

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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October 14, 2014  
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: RITCHIE J. TORRES  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Rosie Mendez  
James G. Van Bramer  
Donovan J. Richards  
Laurie A. Cumbo  
Vanessa L. Gibson

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

Cindy Colter, Vice President  
Domestic Violence Shelter Program  
Safe Horizon

Alvera Williams

Joy Solomon, Managing Attorney  
Harry and Janette Weinberg Center for Elder  
Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home at  
Riverdale

Quentin Walcott, Co-Executive Director  
Connect for Safe Families and Peaceful  
Communities

Catherine Trapani, Housing Director  
New Destiny Housing Corporation

Beth Baltimore, Senior Staff Attorney Legal  
Services NYC Bronx

Johan Byssainthe Charles, Attorney  
Legal Aid Society, NYC

Judith Goldman, Attorney  
Legal Aid Society, NYC

Ted Mc Courtney  
Director of Sarah Burke House  
Sanctuary for Families - NYC

Brian Clarke, Vice President of Operations  
New York City Housing Authority - NYCHA

Nora Reissig, Director  
Family Services Department  
New York City Housing Authority - NYCHA

Rosemonde Pierre-Louis, Commissioner  
New York City Mayor's Office to  
Combat Domestic Violence

Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner  
Human Resource Administration  
Department of Social Services

Maria Torres  
Laticia  
Praline Tiscal

Theresa MacIntosh  
Voices of Women Organizing Project - VOW  
Chair of Housing Justice Campaign

Gitsy Ajobi, Program Director  
Food First Family Project

Erin Feely-Nathem, Executive Director  
Food First Family Project  
Co-Chair, New York City Coalition of  
Domestic Violence Residential Providers  
Housing Committee

Judith Kahan, CEO  
Center Against Domestic Violence  
Co-Chair, New York City Coalition of  
Domestic Violence Residential Providers

Nadine Simon, Member  
Voices of Women Organizing Project

Charlena Powell, Member

Voices of Women Organizing Project

2 [sound check]

3 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Good morning  
4 everyone, my name is Council Member Ritchie Torres.  
5 I'm the Council Member for the Central Bronx. I am  
6 the Chair of the Committee on Public Housing, and  
7 most important of all, I am upstander in the fight  
8 against domestic violence. And, I am proud to be  
9 joined by my fellow upstander, Council Member Vanessa  
10 Gibson, who chairs the Committee on Public Safety.

11 As all of you know, over the past several  
12 years Public Housing has seen a dramatic rise in  
13 major crime. According to an analysis by the Daily  
14 News earlier in the year, over the past five years  
15 Public Housing has seen a 31% increase in major crime  
16 compared to a 3% increase citywide. The leading  
17 driver of that increase is domestic violence. In  
18 2009, there were 820 domestic crimes in Public  
19 Housing. By 2013, that number rose to 1,642, more  
20 than doubling.

21 When I speak of domestic violence, I am  
22 referring to a pattern of abusive behavior toward an  
23 intimate partner. The term 'domestic violence' is  
24 misleading in one important sense. There is nothing  
25 domestic about the far-reaching impact of violence in

2 our homes or in our most intimate partnerships. The  
3 instability it creates afflicts every corner of  
4 society. It affects many people and comes in many  
5 forms. Here are a few facts about the prevalence of  
6 domestic violence in New York City.

7 Fact: The NYPD responded to more than  
8 280,000 domestic violence incidents citywide in 2013.  
9 That amounts to 765 incidents every day.

10 Fact: The number of domestic violence  
11 crimes rose by 25% from 25,761 in 2009 to 32,324 in  
12 2013.

13 Fact: 25% of homeless households in the  
14 shelter system are reportedly homeless due to  
15 domestic violence. Fear of homelessness is one of  
16 the reasons victims often remain with their abusers.

17 For victims of domestic violence, access  
18 to a safe place to live, access to Public Housing in  
19 particular, can be a matter of life and death. But  
20 as all of you know, access to Public Housing is  
21 notoriously hard to come by. There are 240,000  
22 families on the waiting list for Public Housing.  
23 120,000 families on the waiting list for Section 8.  
24 The turnover rate for Public Housing is 3.1%, meaning  
25 that on average a mere 5,000 units become available

2 every year. Consider for a moment that 240,000  
3 families are competing for 5,000 units in a given  
4 year. Only two percent of those on the waiting list  
5 are able to access Public Housing every year. As  
6 shown in one of the charts, as of September 29, 2014,  
7 there are a total of 754 households on the Domestic  
8 Violence Waiting List across the five boroughs. In  
9 Manhattan, there is DV victim who has been on the  
10 waiting list since 2003, for more than ten years.

11           Given these facts, the Committee will  
12 examine the challenges that domestic violence victims  
13 face in accessing Public Housing. Here is how the  
14 process works:

15           A DV victim can access in Public Housing  
16 in two ways, either as an applicant with an N1  
17 priority or W0, or as a Public Housing resident  
18 through the Emergency Transfer Program. When it  
19 comes to the 240,000 households on the waiting list  
20 for Public Housing, NYCHA ranks each household  
21 according to a priority, either Need-Based Priority,  
22 or Working Families Priority. There are five Need  
23 Based Priority Codes: N0, N1, N3, N4 and N8.

24           N0, the highest priority, is reserved for  
25 applicants referred by select City agencies, mainly

2 ACS, DHS, CASA, and HPD. N1, the second highest  
3 priority is reserved for victims of domestic  
4 violence. If you are in a DHS shelter, then you can  
5 potentially qualify for N0. But, if you are a  
6 domestic violence victim in the HRA shelter, then the  
7 highest priority for which you could qualify is N1.  
8 Under NYCHA's system, DV victims in the HRA shelter  
9 receive a lower priority than households in the DHS  
10 shelter. It would seem to me that there should be no  
11 distinction here. HRA shelter DV victims should at a  
12 minimum receive the same priority as the rest of the  
13 municipal shelter population. When it comes to  
14 receiving the highest priority for Public Housing  
15 units, HRA shelter DV victims should no longer be  
16 excluded as a second class within the shelter system.

17 I would like to turn your attention to  
18 enlarged copy of NYCHA's required document chart to  
19 the right. If you are a DV victim, to qualify for N1  
20 or emergency transfer, you are required to present  
21 NYCHA with documentation verifying that you are, in  
22 fact, a victim. As you can see, the chart is a bit  
23 overwhelming at first glance. In order to qualify  
24 for N1, a DV victim is required to present two  
25 documented incidents, and one advocacy letter. A DV



2 victim of a serious felony, however, is required to  
3 only present documented incident, and one advocacy  
4 letter. The Committee will examine NYCHA's system  
5 for placement and transfer, and examine how  
6 responsive that system is to the needs of domestic  
7 violence victims. I, for one, must admit that I have  
8 concerns the NYCHA system may be too rigid, too  
9 reactive, too bureaucratic. For example, does the  
10 general requirement that a DV victim produce two  
11 documented incidents rather than one, except in cases  
12 of a serious felony, does that general requirement  
13 raise the bar a little too high? In thinking about  
14 that question, here are two facts to consider about  
15 how domestic violence often occurs.

16 Fact 1: Cases of domestic violence often  
17 go undocumented. In 2013, there were 62 domestic  
18 violence homicides. Most of those cases had no  
19 documented incidents. Seventy-four percent of those  
20 cases had no prior police contact. Eighty-six  
21 percent of those cases had no order of protection.

22 Fact 2: Cases of domestic violence can  
23 escalate quickly. According to a report by the  
24 Justice Department, a domestic violence victim's risk

2 of facing a subsequent incident is highest within the  
3 first 11 days of the initial incident.

4           Given these facts, given the fact that  
5 domestic violence can often go undocumented, and can  
6 escalate quickly, the Committee will examine whether  
7 there are changes that can be made to make the NYCHA  
8 system more flexible, more proactive, and more  
9 responsive to the complicated ways in which domestic  
10 violence transpires in real life. Is the system we  
11 have the best that we can do, or can we do better?  
12 With that being said, I will no turn the floor over  
13 to Council Member Gibson, the Chair on the Committee  
14 of Public Safety.

15           COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Good morning.  
16 Thank you very much, Chairman Ritchie Torres. It is  
17 a pleasure to be here with all of you. I am  
18 Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson. I represent the 16th  
19 District in the Bronx, and also serve as Chair of the  
20 Committee on Public Safety. It is a delight to join  
21 with all of you today, with all of my colleagues who  
22 are here. This is certainly a very, very important  
23 topic that brings us here today when we focus on  
24 domestic violence and critical and necessary

2 resources programs and services for families that  
3 live in public housing.

4           We have had many conversations with  
5 multiple partners, stakeholders and advocacy groups  
6 over the past several months. And I'm extremely  
7 pleased that in my community I represent a large  
8 development within PSA-7 including Butler, Claremont,  
9 Forest, McKinley, High Bridge, Morris, Grosvenor,  
10 Webster, and Sedgwick houses. And so, when I look at  
11 these numbers, I look at the faces of the children  
12 and families that are impacted by domestic violence  
13 each and every day. A pervasive very challenging  
14 issue that we continue to grapple with recognizing  
15 that it not only affects victims, but also their  
16 families. And this is an issue that continues to be  
17 in the dark. And through many efforts on account of  
18 many people, we are domestic violence to the light.  
19 October is National Violence Awareness Month., and  
20 throughout this entire city, we are having events  
21 throughout the entire city to focus and bring our  
22 victims to the forefront. To let them know that  
23 they're not alone in this struggle. This struggle  
24 for survival for renewal, for strength, for hope, and  
25 for opportunity. And I'm delighted that my colleague

2 Council Member Torres has been a tremendous leader in  
3 making sure that we come up with creative approaches  
4 and techniques on how we figure out how to provide  
5 the necessary healthcare, mental health, housing,  
6 economic developments. So that we can continue to  
7 take care of many victims and their families.

8           And I'm very excited today. We have so  
9 much testimony that we will hear because we recognize  
10 that case management, legal assistance is also  
11 extremely important. And so, I want to thank all of  
12 you. It's been a pleasure working with all of our  
13 colleagues and this Administration who is making sure  
14 that domestic violence and the services continue to  
15 be a major priority. So as the Chair of Public  
16 Safety I am committed to working with all of our  
17 advocacy groups. The Mayor's Office to Combat  
18 Domestic Violence, all of our colleagues in the City  
19 Council, and the Speaker to make sure that this  
20 multi-agency partnership that includes not just the  
21 Housing Authority, the New York Police Department,  
22 HRA, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence,  
23 DFTA, our Family Justice Centers. We are making sure  
24 that this is going to be a priority. We're putting

2 resources into many of our programs so we can  
3 continue to do this good work.

4           So I thank all of you for being here, and  
5 I want to thank my colleague again, Council Member  
6 Ritchie Torres for his leadership. It is an honor to  
7 always join with you, Public Safety and Public  
8 Housing. That is how we can truly achieve safety for  
9 all New Yorkers. So I thank you again for your  
10 presence today. Thank you Council Member Torres.

