the person back in the program. So that's one
14 suggestion I have. The second has to do with the
15 definition of income.

16 Similarly, because we've had these
17 conversations, one-time income that puts someone over
18 the limit. But I'm hoping we're going to see less of
19 these cases with the higher income level. But it's
20 still going to happen where someone -- The only
21 exclusions from the definition of income in the
22 statute right now are for inheritances and gifts.
23 But there are other forms of one-time income that
24 someone could have; withdrawals from an IRA,
25 inheritances.

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Not inheritances, but personal injury lump sum. It could be just if someone's income is \$29,000 or under the new limits \$50,000. And then we get an extra one-time amount that [bell] shouldn't -- they should be allowed to get back into the program the following year with their rent frozen at the lower level. Not at the new much higher level. So thank you again, and we're hoping to be able to work with you, and to work with the State on these issues.

LISA NEWMAN: Hi, my name is Lisa Newman. I'm an attorney with Legal Aid Society, and I wanted to thank Chairs Chin and Ferreras for taking the lead on Intro 243. I wanted to urge the Council to pass 243, and the resolution so that these changes that the State made can go into effect on July 1st of this year, and we urge the Council to do that. At Legal Aid we see many, many households who will benefit from this increase in the income limits including those rent control tenants who are subject to 7.5% rent increases each year. And rent stabilized seniors in Manhattan who face increasingly large rent -- monthly rent burdens.

And I think our bill is concerned for us. And something that Legal Aid really hopes the

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2 Administration when this law is passed is designing
3 an effective Outreach plan. We are very aware of the
4 fact that there are many, many seniors who while
5 eligible for SCRIE are not actually currently on
6 SCRIE. And it's tragic that there are so many
7 seniors who are not accessing a benefit to which
8 they're entitled. And so with this increase, there
9 are obviously going to be a large number of seniors
10 who become eligible for SCRIE and so they're hoping
11 that the City really does a great public service
12 announcement to make sure that we get as many seniors
13 signed up as possible.

14 And to that end, Legal Aid is very
15 available to work with the Administration to design
16 an effective Outreach plan. And would be very
17 welcome -- welcome the idea to partner to make sure
18 that gets done. For example making sure that any
19 time agencies that interact with seniors, see
20 seniors, including HRA when they're dealing with
21 Medicaid or HPD or DFTA just pushing SCRIE
22 applications on people so that they can get approved.
23 And also mirroring what Katie said earlier, we'd
24 obviously also urge the State to start working on
25 legislation increasing DRIE amounts. Thank you.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you very much for all your testimony, and for the great suggestions. We look forward to working with you on that. Thank you.

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LUCY NEWMAN: Thank you.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh. Okay, we're going to call up the final panel. Edith Prentiss, Damatri [sp?], and Martin --the last name is --

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MALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Damatri Martin from the South Hall Community Service. Huh?

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FEMALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, Miriam, oh say. Miriam, okay.

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[Pause]

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Please start.

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EDITH PRENTISS: Well, all the senior service people may be in awe of today.

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CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Identify yourself.

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EDITH PRENTISS. I'm sorry. Edith Prentiss, Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York. The disability community was in awe yesterday when we got the Taxi Bill passed. So, it's not so terrible we're getting nothing today. When you speak

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2 about talking to the State to correct the problems
3 with the Bill, you could try throwing in the DRIE
4 word. The DRIE community has been trying to get DRIE
5 since -- as long as the DRIE program has existed
6 since the early '70s.

7

8 Come 2007, we finally got a totally
9 disparate program with the promise that each year
10 we'll go for parity. Each year we'll get parity. It
11 is now 2014 -- 2014, we still don't have parity. In
12 fact, the disparity has now gone from only being a
13 \$9,000 disparity to a \$30,000 disparity, and the
14 disability community is even more impacted. Seniors
15 who got their SCRIE at 62 have seen their rents
16 frozen. They got epic. They're protected from the
17 donut hole.

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19 The disability community most of us
20 whoever were qualified, we never were eligible for
21 SCRIE and for DRIE for the simple reason that we
22 actually worked, and we have Social Security. I
23 became disabled in the late '90s. I have been
24 signing leases since 1990 to 2014, and have seen my
25 rent go up over 30%. If I was even eligible for DRIE
in 2007, my rent would at least only be \$900 today.
Instead, my rent exceeds my Social Security. How do

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2 you live like that? You give back everything else in
3 your life, and I budget to buy my way out of the
4 donut hole.

5 Theater, movies, library, whatever, they
6 are not in our budgets. They are so truly not in our
7 budgets. Finance seems to think that the City of New
8 York has been supportive of DRIE. The City of New
9 York was the one most against DRIE as it was known.
10 Under the Bloomberg Administration I will always
11 remember then Commissioner Falkland [sp?] saying to
12 me, They think we're going to live too long. Well,
13 what? And then he said to me, What kind of
14 disability don't they get? This is about two months
15 before he died. I never thought I'd make it to 62.
16 [bell] I will not make it to 65. Thank you.