11           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you Council  
12 Member Gibson, and not only do we have neighboring  
13 committees, but actually neighboring council members.  
14 So there's a certain irony there. I want to  
15 recognize a few of my colleagues. The Majority  
16 Leader Jimmy Van Bramer, who happens to represent the  
17 largest public housing development in the country or  
18 the continent of North America. And we have Council  
19 Member Donovan Richards.

20           Today's hearing will begin with three  
21 panels. The first panel consisting of domestic  
22 violence service providers will provide the nature  
23 and scope of domestic violence in general. The  
24 second panel consisting of legal service providers  
25 will evaluate NYCHA's system of replacing and

2 transferring DV victims. And the third panel  
3 consisting of members of the Administration will  
4 testify about the historic efforts that are being  
5 made to confront this crisis in public housing.

6 We have here with us the Commissioner of  
7 the Office to Combat Domestic Violence, Rosemonde  
8 Pierre-Louis. Out of respect for the Commissioner's  
9 time, I will only permit questioning until after the  
10 second panel. The purpose of the first two panels is  
11 to provide context for the Administration's  
12 testimony. With that said, I would like to call up  
13 the first panel. Cindy Colter from Safe Horizon.  
14 Alvera Williams, Catherine Trapani from New Destiny  
15 Housing, Jay Solomon, or Joy Solomon, and Quentin  
16 Walcott from Connect.

17 [Pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So each of you will  
19 have three minutes to testify. We will be starting  
20 with Safe Horizon.

21 CINDY COLTER: Hello. Thank you Council  
22 Member Torres and Members of the Committee for the  
23 opportunity to testify before you today. My name is  
24 Cindy Colter, and I'm Vice President of Safe  
25 Horizon's Domestic Violence Shelter Program. Safe

2 Horizon is the nation's leading victim assistance  
3 organization, and New York City's largest provider of  
4 services to victims of domestic violence, sexual  
5 assault, child abuse, and human trafficking. We  
6 commend the City Council for taking an in-depth look  
7 at how NYCHA responds to victims of domestic  
8 violence. Safe Horizon operates eight DV shelters  
9 throughout the five boroughs of New York City with  
10 725 beds, and last year we served 2,500 adults and  
11 children. As you know, State regulations allow for 90  
12 days in the emergency shelters with a possible  
13 extension of up to 90 more days. For our residents,  
14 this is a very short window to obtain housing.  
15 Without housing, again as you know, many of our  
16 clients face stark choices between homelessness, and  
17 return to safe and potentially lethal living  
18 environments.

19 We are deeply gratified that the de  
20 Blasio Administration has rolled out a pilot housing  
21 subsidy for DV survivors and their families. But  
22 prompt access to public housing is also an essential  
23 component to promoting ongoing safety.

24 I would like to draw the Committee's  
25 attention, which has already been drawn there, to our

2 belief that all shelter residents regardless of which  
3 city agency administers the program should quality  
4 equally for priority status when applying for public  
5 housing. We appreciate NYCHA's recent change in  
6 police because it creates more flexible criteria for  
7 residents of DV shelters to quality for N1 priority  
8 status. We hope to see this flexibility expanded to  
9 all DV victims in New York City, not just in the  
10 shelters. Nonetheless, we're concerned with the  
11 proposal to create unequal tiers for homeless New  
12 Yorkers. A higher one for residents of DHS shelters  
13 and a lower one for residents of domestic violence  
14 shelters.

15           To help illustrate this, I just want to  
16 very briefly go into an example of one of our  
17 clients. She was first in emergency shelters,  
18 applied for NYCHA priority. Time ran out. She was  
19 then fortunate enough to get into the small number of  
20 DV Tier II shelters. Again, waiting for NYCHA  
21 housing. Her application was rejected. She hired  
22 one of lawyers who again advocated on her behalf.  
23 Time ran out. She then went into one of the DHS  
24 shelters where she no longer had the safety nor the  
25 kind of healing environment. Finally, she was one of



2 the few that after a two-year period was able to  
3 achieve NYCHA housing. And as you know, and as you  
4 mentioned, for us only one percent of our residents  
5 received NYCHA housing in FY 13. [bell]

6           And I'll sum up by saying by creating two  
7 classes of homelessness in the City shelter system,  
8 we're asking domestic violence victims to further  
9 impoverish themselves to obtain housing. As  
10 mentioned above, resident of DV shelters face strict  
11 time limits, long lines, and long waiting times  
12 because of a limited number of vacant apartments DV  
13 NYCHA before the end of-- While the change of  
14 documentation will increase the number of residents  
15 eligible, the N1 status will create a wait time that  
16 is far longer than they're permitted to stay.  
17 Further more, the shelters are not in confidential  
18 locations, nor do they have the services to support  
19 them through their healing. This speaks to an urgent  
20 need to create more housing options, not greater  
21 competition among needy populations. We urge the  
22 Administration and NYCHA to reassign the NO Priority  
23 status to all shelter residents regardless of which  
24 city administers them. Thank you and I would be  
25 happy to answer any questions you may have.

2 ALVERA WILLIAMS: Hi, I'm in a DV shelter  
3 with my two-year old son, and I do not have N1  
4 priority because I only have an order of protection.  
5 Which means when my six months is up at the end of  
6 December. that I will hopefully get into a Tier II.  
7 Or, I will have to go back to the PATH in the Bronx  
8 if it's open at that time. If it's not open, I will  
9 have to consider going back to my son's father  
10 because I don't have family, and I don't friends, and  
11 I don't have anywhere else to go. And it will be the  
12 middle of winter. I work but because I do work,  
13 they're telling me that I'm making a little bit too  
14 much to qualify for certain programs, which means  
15 that my wait period would be longer.

16 But I still can't afford a place on my  
17 own without any help. They're telling me to work  
18 part-time so that I qualify for the program. And I'm  
19 not willing to do that because I do have a two-year  
20 old and I have to take care of him myself. My fear  
21 is that I will not get into Tier II because of lack  
22 of room. And then, the PATH will be closed at that  
23 time, and me and my son will be in the street. My  
24 son's father was extremely abusive. He was an  
25 alcoholic, and it was a very scary situation. I

2 don't want my son growing up in that environment, and  
3 I don't want to have to consider going back there  
4 because I don't have enough paperwork saying that I  
5 was abused. My son doesn't deserve that. I don't  
6 feel that I deserve that.

7 I feel that I should be able to work and  
8 do regular things that other parents can do with  
9 their kids; go to work, come home, wash clothes,  
10 spend time with my child. You know, regular things,  
11 and I can't do that if I don't have a home. That's  
12 pretty much the most important thing in the world for  
13 me is for me to have a home for me and my child. I'm  
14 sincerely scared that I'm not going to get the  
15 housing in time. It's only a couple months from now,  
16 and I've been there since July. I just hope that you  
17 guys hear what everybody has to say because we really  
18 need the help. I'm blessed that I only have one  
19 child, but some of you girls have three and four  
20 kids, and they cannot work because their kids are too  
21 young or their children have special needs, or  
22 whatever the case it.

23 They themselves won't be able to get help  
24 either, and then they'll be living in the street as  
25 well. I don't know what else to say other than I

2 hope you guys will hear us and consider all angles.  
3 Consider the fact that it's not always easy to go and  
4 get an order of protection or call the police because  
5 these abusers take your phon. [bell] Sometimes even  
6 if you have your phone, he's sitting there or right  
7 there, and you're scared to make that phone call to  
8 call the police. And even them when they go-- My  
9 son's father was released two hours later from jail,  
10 and he came home. I'm thinking I'm safe at least for  
11 the night, and he came home in two hours. So, you  
12 know, it's not always easy to just get these things  
13 being documented. It's not always the safest thing  
14 to call 911 honestly. That's it. Thank you.

15 [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Ms. Williams, Thank  
17 you for sharing your story. I can't imagine how  
18 difficult that was, but I appreciate your testimony.  
19 Ms. Solomon.

20 [Pause]

21 JOY SOLOMON: Good morning, Chairman  
22 Torres and member of the Committee on Public Housing.  
23 My name is Joy Solomon. I'm the Director and  
24 Managing Attorney of the Harry and Janette Weinberg  
25 Center for Elder Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home

2 at Riverdale. The Weinberg Center is the nation's  
3 first elder abuse shelter, and I am thankful for the  
4 opportunity to be her to present testimony regarding  
5 the epidemic of elder abuse in New York City, and its  
6 impact on NYCHA housing residents.

7           The Weinberg Center is a comprehensive  
8 prevention and intervention program for victims of  
9 elder abuse in all five boroughs of New York City.  
10 We're grateful for the DOVE Funding that we have  
11 received in part to support this program. The Center  
12 encompasses a holistic service model to provide  
13 victims with a safe environment, a full range of  
14 individualized medical, psychological, therapeutic,  
15 and direct and immediate legal service.

16           Since 2005, we have provided 59,000 days  
17 of shelter for older adults and in every racial,  
18 ethnic, and financial backgrounds. Most elder abuse  
19 is community based. It can be emotional, physical,  
20 sexual, financial, and include neglect and  
21 abandonment. Eighty-five to 90% of abusers are  
22 family members or individuals known to victims. The  
23 more vulnerable the older adult, the more likely they  
24 are to be abused. In New York State for every case

2 of elder abuse, which is reported, 23 cases go  
3 unreported.

4 A study in 2001, found that 141 out of  
5 every 1,000 older New Yorkers have experienced an  
6 elder abuse event since turning age 60. Based upon  
7 these statistics and other studies, one can estimate  
8 that of the 75,000 older adults living in NYCHA  
9 buildings anywhere from five to 7,500 tenants may be  
10 victims of elder abuse. Those victims are often  
11 isolated and hidden from view. Moreover, every  
12 recent study shows rapid increases in the number of  
13 older New Yorkers, and the number is expected to  
14 increase 50% by 2030. This population has the  
15 highest levels of poverty, 17% along all racial and  
16 ethnic groups. And it's definitely more dramatic in  
17 New York City's public housing. Residents age 65 and  
18 older are the fastest growing age group among NYCHA's  
19 resident populations. And of the 36% of NYCHA  
20 assaults are domestic violence with the rate jumping  
21 to 54% last year.

22 I just want to tell you quickly about  
23 Mrs. S who lived in a NYCHA since 1974. Here 23-  
24 year-old grandson moved to her 14th floor apartment  
25 three years ago, unemployed. Though she was healthy

2 despite diabetes and heart disease, when he came, he  
3 changed that. He stole money from her, forcing her  
4 to choose between medication and food. He used and  
5 sold drugs in her apartment, frequently bringing  
6 friends and buyers in at all hours. He screamed at  
7 her threatening to harm her. Damaged personal  
8 property of hers. Over time, she became depressed,  
9 which was atop her other chronic diseases. As the  
10 abuse, in fact, increased, the constant stress and  
11 anxiety caused her health to deteriorate. Her doctor  
12 recommended more medicine. Her vision was affected.  
13 She tripped over some of his things, and needed a  
14 cane for mobility. She was afraid of falling again.  
15 So she didn't leave the apartment. She couldn't  
16 muster the energy to go out. Sometimes he would take  
17 her cane reminding her of the power and control he  
18 had over her. The doctor, the housing manager, the  
19 pharmacist, the community center, no one identified  
20 her as an elder abuse victim and inquired about the  
21 possibility of abuse. And she didn't want to make  
22 reports because she was afraid she would lose her  
23 apartment. She was afraid of going through the  
24 system. It might send him to jail and not help his  
25 drug problem. Or worse, even if she did make a

2 report, not have it taken seriously, and being in  
3 greater risk of harm. She chose to tolerate the  
4 abuse as best can.

5           We work closely in a multi-disciplinary  
6 approach with many of the agencies that you talked  
7 about today including DA's offices, APS, Family  
8 Justice Center, Safe Horizon, NYPD and DFTA. We've  
9 worked with Local 32BJ, which is the housing and  
10 Super Union to help them have an online training  
11 program to recognize and intervene in cases of elder  
12 abuse in their buildings. And we have also partnered  
13 with the Robin Hood Foundation to screen low income  
14 residents, who participate in manage long-term care  
15 for elder abuse.

16           We have some clear suggestions, which are  
17 in our papers that we have handed in about what we  
18 think we can do to help support older residents who  
19 live in NYCHA housing to help them identify, to help  
20 train people who work in the buildings. And  
21 particularly when calls are coming in for domestic  
22 violence, that police officers are trained to notice  
23 the older adults living in the buildings as well.  
24 Because they, too, may be victims of violence, and  
25 often go unnoticed. So we're happy to answer any



2 questions that you have, and to assist in providing  
3 any of this training. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And Connect.

5 [Pause]

6 QUENTIN WALCOTT: We would like to thank  
7 all of the council members and members of the  
8 committee for first of all giving us this opportunity  
9 to testify today to share our thoughts on the  
10 poignant issue of domestic violence within public  
11 housing communities in New York City. In addition,  
12 we would like to come before you recognizing domestic  
13 violence as an equal form of community violence.  
14 Domestic violence historically has been treated as a  
15 private family matter. The truth is that it affects  
16 us all directly, indirectly, publicly, and privately.  
17 I just want you to consider some of the following  
18 statistics. I won't point to them all, but I just  
19 want to highlight a few.

20 If a woman is being abused, in 30 to 60%  
21 of cases, the children in the household are being  
22 abused as well. Domestic violence is a major cause  
23 of homelessness. At least one-third of the families  
24 using New York City's family system are homeless due  
25 to domestic violence. We can say domestic violence

2 is the single best predictor of juvenile delinquency  
3 and adult criminality. Boys who witness domestic  
4 violence are twice as likely to abuse their own  
5 partners and children when they become adults.  
6 Females are more likely to be abused. Domestic  
7 violence is a major public health, public safety, and  
8 social justice issue in New York City. New York  
9 City's Police Department responds to 700 incidents of  
10 domestic violence a day. It is currently the leading  
11 cause of murder for women in New York City.

12           Thought New York's statistics related to  
13 DV are the catalyst that can be cited to justify the  
14 need for more effective and efficient programs, I  
15 would like to discuss our Violence Prevent Pilot  
16 Project that our community pilot program will  
17 implement in one public housing development in each  
18 of the five boroughs. That goes beyond the numbers,  
19 and the real stories of residents of public housing.  
20 The use of resident's experience in the agency and  
21 this project will gain the participation and  
22 involvement from the ground up, building holistic and  
23 effective prevention and intervention responses that  
24 can interrupt too often deadly violence. We believe  
25 that this project with partnerships with public

2 housing residents and staff, City Council, and the  
3 community-based organizations by connecting its  
4 partners can transform violence, and cultures of  
5 violence to communities of peace in public housing.

6           The project is entitled Real Stories  
7 because Connect plans to ask public housing residents  
8 both individually and in groups to share their  
9 perspectives, experiences, and concerns about  
10 interpersonal violence within their housing  
11 development and neighborhood. And this includes  
12 domestic violence, intimate partner violence, child  
13 abuse, sexual assault, gang related violence, and  
14 elder abuse. We know that crime in communities of  
15 color is on the rise. We know that the root cause of  
16 violence including domestic violence is untreated  
17 emotional and psychological trauma. In discussions  
18 with residents we will explore the attitudes and  
19 responses to abusers, survivors, and bystanders in  
20 how to develop practical and safe strategies of  
21 prevention and effective intervention.

22           We also want to discuss the high  
23 correlation between children who witness violence at  
24 home, and then who become in gangbang, and other  
25 forms of community violence. Connect's Community

2 Pilot Programs are designed to help women and men to  
3 gain a deeper awareness of the ways that intimate  
4 violence shapes their lives. Over the years we have  
5 learned that when people have the opportunity to be  
6 part of safe spaces, where they can live and  
7 challenge their thinking and behavior that condone  
8 violence, they are able to more freely explore how  
9 violence is sustained in a particular community.

10           Hearing direction from tenants about how  
11 violence impacts their lives in this critical first  
12 step to putting effective strategies in place based  
13 on how they can participate in change. Connect  
14 offers these spaces of collective empowerment,  
15 education, and healing in a variety of ways and in a  
16 variety of cases throughout New York City. Through  
17 women's circles, men's round tables, faith round  
18 tables, and community dialogues. As well as our  
19 community faith and school based educational  
20 workshops and forums, seminars, and what have you.

21           Our Legal Advocacy program and help line  
22 is a crucial resource--

23           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I'm going to ask you  
24 to just conclude.

2 QUENTIN WALCOTT: I'll sum it up, yeah.

3 For this pilot we will take a multi-pronged approach  
4 to get the real stories. First, we want us to  
5 support a resident association and tenant council for  
6 the pilot. We will provide association members with  
7 on-site Connect facilitated workshops in identifying  
8 and understanding violence, and personal violence.  
9 Next, we will schedule a series of community  
10 dialogues through round tables and circles on  
11 violence in the housing development, and what they  
12 think is and is not working in terms of services,  
13 support networks and tools. We would like to video  
14 tape and record these stories that capture the real  
15 stories of residents in public housing violence  
16 statistics. And once we have these results, we will  
17 report back to the communities and develop particular  
18 tailor made programs in each housing development that  
19 will address the needs of preventing violence, and  
20 effective intervention when it does occur.

21 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you, Mr.  
22 Walcott, and New Destiny Housing.

23 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Good morning, my name  
24 is Catherine--

2 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Actually, I just  
3 want to recognize one of my colleagues, Council  
4 Member Johnson, Corey Johnson.

5 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Thank you. My name  
6 is Catherine Trapani. I'm the Housing Director at  
7 New Destiny Housing Corporation. Thank you for  
8 calling this hearing and offering me the opportunity  
9 to testify. New Destiny Housing is a non-profit  
10 organization dedicated to the long-term safety and  
11 stability of survivors of domestic violence and  
12 others at risk of homelessness. We own and manage  
13 affordable housing throughout the City of New York,  
14 and operate programs designed to help survivors of  
15 domestic violence find and maintain safe and stable  
16 housing. We understand the challenges associated  
17 with providing housing to low income New Yorkers and  
18 applaud NYCHA for its efforts to maintain the largest  
19 portfolio of public housing in the country despite  
20 the very real economic challenges associated with  
21 doing so.

22 At New Destiny reflected in the faces of  
23 our tenants every day we see the transformative power  
24 an affordable home of one's own can have on victims  
25 of abuse. Safe housing is a lifeline, an essential

2 tool that victims must have access to if they are  
3 ever to be able to escape abuse. The deep permanent  
4 affordability of NYCHA's housing stock often provides  
5 the only housing option available to low income  
6 families. It also often represents the only hope of  
7 a survivor of domestic violence has of being able to  
8 live and raise her children in a home without  
9 violence. Unfortunately, access to NYCHA housing for  
10 victims of domestic violence is extremely limited.  
11 This is partially due to housing's low vacancy rate,  
12 but it is also attributive to NYCHA's own policies  
13 that make it difficult and often impossible for the  
14 neediest victims to access public housing.

15 NYCHA has a needs based priority system  
16 allowing certain qualified applicants, expedited  
17 placement in available housing units. The highest  
18 such priority is known N0, or City Referred, and is  
19 currently being used to expedite placement of  
20 homeless families into NYCHA public housing units.  
21 At first glance, it sounds like a common sense good  
22 policy. Those without home should have the first  
23 chance at receiving homes through NYCHA. However,  
24 the execution of this policy is flawed. Unlike in  
25 the past, this homeless priority is exclusively

2 available to the residents through the Department of  
3 Homeless Services shelters and, therefore, excludes  
4 victims of domestic violence residing in HRA's  
5 confidential network of domestic violence shelters.  
6 We're concerned about this exclusion, which seems to  
7 create a two-tiered and unequal system for dealing  
8 with homeless families.

9           We would like more clarity around the  
10 recently restored NO Priority for homeless shelter  
11 residents. And we want to know if it's a one-time  
12 only, or if it's going to be implemented again in the  
13 future. And what was their rationale for excluding  
14 HRA domestic violence shelter residents. We've been  
15 told that NO Priority for DHS will apply to only 750  
16 units of public housing. And after that, DV priority  
17 N1 applicants are going to be the first in line.  
18 However, the N1 DV priority is not a substitute for  
19 NO. The N1 priority is intended to provide safe  
20 NYCHA housing so low income victims of domestic  
21 violence are most at risk, whether they are using a  
22 shelter or not. The NO Priority has historically  
23 been available to homeless families using shelters  
24 regardless of the agency that happens to administer  
25 it.



2 Homeless domestic violence survivors  
3 should not be denied access to the homeless priority  
4 just because they're in the homeless shelter system  
5 not administered by DHS. Still, the N1 priority is  
6 an important tool for survivors, particularly those  
7 not residing shelters who need access to NYCHA  
8 housing for their safety. That is why we are pleased  
9 to learn that NYCHA is considering broadening the  
10 criteria used to obtain the N1 priority. And one  
11 change that has already been implemented is victims  
12 of domestic violence using HRD shelters are now able  
13 to get the N1 priority under a new process based on a  
14 shelter assessment instead of the stringent criminal  
15 justice based documents previously required. This is  
16 something that advocates have requested for many  
17 years knowing that many survivors using shelters do  
18 not, and sometimes for their own safety should not  
19 involve the police or criminal justice system. So  
20 the change in policy is a welcome one.

21 While the changes to the N1 priority  
22 criteria for survivors in shelter are laudable and  
23 recognize that many victims most in danger have never  
24 had contact with police, we strongly feel that this  
25 new policy should not be limited to users of the HRA

2 shelter system. It should be applied to all  
3 domestic violence survivors who need the N1 priority,  
4 those using shelters as well as those who may be  
5 connected to other services in the community, and  
6 need the housing to ensure long-term safety. The  
7 current criteria for DV victims living outside of the  
8 shelter system relies almost exclusively on  
9 documentation of the abuse by the NYPD and court  
10 systems. The criteria is stringent and confusing.  
11 The Housing Lead Help Line that New Destiny operates  
12 receives dozens of calls from social service  
13 professionals and survivors desperate for information  
14 on how to move their application forward. The sad  
15 truth is that despite the danger faced by these  
16 victims, many don't have sufficient documents to  
17 obtain priority housing. As a result, they were--

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: If you can just wrap  
19 it up.