17 MARIAM HACHACHIAN: Good afternoon. My
18 name is Mariam Hachachian[sp?], and I'm the Program
19 Director of the South Health Community Services
20 Russian Anti-Victim Program. [sic] South Health
21 wholeheartedly endorses the New York City's Council's
22 work on Intro 243, which will approve the increase
23 for SCRIE income managability to \$50,000. This would
24 have a profound impact on the ability of so many of
25 our city's elders to continue living independently

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2 and to remain in their homes. We would also like to
3 invite you to consider using that tremendous
4 opportunity to advocate for a rollback program for
5 senior citizens. So many of our neighbors who are
6 the fortunate recipients of the benefits of this
7 wonderful program, nevertheless are paying more than
8 50% of their limited incomes towards their housing
9 costs. We urge you to advocate that the maximum rent
10 to be paid by a SCRIE recipient be capped at 30% of
11 income, which is universally considered to be the
12 affordable housing level. Lastly, we respectfully
13 ask you to consider returning the administration of
14 the SCRIE program to the New York City Department for
15 the Aging. When the program was under DFTA auspices,
16 clients and advocates with full staff who were
17 knowledgeable about SCRIE, and who were able to speak
18 about the details of individual cases and issues were
19 resolved efficiently and personally. This is
20 markedly different than the process which exists
21 today. Client's advocates must call 311, and speak
22 to representatives who only the problem
23 superficially, and they are unable to meaningfully
24 discuss the details of any individual case. These
25 calls then get referred to someone at the Department

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2 of Finance. Neither the client nor the advocate is
3 given a name or a contact number for this person. An
4 unfortunate number of individuals have been wrongly
5 terminated from the program. And instead of being
6 able to call and speak to a program representative,
7 and resolve these matters as we used to, our skilled
8 advocates are forced to go through the bureaucracy of
9 calling 311 repeatedly to request that someone call
10 us back. The results are inefficient and cause
11 effective elders a deal of stress. The elders of our
12 community are very fortunate to be living at a time
13 when the New York City Council is advocating so
14 strongly on their behalf. We stand with them in
15 thanking you, and encourage you to continue doing so.
16 And please, let us know if there is anything we can
17 help with this process. Thank you.

18 DONNA CHIN: Good afternoon Council
19 Members. My name is Donna Chin. I'm a Senior Staff
20 Attorney at MFY Legal Services. Thank you for this
21 opportunity for me to testify about SCRIE and DRIE
22 improving language access. The importance of
23 language access for the success of the SCRIE/DRIE
24 program was underscored when in Spring 2013, the
25 Department of Finance sent letters to nearly 6,000

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2 New York City senior citizens notifying them that
3 their SCRIE benefits had been revoked, and that they
4 had a limited time to reverse the revocation by
5 submitting income recertification documents to DOF.
6 Because this critical notice was sent only in
7 English, and many did not have access to informal or
8 formal translation, thousands of LEP SCRIE recipients
9 could not fully understand its content, and delayed
10 or took no action. As a result, many of these LEP
11 seniors failed to quickly recertify their SCRIE
12 benefits. And based on this experience on August 8th
13 of 2013 a group of community organizations consisting
14 of MFY, Asian Americans for Equality, Project Home
15 and University Settlement, Good Old Lower East Side,
16 and Council Member Margaret Chin's office met with
17 the then DOF Commissioner and his key staff at the
18 SCRIE office, and re-presented eight recommendations
19 to them. Since our meeting, DOF have taken steps to
20 improve language access, but we believe they can do
21 more. And very briefly our eight recommendations are
22 for them to translate all essential documents,
23 letters or correspondences that affect a senior's
24 rights through the denial, loss, or decrease in
25 benefit or services into Spanish, Chinese, and

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2 Russian, the top three most requested languages at
3 DOF or any other appropriate language. And for non-
4 essential documents sent only in English to include
5 on the insert that they mentioned earlier. And we
6 also asked for them to create the SCRIE Call Center,
7 which I know Council Members today mentioned where
8 LEP customers can call to access the information
9 instead of going to the office. And also, of course,
10 to ensure that there is signage at the lobby of the
11 SCRIE/DRIE office. So that informing the customers
12 that translation, and interpretation services are
13 available. Ensure that there's directional signage
14 with pictograms so that people can know actually
15 where at 66 John Street the SCRIE office is located,
16 and to make sure that there are I Speak cards
17 available at the SCRIE office. Also to ensure that
18 at 66 John Street that the staff have access to a
19 telephone where they can provide customers with
20 telephonic interpretation. And to ensure all the
21 SCRIE and DRIE staff are properly trained regarding
22 the DOF's language access policy and procedures, and
23 trained to be culturally sensitive to LEP customers.
24 And there are a few more, but I'm going to not
25 mention them. They're in my prepared testimony

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2 because of the time, and thank you very much for this
3 opportunity for me to testify.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you very
6 much for your testimony, and as we have learned,
7 there is room for improvement both at DOF and some
8 work at DFTA. I'd like to thank my colleague and Co-
9 Chair for this hearing. This is vey important to all
10 of us. We looking forward to hopefully having
11 another hearing to talk about all the great
12 improvements as a follow-up to this hearing. What do
13 you think, Margaret?

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, but first
15 we've got to get this legislation passed, and then
16 we've also got to work on DRIE and also the homeowner
17 part. And also trying to get all these amendments
18 from all the suggestions that came out at the
19 hearing. I really want to thank the advocates, and
20 the seniors themselves for coming out. It is so
21 important to hear directly from you, and your stories
22 and your suggestions help. It makes these laws
23 better. So thank you once again for coming out.

24 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: And again we urge
25 you to make sure that you contact your council member

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with your specific stories, and be able to get us information. Please pay attention. Both the Chair and I are going to be working with the Administration on our side here in turning the Council so that we can get this legislation passed and voted on as soon as possible. Thank you, and we're going to call this meeting to adjourn.

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 15, 2014