20 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Yeah. And so they  
21 remained at extremely high risk. And you know the  
22 statistics, you said it before, 75% of homicide  
23 victims had no prior police contact. So clearly, the  
24 criminal justice criteria is not a good indicator of  
25 risk. So, we are urging NYCHA to adopt a universal

2 policy of accepting a comprehensive risk assessment  
3 by trained domestic violence service providers  
4 instead of criminal justice documentation to qualify  
5 for the N1 priority. And finally, I just want to say  
6 that I know NYCHA has a really hard job, and we're  
7 here to partner with them. And we also urge the  
8 City, State, and federal governments to do everything  
9 it can to make sure the Housing Authority is  
10 appropriately resourced to cope with the high demand,  
11 and to preserve their portfolio of housing as well as  
12 make it available to those who are desperate to  
13 access it. Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you. So this  
15 concludes the first panel. I want to thank you for  
16 just reminding us that domestic violence is an  
17 expansive problem that includes child abuse, and  
18 elder abuse. And it can be a predictor of other  
19 social pathologies like juvenile delinquency. So  
20 thank you for setting the context for us. And I want  
21 to acknowledge a few more of my colleagues. We have  
22 with us Council Member Rosie Mendez, who is a member  
23 of the Committee. And I believe we have our Council  
24 Member Laurie Cumbo, who Chairs the Committee on

2 Women's Issues, and is leading the Domestic Violence  
3 Awareness Campaign here in the City Council.

4 I want to call up the second panel of  
5 legal service providers. We have from Legal Services  
6 New York City Beth Baltimore. We have Judith Goldman  
7 from the Legal Aid Society, as well as Johan, and we  
8 have Ted McCartney from Sanctuary for Families.

9 [Pause]

10 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay. All Legal  
11 Services?

12 BETH BALTIMORE: Yes. Good morning. My  
13 name is Beth Baltimore, and I'm a Senior Staff  
14 Attorney at Legal Services NYC Bronx, a constituent  
15 corporation of Legal Services NYC, the nation's  
16 largest as a legal services provider. For over four  
17 decades, our office has represented the civil legal  
18 services needs of low income and elderly families and  
19 individuals many of whom have experienced domestic  
20 violence in one of the poorest urban neighborhoods in  
21 the country.

22 Domestic violence and sexual violence are  
23 disproportionately high in the Bronx. Of all  
24 reported rapes, 20% of family related homicides and  
25 23% of calls to domestic violence hotlines, the

2 current number represents only 16% of New York City's  
3 population. The decision to leave one's abuser is  
4 not one that is made lightly, especially for people  
5 who are financially dependent upon their batterers.  
6 In addition to the risk of incurring further  
7 violence, leaving often means uprooting one's  
8 children, abandoning one's community and support  
9 system, and enduring financial instability and  
10 homelessness. Because so many of our clients  
11 experience violence are in dire need of safe and  
12 affordable housing, they are greatly affected by  
13 NYCHA's policies and procedures. We appreciate the  
14 opportunity to testify today to address the impact of  
15 NYCHA's policies on our clients.

16 I'm going to first tell you briefly about  
17 some important recent reforms, and how NYCHA  
18 administers the victim of domestic violence priority  
19 for public housing. And after that, highlight some  
20 ways NYCHA could further improve access for survivors  
21 of domestic violence to this essential resource. In  
22 March of 2013, our office filed a case against NYCHA  
23 in federal court called JCV REA [sic], which we  
24 brought on behalf of ten survivors of domestic  
25 violence, who had applied for NYCHA public housing

2 and required domestic violence priority status. The  
3 lawsuit grew out of reports of many advocates that  
4 the priority application process was not working for  
5 their clients. Advocates and applicants who reported  
6 lengthy periods of uncertainty and insecurity during  
7 the priority process period. And were being denied  
8 the priority when they clearly met its criteria. One  
9 of the plaintiffs in our lawsuit suffered from a long  
10 history of domestic violence.

11           Even after she separated from her abusive  
12 partner and obtained a final order of protection, he  
13 continued to harass her forcing her to flee her home  
14 to a domestic violence shelter. She applied for  
15 NYCHA housing with a domestic violence priority, but  
16 timed out of the shelter and moved into a homeless  
17 shelter, and then again back into the domestic  
18 violence shelter before she obtained housing. When  
19 we filed our lawsuit, she was waiting for nearly 18  
20 months since she submitted her NYCHA application.  
21 And her request was only granted as a part of our  
22 settlement. We are extremely grateful that NYCHA  
23 worked with us to come to a just settlement that  
24 incorporated numerous changes and to have an  
25 administrated for priority.

2           And I will briefly explain some of the  
3 changes. NYCHA is now issuing clear notices when  
4 they determine an applicant has not submitted  
5 sufficient documentation to apply for the priority.  
6 There is also a review process where NYCHA will ask--  
7 will give an applicant a chance to provide more  
8 information to explain why they believe they qualify  
9 for the priority. And NYCHA will then issue a  
10 written determination if it determines that the  
11 person has not submitted the documents needed. There  
12 is now greater transparency. NYCHA has published  
13 waiting list information, and have put inclusions on  
14 their website. Since our litigation, NYCHA has  
15 issued a change in their HRA Domestic Violence  
16 Shelter System, which we applaud because it's a more  
17 meaningful process that is not based on criminal  
18 justice documentation. However, it only affects a  
19 small percentage of domestic violence survivors. We  
20 believe that more changes would--

21           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I'm going to ask you  
22 to conclude.

23           BETH BALTIMORE: Sure. So we believe the  
24 system should be based on a comprehensive risk  
25 assessment. And before that's done, we believe that

2 NYCHA should examine the list of felonies, which we  
3 believe are arbitrary. We would also ask that NYCHA  
4 allow people reporting felonies in Family Court to  
5 qualify for the waiver of the second documentation.  
6 And we also ask that the Council examine the advocacy  
7 letter required when someone has a clear history of  
8 domestic violence documented that may not have access  
9 to an advocate who is aware of the way to address the  
10 advocacy letter. Thank you for this opportunity to  
11 testify.

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Of course, thank  
13 you. Legal Aid.

14 JOHAN BYSSAINTHE CHARLES: Good morning.  
15 My name is Johan Byssainthe Charles. I'm an attorney  
16 at the Legal Aid Society. And on behalf of the Legal  
17 Aid, we appreciate the opportunity today and the  
18 leadership of Chair Ritchie Torres. The first thing  
19 I would like to speak with you today about is a  
20 client that I had a couple of years ago. My client  
21 illustrates issues with NYCHA's policies. I will  
22 call her Miss Jane for the purposes of this  
23 testimony. Miss Jane is a mom of three children.  
24 Her oldest is serving our country in the Army. The  
25 remaining are in junior high school and in high



2 school. Miss Jane is an immigrant, and a survivor of  
3 domestic violence. She entered the shelter system in  
4 2008 after she fled from her long-time abuser of ten  
5 years. She had to get an order of protection against  
6 him, and could not remain in the Bronx for fear of  
7 running into him. This meant that the children had  
8 to change schools. Miss Jane came to Queens, and was  
9 fortunate to receive an advance housing subsidy  
10 voucher after being in the shelter for two years.

11 I'm not Miss Jane, and I worked as a  
12 housing attorney at the Society when the landlord  
13 sought to evict her after her first year of her  
14 participation in the program even though the program  
15 specifically entitled Miss Jane to a second year in  
16 the apartment. We were successful in dismissing this  
17 holdover proceeding. However, the second year was  
18 barely over when Miss Jane was back in court on a  
19 non-payment proceeding because the landlord, who  
20 lived on the first floor of the house, stopped  
21 receiving payments from New York City. This time, it  
22 was because the program was terminated for lack of  
23 funds, and Miss Jane could not afford to pay the  
24 required \$1,050 per month. Miss Jane worked for the  
25 Board of Education, but at the time her husband had

2 filed a false claim against her, which was still  
3 being prosecuted. When Miss Jane was finally cleared  
4 of all charges, the Board still did not call her  
5 regularly for work, as she was per diem.

6           With no ability to pay the rents after  
7 the Advantage Program was defunded, Miss Jane was  
8 eventually evicted. And having no affordable housing  
9 available, Miss Jane was forced to return to the  
10 shelter. Miss Jane applied for NYCHA housing at that  
11 time, but found an apartment without getting a  
12 response from NYCHA. Since then, Miss Jane and her  
13 children have continued to cycle in and out of the  
14 shelter system. Miss Jane was encouraged to reapply  
15 for NYCHA housing. However, NYCHA agents have told  
16 Miss Jane that she is no longer a DV priority even  
17 though she remains certified as DV by HRA, because  
18 the order of protection has expired. Yet, Miss Jane  
19 remains terrified of running into her husband in the  
20 Bronx. She lost multiple apartments and continues to  
21 remain without-- She continues to not have an  
22 apartment in NYCHA.

23           Here's the bottom line. Sorry. NYCHA  
24 reports that in 2013 only 250 apartments were  
25 allocated to domestic violence survivors under the N1

2 priority, 50 of whom came from homeless shelters. We  
3 need to allocate at least 2,500 public housing  
4 apartments each year to homeless families. Eliminate  
5 the working family preference, which does not require  
6 a demonstrated need for housing. This will ensure  
7 that NYCHA apartments are allocated to households who  
8 have a demonstrated need for housing. Restore  
9 priority for people in homeless and domestic violence  
10 shelter to the NO Priority Code. The top priority  
11 code, and ensure that the New York City Department of  
12 Public Services--

13 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you, ma'am.  
14 That's your three minutes. Thank you for your  
15 testimony.

16 JOHAN BYSSAINTHE CHARLES: --and HRA can  
17 make it the NO Priority.

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you for your  
19 testimony.

20 JOHAN BYSSAINTHE CHARLES: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: The Sanctuary for--  
22 Yes. And after your testimony, this will conclude  
23 the panel.

24 [Pause]

2 TED MCCOURTNEY: Good morning. Thank you  
3 for the opportunity to address you today. My name is  
4 Ted McCourtney. I work for Sanctuary for Families as  
5 the Director of Sarah Burke House, a transitional  
6 domestic violence shelter in the Bronx. Sanctuary  
7 for Families is a non-profit agency dedicated  
8 exclusively to serving domestic violence and sex  
9 trafficking victims and their children. I am also a  
10 member to the Steering Committee of the New York City  
11 Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service  
12 Providers, a coalition that includes all the  
13 organizations providing domestic violence in New York  
14 City.

15 I am here today because I am concerned  
16 about violence and domestic violence shelter system  
17 being assigned a lower priority for accessing NYCHA  
18 housing than clients in the DHS shelter system.  
19 Admirably, New York City devotes considerable  
20 resources to supporting a robust domestic violence  
21 shelter network. We encourage women to escape  
22 dangerous relationships. We offer them safe,  
23 confidential shelter where they and their children  
24 have access to extensive clinical services. The  
25 families who enter our shelters make tremendous

2 progress towards stability and self-sufficiency  
3 during their time with us. However, much of the  
4 stability comes undone if there are not safe housing  
5 options available for them at the end of their  
6 shelter stay. Without viable housing assistance, at  
7 the conclusion of their shelter stay, our clients are  
8 often facing a possible decision to become homeless  
9 again or return to a dangerous situation.

10           This is no way to treat the women who  
11 have made the courageous decision to leave their  
12 abuser. This summer, the eligibility requirements  
13 for the NYCHA Domestic Violence Priority were  
14 broadened, a very welcome development. During my 12  
15 years working in domestic violence shelters in New  
16 York City, I have often observed that the clients who  
17 have experienced the most severe abuse do not  
18 necessarily possess the court documents that were  
19 previously required to access the domestic violence  
20 priority. As a result, less than 25% of our clients  
21 qualified. With the new expanded eligibility  
22 requirements, many more of our clients who are  
23 clearly victims of domestic violence, do qualify for  
24 the priority.

2           It is my hope that the expanded criteria  
3 will remain in place for future use. However, in  
4 order to be effective, the domestic violence priority  
5 must be designated as an NO Priority, the same  
6 priority that clients in DHS shelters receive. The  
7 DV priority will be of little use to our clients if  
8 they are slotted behind thousands of families in the  
9 DHS system. Clients in domestic violence shelters  
10 are homes, and they are homeless because it is unsafe  
11 for them to remain in their homes. They are every  
12 bit as homeless as the clients in the DHS system, but  
13 with an added risk factor as well as a time limited  
14 stay in a shelter. There is no justifiable reason  
15 for clients in the DV shelter system to have a lower  
16 priority when it comes to accessing public housing.

17           In previous years when the NYCHA homeless  
18 priority was in place, clients in the domestic  
19 violence shelter system had access to this priority,  
20 equal to clients in the DHS system. When this was  
21 the case, and the other housing support such as  
22 Section 8 and the Advantage Program were available to  
23 our clients, Sarah Burke has regularly placed over  
24 100 families each year into safe permanent housing.  
25 In 2013, without these housing supports we were only

2 able to place 18 families into permanent housing.  
3 Well considered housing programs have a tremendous  
4 affect on the families that enter the domestic  
5 violence shelter system, allowing these families to  
6 have fair access to public housing and play a key  
7 role in helping them to transition to stable,  
8 violence free lives. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you for your  
10 testimony. I actually do have one question. As far  
11 as you know, if you're a DV victim of a serious  
12 felony, and you are only required to produce one  
13 documented incident and an advocacy letter, what kind  
14 of felony, which would the requirement, be to? Can  
15 you give us like a specific example of a felony that  
16 you feel triggers requirement to document an  
17 incident, but should trigger maybe a lesser for this  
18 requirement?

19 JUDITH GOLDMAN: I think there's an open  
20 question why there's this distinction in the crimes.  
21 I mean if you're a victim of domestic violence, I  
22 don't see why you have to get beaten up more than  
23 once. Whatever the felony level is, and we all who  
24 work in the criminal justice system understand that  
25 things get pled down. People get undercharged

2 sometimes in these contexts. And it doesn't really  
3 sense. Really, the issue is not adding a bunch of  
4 new crimes to the list that you only need one. But  
5 looking at why does NYCHA require two crimes anyway  
6 for any victim of domestic violence. There should be  
7 a way to show that you're a victim of domestic  
8 violence without having to get that in place, and  
9 without having to fall within a specific criminal  
10 category.

11 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay.

12 TED MCCOURTNEY: I also think a lot of  
13 our clients who clearly are actually victims of  
14 severe abuse--

15 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And actually, could  
16 you identify yourself?

17 JUDITH GOLDMAN: Oh, I'm so sorry.

18 Judith Goldman from the Legal Aid Society.

19 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: No, I know who you  
20 are, but just for the record.

21 TED MCCOURTNEY: So, clients in my  
22 shelter, who are clearly victims of severe domestic  
23 violence often do not access their court system at  
24 all prior to coming to the shelter. They do not  
25 access the criminal system. They do not call the



2 police, but they clearly have been severely abused,  
3 and certainly do not have access to DV clarity as it  
4 was previously structured. Currently, with the  
5 broader requirements, these clients are able to  
6 access the priority. My hope is that the broader  
7 eligibility requirements remain in place.

8 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay. Thank you for  
9 your testimony. We are going to take a short break,  
10 a very short break, and then we will go to the third  
11 panel. Three minutes.

12 [background discussions during break]

13 [gavel]

14 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So I would like to  
15 call up the third panel. Our first panelist is  
16 Commissioner Rosemonde Pierre-Louis from the Mayor's  
17 Office to Combat Domestic Violence. We have Brian  
18 Clarke, the VP of Operations for the New York City  
19 Housing Authority. We have Nora Reissig, the  
20 Director of NYCHA's Family Services Department, and  
21 Cecile Noel from the Human Resource Administration.  
22 Just an acknowledgment of him. Okay. We actually  
23 have a new policy of swearing in members of the  
24 Administration. So please raise your right hand. Do

2 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
3 nothing but the truth today?

4 PANEL MEMBERS: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: You may proceed.

6 BRIAN CLARKE: Okay. Chairman Ritchie  
7 Torres, members of the Committee on Public Housing  
8 and other distinguished members of the City Council  
9 good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to  
10 discuss the important services that the New York City  
11 Housing Authority provides to victims of domestic  
12 violence as well as the priority they are given for  
13 admission and transfers. I am Brian Clarke, Vice  
14 President of Operations. Joining me today is Nora  
15 Reissig, the Director of NYCHA's Family Services  
16 Department. We are also joined by the Mayor's Office  
17 to Combat Domestic Violence. Commissioner Rosemonde  
18 Pierre-Louis, who will also be giving remarks and  
19 Cecile Noel from the New York City Human Resources  
20 Administration will be available for questions. This  
21 is an important issue for the Authority as well as  
22 for the Council. And is especially relevant today  
23 considering that October is National Domestic  
24 Violence Awareness Month.

2           According to recent statistics from the  
3 NYPD, 14% of all domestic violence related major  
4 felonies in the city occur in NYCHA developments.  
5 And about one-third of major felony crimes occurring  
6 in NYCHA developments are related to domestic  
7 violence. Well, we believe that everyone deserves to  
8 feel safe in their homes, and we know that access to  
9 safe, affordable housing is a critical resource for  
10 domestic violence survivors and their families.  
11 Stable permanent housing helps them flee the abuse,  
12 and live violence free.

13           First, I would like to describe our  
14 multi-faceted approach to assisting victims of  
15 domestic violence in NYCHA developments, which  
16 involves several programs and policies. Central to  
17 NYCHA's efforts to help affected residents is our  
18 Family Services Department with about 150 staff  
19 including 30 professionally trained and certified  
20 social workers who advocate everyday for residents in  
21 need. As part of its domestic violence outreach,  
22 Family Services receives referrals from NYCHA, staff,  
23 residents, the NYPD and other City agencies.  
24 District Attorney's offices, community based  
25 organizations, and elected officials. Then we

2 conduct a home visit and we'll do an assessment,  
3 safety planning for crisis counseling. They do any  
4 necessary referrals to our Emergency Transfer Program  
5 and/or a community based provider or city agency.  
6 Each referral is handled on a case-by-case basis  
7 according to individual needs. The Emergency  
8 Transfer Program enables residents and their families  
9 suffering from domestic violence to relocate  
10 confidentially to a development in another area.  
11 NYCHA staff will help residents get the needed  
12 documentation for transfer. And will identify other  
13 transfer and support options if a resident does not  
14 meet the criteria for a transfer or chooses to not  
15 relocate.

16                   Since 2011, 1,145 residents have  
17 transferred to a safe new home including 224 this  
18 year so far. The experience of Miss P is just one of  
19 the many success stories. Before her transfer, she  
20 suffered more than ten years of physical, verbal, and  
21 emotional abuse at the hands of her husband, the  
22 father of their two children. He put a gun to her  
23 head and threatened to kill her. Locked her in a  
24 closet, held her hostage in their apartment. Beat  
25 her in front of their children, and abandoned her in

2 another country without a passport. She went to a  
3 shelter to escape the abuse, but thanks to an  
4 emergency transfer and assistance such as counseling,  
5 Ms. P is now living a violence free life. She  
6 advocates for other women suffering from domestic  
7 violence, and still keeps in touch with the Family  
8 Service Department staff. Her children are doing  
9 well, too, after getting connected to therapy and  
10 recreational, job training, and employment  
11 opportunities. One of them is now a journalist.

12 Mayor de Blasio has tasked City agencies  
13 with working collaboratively to address the  
14 affordable housing needs of the city's most  
15 vulnerable including victims of domestic violence. I  
16 am pleased to say that NYCHA already has an excellent  
17 track record of coordinating critical services with  
18 other agencies. We refer households that are  
19 transferring due to domestic violence to HRA's  
20 Domestic Violence After Care Program. The program  
21 helps with pre-location, moving logistics, and  
22 expenses. It provides safety planning, and  
23 counseling. It offers post-relocation counseling for  
24 the family, helps them to adjust to life in a new  
25

2 community, and advocates for any needed services at  
3 the new location.

4 Another valuable and especially effective  
5 collaboration with HRA is Domestic Violence  
6 Intervention Education and Prevention Program known  
7 as DVIEP. Case managers partner with domestic  
8 violence police officers who are located in NYPD  
9 Housing Bureau precincts. This team does outreach to  
10 every NYCHA household where domestic violence is  
11 reported. Letting the victims know that they are not  
12 along, and providing crisis counseling, safety  
13 assessments, and service referrals. Case managers  
14 raise awareness about the domestic violence by  
15 regularly presenting to resident association, NYCHA  
16 staff, police officers, and community members, and  
17 just by distributing information to the NYCHA family  
18 base.

19 This year, NYCHA launched a new  
20 partnership with MOCDV to share information and  
21 coordinate assistance to the community. MOCDV set up  
22 NYCHA domestic violence response teams to conduct  
23 outreach at the 15 housing developments including the  
24 Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety. We also  
25 partnered with MOCDV to provide ongoing training for

2 NYCHA staff on identifying domestic violence at our  
3 developments. About 600 staff will be trained this  
4 year including the property management staff, who are  
5 in touch with residents everyday. We also train  
6 staff at our community centers, Customer Contact  
7 Center, Application and Tenancy Administration  
8 Department, Office of Resident Economic Empowerment  
9 and Sustainability, Office of Resident Engagement,  
10 and Family Service Department. We make sure that our  
11 domestic violence training reaches multiple levels of  
12 staff so that they all can identify domestic  
13 violence. Speak with the tenants so they feel  
14 supported and not judged, and connect them to  
15 services.

16           Thanks to the knowledge they've gained  
17 about domestic violence, NYCHA staff refer more than  
18 200 residents of needed assistance to the Family  
19 Services Department each year. Our expectation is  
20 that these trainings tailored to NYCHA will go a long  
21 way to promoting resident safety and wellbeing. Just  
22 last week, after attending training, a property  
23 manager at one of our developments identified a  
24 victim abused by her husband. With subsequent  
25 outreach, she accepted a referral to the Family

2 Justice Center and others. She now has the support  
3 she needs for any next steps.

4 Domestic violence is often viewed in  
5 terms of long-time couples. But studies show that it  
6 also impacts young people in new relationships,  
7 seniors, and other intimate partners. To help focus  
8 on youths, some community centers at our developments  
9 host the NYC Healthy Relationship Training Academy as  
10 part of a multi-agency effort. The Academy's  
11 workshops teach teenagers and young adults about  
12 dating violence and healthy relationships at this  
13 pivotal time when they are forming their first  
14 relationships. Parents can also participate. So  
15 far, there have been six sessions in the Bronx and  
16 Brooklyn reaching 105 youth, and six more are  
17 scheduled for later this month.

18 On October 18th, NYCHA will host our 13th  
19 Domestic Violence Conference and Resource Fair, and  
20 hundreds of residents are expected to attend. The  
21 conference at Hostos Community College in the Bronx  
22 will feature an impressive array of speakers and  
23 domestic violence experts such as MOCDV Commissioner  
24 Rosemonde Pierre-Louis. Participating organizations  
25 include the Bronx Family Justice Center, the Queens



2 Family Justice Center, Children of Domestic Violence,  
3 and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender  
4 Community Center. It also features Ted Bunch, co-  
5 founder of Call to Men, who is known internationally  
6 for his work to end violence against women by  
7 promoting a loving and respectful notion of manhood.  
8 We're getting the word out about this conference  
9 through social and additional media. We're reaching  
10 out to men in particular so that Bunch's message  
11 about healthy manhood will inspire men to become part  
12 of the solution.

13 As domestic violence is on everyone's  
14 minds, HRA and MOCDV are co-sponsoring the  
15 conference, and we're organizing it in coordination  
16 with the resident leaders, NYPD, the District  
17 Attorney's Office, community based organizations,  
18 advocates, and service providers.

19 The Federal Violence Against Women Act,  
20 known as VAWA also provides support to our residents.  
21 The law protects authorized household members who are  
22 abuse victims from being evicted based on the  
23 violence in their homes. And it enables NYCHA to  
24 evict an abusive household member while preserving  
25 the tenancy of the remaining family members. VAWA

2 also protects applicants from being denied housing  
3 simply because they are victims of domestic violence.

4           It should be noted that as part of our  
5 commitment to providing equal opportunity for all  
6 residents and applicants, we provide language  
7 assistance services such as interpretation and  
8 translation for domestic violence with limited  
9 English proficiency.

10           NYCHA's concern for this [bell] pressing  
11 issue is not just as a landlord, but also as an  
12 employer. NYCHA's Domestic Violence in the Workplace  
13 Policy and Procedure was implemented in 2011 to  
14 increase awareness of domestic violence among all  
15 11,000 employees, about 25% of whom are also  
16 residents. And to increase supportive workplace  
17 responses to them. At a time with affordable housing  
18 is desperately needed but in short supply, it is not  
19 surprising that there are nearly 290,000 families on  
20 our wait list. And the apartment turnover rate is  
21 only three percent. We strive to serve as many  
22 people in need as possible especially the most  
23 vulnerable. Last year, we provided apartment to 286  
24 victims of domestic violence. In 2014, we housed 346  
25 domestic violence victims as of October 9th, already

2 exceeding last year's numbers. So together with the  
3 emergency transfers, we have assisted 570 domestic  
4 violence victims so far this year.

5           Victims of domestic violence on the wait  
6 list are currently and always have been assigned one  
7 of the highest priorities to receive an apartment.  
8 Domestic violence victims are assigned Need Based 1,  
9 or N1 Priority. Domestic violence victims also  
10 receive one of the highest priorities for transfers.  
11 These categories are part of the computerized Tenant  
12 Selection and Assignment Plan, a fair federally  
13 mandated system that equitably matches apartments  
14 with those who need them. Details about how this  
15 system works are described on our website.

16           As part of our efforts to increase  
17 efficiency and transparency, NYCHA improved the  
18 process for receiving and reviewing applicant's  
19 requires for domestic violence victim priority. It's  
20 important for the public to better understand this  
21 process, and see the actual numbers. That's why we  
22 also post the number of applicants who are certified  
23 N1. That data updated every quarter is broken down  
24 by emergency priority number, and requested borough,  
25 and apartment size.

2 NYCHA is further revising its policies to  
3 continue to provide real world solutions to the  
4 problem of domestic violence. Early this month Chair  
5 Shola Olatoye, and other NYCHA leadership met with  
6 domestic violence advocates and MOCDV to get their  
7 ideas on how we can continue to improve our policy  
8 and programs. One such policy change underway is an  
9 expansion of the specific type of crimes that qualify  
10 as a domestic violence offense, with the list growing  
11 to about 80 from 21. A single instance of any of  
12 these crimes could qualify as a domestic violence  
13 offense.

14 We are also expanding the types of  
15 medical documentation that will assist domestic  
16 violence victims get priority for admissions to  
17 transfers. We are working closely with the Health  
18 and Hospitals Corporation, and the Greater New York  
19 Hospital Association to make this happen. Domestic  
20 violence is a pervasive crime that destroys families  
21 and harms the communities we care so much about. As  
22 we all know, it has dominated the headlines recently.  
23 Although, it's tragic for the people affected, this  
24 has raised awareness of the complexities of the  
25 problem. Hopefully, together as a society we can

2 reduce this violence in our communities through data,  
3 education, and prevention. Fortunately, NYCHA  
4 residents, who were impacted by domestic violence  
5 have the resources they need to get help and move on.  
6 Our supportive services and admissions and transfer  
7 policies are designed to help victims go from crisis  
8 to stability.

9 Thank you for your continued support.

10 Following Commissioner Pierre-Louis' testimony, we  
11 will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

12 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Good morning.  
13 Good morning Chair Person Torres, members of the City  
14 Council Committee on Public Housing. I am Rosemonde  
15 Pierre-Louis, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to  
16 Combat Domestic Violence, known as OCDV. Thank you  
17 for the opportunity to speak with you today about the  
18 Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, a  
19 coordinated plan to make New York City's  
20 neighborhoods and housing developments safer by  
21 reducing violent crime and fear, building stronger  
22 neighborhoods and holding ourselves accountable.

23 The Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic  
24 Violence, known as OCDV is participating in this  
25 initiative by launching a New York City Housing

2 Authority Domestic Violence Response Team, known as  
3 NYCHA DVRT in the 15 housing developments that  
4 account for almost 20% of all violent crimes in  
5 NYCHA. In the interest of time, I'm not going to  
6 repeat the statistics that have been provided by a  
7 number of speakers today. I want to talk a little  
8 bit more about OCDV and our work in partnership with  
9 NYCHA and HRA and a number of city agencies.

10           The New York City Family Justice Center  
11 is known as FJC, and it's operated by my office, and  
12 currently located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan,  
13 and Queens. It provides comprehensive multi-agency  
14 services to victims of intimate partner violence,  
15 elder abuse, and sex trafficking in one location.  
16 Each center is located with the local district  
17 attorney's offices, and has NYPD Domestic Violence  
18 Prevention Officers known as DVPOs on site. In  
19 addition to staff from over 35 community organization  
20 partners who offer counseling services for adults  
21 and children, civil legal assistance, immigration  
22 assistance, economic empowerment, and supportive  
23 services.

24           The FJCs are walk-in centers that provide  
25 free and confidential services regardless of the

2 client's language, income, immigration status, gender  
3 identify, or sexual orientation. A fifth Family  
4 Justice Center is expected to open in Staten Island  
5 in 2015, making the New York City centers the largest  
6 network of FJCs in the country.

7 In 2013, there were almost 45,000 client  
8 visits to the New York City Family Justice Centers.  
9 This year alone, we have already exceeded 43,000  
10 visits, and expect to reach at least 52,000 visits by  
11 the end of 2014 at all four of our Family Justice  
12 Centers. In order to effectively respond to the  
13 incidents of domestic violence in the city, OCDV has  
14 recently focused largely on outreach to raise  
15 awareness about domestic violence, and connect  
16 victims with services at the FJCs with community and  
17 government partners citywide.

18 Since February 1, 2014, when I came on as  
19 Commissioner, OCDV staff has participated in over 700  
20 outreach events, an increase of over 400% from the  
21 same period last year. And has distributed over 175  
22 outreach materials. Regular outreach efforts have  
23 occurred at transit hubs, business districts, beauty  
24 salons, and grocery stores. In addition, by the end  
25 of 2014, OCDV staff will have presented at all 59

2 community boards, and all 77 police precinct Council  
3 meetings in New York City. As has been said before,  
4 awareness is the greatest tool we have to combat  
5 domestic violence. It's the chief priority of OCDV,  
6 and it is the cornerstone of the NYCHA DVRT  
7 Initiative.

8           The incidents of domestic violence in  
9 NYCHA developments is staggering. In 2014, 32.6% of  
10 major felony crimes that occurred in NYCHA were  
11 domestic violence related. So far this year, 54% of  
12 all felony assaults and 41% of all rapes that  
13 occurred in NYCHA developments were domestic violence  
14 related. Overall, 70% of the crime increase in NYCHA  
15 over the last three years can be attributed to  
16 domestic violence related incidents.

17           The NYCHA DVRT Initiative is a homicide  
18 prevention program that will focus specifically on  
19 early intervention and engagement, raising awareness  
20 about domestic violence, and directly linking victims  
21 to appropriate services. OCDV has hired a team of  
22 eight new staff members who will be assigned solely  
23 to efforts within NYCHA. The team will consist of  
24 community liaisons, DVRT specialists and high-risk  
25 coordinator. Working together as a cohesive unit,



2 they will provide information about resources, and  
3 rapid response to meet the service and safety needs  
4 of domestic violence victims in public housing.

5           The community liaisons will focus on  
6 raising awareness about domestic violence by  
7 coordinating extensive public education campaigns in  
8 NYCHA, and the surrounding communities. Conducting  
9 high visibility outreach in subway stations,  
10 playgrounds, parks, and busy intersections, and  
11 building relationships and partnering with local  
12 community, religious institutions, elected officials,  
13 police precincts, medical providers, and other  
14 stakeholders. In addition, the community liaisons  
15 will actively engage with NYCHA residents who  
16 disclose they are victims of domestic violence. And  
17 will connect those residents directly with a DVRT  
18 specialist for special assessment and services. This  
19 model of a focused outreach plan has proved  
20 successful in the past. Following the murder of  
21 Daisy Garcia and her two toddler daughters in Queens  
22 earlier this year, OCDV conducted targeted outreach  
23 in the Jamaica community immediately after her death.  
24 And subsequently saw a 40% increase in client visits

2 from that neighborhood to the Queens Family Justice  
3 Center over a three-month period.

4           Although the NYCHA DVRT Program has not  
5 yet officially launched, OCDV has already started the  
6 training piece of the initiative. To date, we have  
7 trained over 400 NYCHA staff including building  
8 management, supervisors, building maintenance,  
9 application, family services, and customer services  
10 staff. We are scheduled to train a total of almost  
11 700 NYCHA staff by the end of October. NYCHA DVRT  
12 specialists will be housed at our Family Justice  
13 Centers, and their caseloads will be comprised solely  
14 of clients from the 15 identified NYCHA developments.  
15 They will provide case management services for the  
16 NYCHA clients including crisis intervention,  
17 advocacy, risk assessment, and safety planning. As  
18 needed, the DVRT specialist will refer the NYCHA  
19 clients for other legal counseling or supportive  
20 services available at our FJCs. The DVRT specialists  
21 will be the client's direct point of contact at the  
22 Family Justice Centers, and will oversee all services  
23 the clients are receiving.

24           In the past two months prior to the  
25 launch of this initiative only two percent of new

2 clients, receiving services at the FJCs reported  
3 living in NYCHA developments. We expect this number  
4 will increase significantly once the outreach by  
5 community liaisons with NYCHA commences.

6           In addition to working directly with  
7 NYCHA clients at the FJCs, the NYCHA DVRT Program  
8 also includes a High Risk Service Coordinator  
9 operating out of OCDV's headquarters. Who will work  
10 with all clients who are identified by community  
11 liaisons, DVRT specialists or community and city  
12 agency partners as high risk for escalating abuse,  
13 serious physical injury, or death. The High Risk  
14 Service Coordinator will collaborate directly with  
15 DVRT specialist, city agencies, and other community  
16 partners to create individualized action plans for  
17 identifying high-risk clients to quickly meet their  
18 service and safety needs. The High Risk Service  
19 Coordinator will also work closely with identified  
20 contact persons at key city agencies to ensure that  
21 there is an effective interagency communication. And  
22 collaboration for all high-risk client cases to  
23 ensure their safety and that they receive the rapid  
24 response to obtain all eligible city services.

2           As mentioned by my colleague, at NYCHA  
3 the NYCHA DVRT Program hinges on prevention and early  
4 intervention to decrease the risk of escalating or  
5 further abuse. A critical piece of prevention is  
6 educating our youth, and through our Healthy Dating  
7 Academy we will work very closely with NYCHA as well  
8 as DYCD to provide ongoing workshops for parents, for  
9 young people, youth based organizations as well as  
10 community-based organizations. To date, we have done  
11 six workshops with 105 participants, and we are in  
12 the process of scheduling additional workshops in  
13 NYCHA developments.

14           In closing, the NYCHA DVRT Program is a  
15 multi-pronged approach to ensure that NYCHA residents  
16 are aware of the dynamics of an abusive relationship,  
17 know that resources are available, and are easily  
18 able to access them. And understand that they have  
19 the right to be free of violence in their homes. We  
20 look forward to launching the NYCHA DVRT Program in  
21 its entirety in the coming weeks, and continuing to  
22 work with our City and community partners, and with  
23 the Council on our shared goal of strengthening the  
24 safety net for victims of DV. Thank you for this

2 opportunity testify, and we look forward to answering  
3 any questions that you may have.

4 I also want to thank Council Member  
5 Gibson, Council Member Torres, and Council Member  
6 Cumbo for their partnership with OCDV. I'm thrilled  
7 that you identify yourself as an upstander. I also  
8 want to talk about throughout this Administration  
9 that there has been an unprecedented collaboration  
10 amongst city agencies breaking down the silos to  
11 ensure that victims of domestic violence get the  
12 attention that they need. And I know that through  
13 the initiative that is being started at HRA through  
14 the Link Program that we know that we will be able to  
15 address the needs that have been raised today by many  
16 people who have testified at this hearing. Thank  
17 you.

18 [Pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you  
20 Commissioner for your testimony--

21 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: [interposing]  
22 Sure.

23 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: --and I'm great  
24 admiring for your efforts. I know you've been  
25 impressively visible throughout the city traveling,

2 and I very much enjoyed my meeting with you. And  
3 it's worth noting that the Council tomorrow, and I  
4 think just about every council member is going to be  
5 disseminating information at local subways in our  
6 districts to mark Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

7 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: I will be  
8 there. We are actually partnering with the City  
9 Council on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: That's great. I  
11 appreciate your work. When is the launch date for  
12 the NYCHA DVRT Program?

13 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: We anticipate  
14 the end of the month.

15 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: The end of  
17 October, I should say.

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And is it going to  
19 focus on the 15 developments in the Mayor's Housing  
20 Plan or throughout?

21 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Currently, it  
22 will be focused on the 15 housing developments.  
23 However, we know that when you think about the close  
24 proximity of many of these developments, we  
25 anticipate that we will also be contacted by

2 residents that live in complexes outside of the 15.

3 So certainly, we will provide assistance and services  
4 through this team to individuals that reach out to us  
5 for help.

6 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And my understanding  
7 is that OCDV has never had a dedicated team  
8 specifically for Public Housing.

9 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: This is the  
10 first time that the City will have a team that's  
11 focused solely on NYCHA.

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So we owe the Mayor  
13 and you a huge debt of gratitude. Eight people. Do  
14 you feel like that's enough to leave a dent?

15 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: I could just  
16 tell you that we are-- As an agency, we are going  
17 to be about 50 people in terms of staff, and all of  
18 us will be involved in this initiative. And we'll  
19 work very closely with all eight off our team  
20 members. We think that eight is the right number to  
21 work with this group of 15 complexes. But we will  
22 also work closely with our FJC directors and staff  
23 that are located at the Family Justice Centers. And  
24 certainly a big part of the FJCs, so the community  
25 based organizations, many of whom testified today,

2 that will be working with us on this initiative as  
3 well.

4 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And OCDV has its own  
5 support services and outreach programs for DV  
6 victims, as does NYCHA. What's the coordination  
7 between the two agencies?

8 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Where there  
9 are regular meetings as part of the Mayor's  
10 initiative to sure that one-- that we are not only  
11 coordinating outreach efforts, but ensuring that  
12 there's information sharing. That we are working  
13 closely with HRA, DYCD, and DFTA because we also know  
14 within NYCHA there is a very large senior population.  
15 And elder abuse is certainly one of those areas that  
16 we want to make sure that our elders have access to  
17 the information. So there are ongoing meetings that  
18 are led by Liz Glazer who heads up the Officer for  
19 Criminal Justice, the Mayor's Office for Criminal  
20 Justice. And so, these meeting will continue to go.

21 I just met with Chief Gomez from the  
22 Police Department, and we will be working very  
23 closely with PSAs and the DVPO. So we want to make  
24 sure that victims know exactly who they're talking to  
25 in the Administration. And that this is done in a



2 coordinated way. So it's not confusing, and victims  
3 can really access information and services, and  
4 understand what their options are quickly. And early  
5 intervention we know can make all the difference in  
6 the world in the life of someone who is experiencing  
7 domestic violence.

8 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So with all the  
9 domestic violence transpiring in our Public Housing  
10 developments, do we have a breakdown? Do we know  
11 what percentage is child abuse, what percentage is  
12 elder abuse, or is it mostly abuse of women?

13 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: I think that  
14 information could be provided by the NYPD. I think  
15 it's important to note that there's been a lot of  
16 discussion about this epidemic of domestic violence,  
17 this increase of domestic violence. In fact, there  
18 was an article today. I think it's important to  
19 understand that as a result of outreach efforts,  
20 awareness, education programs, services like the  
21 Family Justice Centers, services that are provide  
22 through other city agencies within NYCHA and HRA.  
23 That the fact that these numbers are going up  
24 particularly around domestic incident reports, those  
25 numbers are going to continue increase. And that's a

2 good thing because we want to make sure that people  
3 are reaching out for help. And certainly those  
4 numbers reflect individuals that are reaching out to  
5 law enforcement. And I think one of things that  
6 we'll be able to provide is a full circle through  
7 NYCHA DVRT Initiative is that we will also be able to  
8 reach those individuals that have reached out to law  
9 enforcement. But those individuals for whatever  
10 reason that may be reluctant to reach out to law  
11 enforcement. So we are really strengthening the  
12 safety net.

13           And we can anticipate that as a result of  
14 these efforts that we will continue to see the number  
15 of reports that are increasing. The number of  
16 reports will increase, and we want to ensure that  
17 people know where they can go to get help. And that  
18 the increase is not about an epidemic because we know  
19 that domestic violence-- And I know for many people  
20 this is surprising. It is still an underreported  
21 crime. And that the numbers that we're referring to  
22 are just simply numbers that are related to law  
23 enforcement. And that we want to make sure that  
24 we're able to reach individuals that contact law

2 enforcement, and those who may not. And we think the  
3 NYCHA DVRT Initiative will help us do that.

4 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So in your  
5 estimation the higher numbers is a function of  
6 increased reporting by the increase of incidents?

7 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: A number of  
8 increase. Once again, it's underreported. SO the  
9 increase of let's say DIRs, Domestic Incident Reports  
10 reflects in my view and for many in the  
11 Administration is increased reporting. It also  
12 relates to arrests and prosecution related to  
13 domestic violence. And so, once again, I want to  
14 point out this is still and underreported crime. The  
15 number that we used today 62 domestic homicides last  
16 year. Yet 75% of those individuals prior to their  
17 murder, had no prior contact with the NYPD. So that  
18 means that in many respects there are a number of  
19 people that are coming through other systems whether  
20 it be emergency rooms, private physicians. Coming  
21 through other programs to access services. So, the  
22 more outreach we do, the more these numbers are going  
23 to increase, and we want people to reach out for  
24 help.

2 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And before I direct  
3 my questioning to NYCHA, what do you feel... How can  
4 we all be upstanders in the fight against domestic  
5 violence? What can we do to bring down the rates?

6 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Well,  
7 certainly today's hearing is an important step. I  
8 think once again with the de Blasio Administration,  
9 this is a Mayor that has put issues of income and  
10 equality and injustice front and center. He has put  
11 the issue of domestic violence front and center. He  
12 has committed resources looking at public housing and  
13 education. And so, I think in terms of domestic  
14 violence, we have to continue to shine the light. We  
15 have to continue to understand the intersections of  
16 domestic violence and do things such as the Map [sic]  
17 Initiatives that bring City agencies to break down  
18 silos, to allow us to work in a coordinated fashion.  
19 And I think this has been a hallmark of the  
20 Administration. We certainly have met with a number  
21 of the Chairs in City Council. Speaker Mark-Viverito  
22 has been incredible. We will be talking more about  
23 upstanders, which I know I had the opportunity to  
24 talk to you about, but there is more. Everyone can  
25 play a role in ending intimate partner violence, and

2 by continuing to shine the light. Continuing to  
3 raise awareness, and letting people know that every  
4 man, woman, and child in the City of New York has the  
5 right to be free of violence and intimidation in  
6 their home.

7 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Well, thank you,  
8 Commissioner. I'm grateful to you for the work that  
9 you do.

10 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So I have a few  
12 questions about NYCHA's System. I have strong  
13 opinions on the subject. I want to begin my  
14 questioning with an article from *City Limits* that ran  
15 on November 20, 2013. The article is entitled *When*  
16 *the Choice is Between Abuse and Homelessness*. Almost  
17 one-third of homeless families in the shelter system  
18 are survivors of domestic violence. And Mayor de  
19 Blasio needs to act quickly to more adequately serve  
20 this vulnerable population. And there's a notable  
21 sentence in this article. It reads, Survivors of  
22 domestic violence in the Human Resource  
23 Administration Shelter System are not considered  
24 homeless and, therefore, not eligible for the same  
25 housing resources as homeless New Yorkers in the

2 Department of Homeless Services shelter system. Easy  
3 fixes to existing policies could give survivors equal  
4 access to permanent housing. These include making  
5 available the Department of Housing Preservation and  
6 development's Section 8 and homeless set-aside units  
7 to victims of domestic violence using the HRA system,  
8 and revising the criteria to gain access to NYCHA's  
9 domestic violence priority housing by adding a risk  
10 assessment tool. And accepting more sources of  
11 documentation.

12           The author of this is the new Chairwoman  
13 Shola Olatoye. So, if you are a household, and with  
14 the HS shelter system you could qualify for the  
15 highest priority N0. But if you are both homeless,  
16 and a victim of domestic violence, then you qualify  
17 for a lower priority. And I want to know what  
18 justification could there possibly be for assigning a  
19 lower priority for a victim of domestic violence?

20           BRIAN CLARKE: So just if I can just to  
21 clear up a little bit of a misconception about the N0  
22 and the homeless priority. So, you know, as we  
23 discussed in the testimony, we have the tenant  
24 selection and the assignment plans, a computerized  
25 system. And when we look at that... When we look at

2 it, and, of course we have the whole issue with the  
3 3% vacancy rate, and there is only approximately  
4 about 5,000 units that are available. They fit into  
5 two, you know, kind of two silos for applicants. One  
6 is Need Based and one is Working Family. So within  
7 the Need Based Priority you have N0 and then you have  
8 N1, which are victims of domestic violence. And the  
9 you have N4 for homeless. Um, in the working family  
10 we have W0 and W01, W02, W03. The referrals that we  
11 receive from the Department of Homeless Service go  
12 into a different silo. So they go into W0. So they  
13 have the highest priority in the Working Family, but  
14 when you look at the Need Based the actual domestic  
15 violence actually has a higher priority that the  
16 homeless.

17 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I'm sorry, the  
18 victims of domestic violence have--?

19 BRIAN CLARKE: Have N1 versus an N4 for  
20 homeless and the Need Based.

21 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Right, but if you're  
22 referred by DHS--

23 BRIAN CLARKE: [interposing] Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: --then you can  
25 qualify for the highest priority?

2 BRIAN CLARKE: Correct. You can qualify  
3 for the W0 or N4.

4 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: But W0 is the  
5 highest priority?

6 BRIAN CLARKE: In the Working Family  
7 silo.

8 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Right and if you are  
9 a DV victim referred by-- from the HRA shelter you  
10 cannot qualify for the highest priority?

11 [Pause]

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I think it's a yes  
13 or no. It's not a--

14 NORA REISSIG: Yeah, I mean you qualify  
15 for the N1, right.

16 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Which is lower than  
17 an N0?

18 NORA REISSIG: Which is the second  
19 highest priority correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Because it just  
21 strikes me as counterintuitive. It strikes me as odd  
22 that if you're homeless then you can qualify for the  
23 highest priority, and that's something I agree with,  
24 and I support it. But if you're homeless, and you  
25 have the added challenge of domestic violence, then



2 you actually receive a lower priority. In what  
3 universe does that make sense?

4           NORA REISSIG: So, it's really how it  
5 works. I know that it's-- As Mr. Clarke was saying,  
6 what we've done with the DHS homeless families is  
7 assign them a Working Family W0 Priority. In order  
8 to be referred under this new initiative to help  
9 house homeless families, you have to be either-- Two  
10 things. You have to fall into the Working Family  
11 Zero priority, there is the W0 priority. And you  
12 also have to be residing in a DHS shelter for a year  
13 or more. And the reason for that is because we--  
14 DHS set that, it's to get to the chronically homeless  
15 families that have been in shelters for a very long  
16 time, and are also under the W0. All other homeless  
17 families actually receive an N4 priority, which is a  
18 lower priority than the domestic violence N1. So  
19 these are different silos that come off of different  
20 lists that are selected through a rotation system,  
21 which is all computerized. It goes by the  
22 certification date of when the applicant was  
23 certified under that particular priority.

24           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I mean it would seem  
25 to me that there should be no segregation of priority

2 that there should be one priority code for DV victims  
3 in HRA shelters should receive the same priority as  
4 the rest of the municipal shelter system whether it's  
5 W0, N0. I could care less about the actual priority  
6 code, but it should be the highest priority in the  
7 system.

8 BRIAN CLARKE: Yeah, so I mean it's--  
9 You know, it's very difficult choices. I mean there  
10 are so many families in need, and we try and service  
11 them.

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: DV in HRA shelters  
13 are families in need.

14 BRIAN CLARKE: They are and I agree with  
15 you there, and we just talked a little bit about the  
16 N0 priorities. The N0 priorities are actually  
17 referrals from city agencies. We receive them from  
18 the Agency for Children's Services for youth that are  
19 aging out of foster care. For a family reunification  
20 program where children that are in foster care it's  
21 deemed appropriate for them to actually be reunited  
22 with their family. We also receive referrals from  
23 HIV-AIDS Service Association, and from HPD vacate  
24 orders. So these are, you know, where they have a  
25 catastrophic incident or a building has been

2 determined uninhabitable for emergency housing as  
3 well as also for people that are in the health and  
4 hospital program. And they are actually leaving the  
5 system, and at risk of being homeless.

6 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So it's referrals  
7 from HHC--

8 BRIAN CLARKE: [interposing] Yep.

9 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: --and HPD from CASA?

10 BRIAN CLARKE: [interposing] Yep.

11 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: From HPD, but not  
12 from HRA?

13 BRIAN CLARKE: HRA would be the--

14 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: [interposing] Only  
15 in the context of outside the context of CASA?

16 BRIAN CLARKE: No, with the N1. And so,  
17 those are our highest priorities for Need Based. So  
18 the N0 and the N1. And as you heard in the  
19 testimony, there is over-- well over 300 families we  
20 were able to service so far this year with the N1  
21 priority.

22 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And I'm curious to  
23 know and one thing I would want to know is whether  
24 the Chairwoman still holds the same views that she  
25 expressed in this article. So that's something I'm

2 looking forward to hearing. How do you go about  
3 deciding I guess which felonies should require one  
4 documented incident, and which felonies should  
5 require two? Like in your mind which felonies are  
6 not serious enough to trigger the lower requirement  
7 of one document?

8           NORA REISSIG: So, as you know, we  
9 currently have a list of 21 felony crimes that  
10 qualify for the one incident. We are expanding that  
11 this month to over 80 felony crimes that encompass...  
12 For example, we're adding criminal contempt, criminal  
13 mischief, and criminal trespass. We're adding to the  
14 current list of 21 felony crimes that for example  
15 under assault, burglary, robbery that are now third  
16 and fourth degree crimes. Whereas, with the current  
17 list we only encompass first and second degrees.  
18 What we did, you know, to really take a look at this.  
19 I guess what I want to say in answering your question  
20 is that we have and this Administration clearly is  
21 very committed to combating domestic violence. And  
22 NYCHA is taking a very, very serious and close look,  
23 very collaboratively. As Commissioner Pierre-Louis  
24 said earlier, you know, it's unprecedented really the

2 level of collaboration that's taking place among all  
3 of the different agencies, and the advocates.

4           So what we did was we sat down with NYPD  
5 with both the Domestic Violence Bureau, with their  
6 Housing Bureau, and we looked at all of the different  
7 felony crimes that occur. And by the way, I just  
8 also want to add, because I think that earlier  
9 someone had mentioned that it's based on conviction.  
10 It's not based on conviction. It's based on arrest.  
11 So whether it gets pleaded down or not doesn't affect  
12 the individual's ability to have that crime used to  
13 determine their eligibility for the priority. But we  
14 took a look at all of the different felony crimes.  
15 We even added attempts because what we're trying to  
16 get at is any crime that-- You know, with one  
17 incident it's already signaling that an escalation is  
18 possible, or it can lead into some more serious.

19           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: But just as a  
20 layperson, most people have no real concept of what a  
21 serious felony is. So what's a felony that is  
22 insufficiently serious to justify that lower  
23 requirement of one document? What kind of abuse is  
24 not serious enough to trigger that lower requirement

2 of two documents? Because the default requirement is  
3 two documented incidents, right?

4 NORA REISSIG: I'd have to go back to  
5 that, and look at the full list that we looked at.  
6 What we really want to focus on is adding the types  
7 of crimes that constitute a serious enough crime that  
8 one incident should be sufficient. Those are  
9 examples of some of the ones we added. Attempts,  
10 like I said. I think that the expansion of the list  
11 is really great.

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Is it a recognition  
13 that the system might be a little too rigid, the fact  
14 that you've gone from 20 incidents to--

15 NORA REISSIG: [interposing] Absolutely.

16 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: --80?

17 NORA REISSIG: Absolutely. I don't deny  
18 that in the past NYCHA has had a system that has made  
19 it difficult for certain victims to access the  
20 housing that they need. And that's something like I  
21 said that we're very, very committed. I, myself,  
22 have almost 30 years of work in domestic violence. I  
23 came from the advocate community. I came from this  
24 direct service provider. You know, domestic violence  
25 is really an area that I've worked in for many, many

2 years. So absolutely there is no denying that we can  
3 improve on the system, and that's what we're working  
4 on doing.

5 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: [interposing] Why  
6 not a general requirement of documented incident?  
7 What's preventing NYCHA from universally lowering the  
8 requirement?

9 NORA REISSIG: For any incident?

10 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: What's the concern?  
11 What's the--

12 NORA REISSIG: Well, quite honestly, one  
13 big concern is capacity. You know, as Mr. Clarke  
14 said earlier we only turn over about 5,000 units a  
15 year. There is a lot of competing demands. We're  
16 working with other agencies and other systems and  
17 other resources to help expand the capacity as much  
18 as we can. For example-- One example, I don't know  
19 what it would fall into, but a type of offense, that  
20 you question should you really give just that one  
21 incident the priority is verbal offense. If someone  
22 has a verbal dispute, should they be given a  
23 priority?

24 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay, let's say  
25 crime. Let's just say any crime should trigger a

2 little requirement of one incident. What prevents  
3 you from adopting that kind of policy?

4 NORA REISSIG: I'm sorry, can you repeat  
5 that?

6 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: That any felony, not  
7 just a serious felony, any felony should result in a  
8 requirement of one documented incident.

9 NORA REISSIG: Well, let me say that  
10 we're doing away with that idea of a serious felony  
11 because any felony is serious.

12 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Yeah.

13 NORA REISSIG: What we're looking at is  
14 what rises to the level of one incident being  
15 sufficient. And I mean I can't think of an example  
16 that I would give you where a felony wouldn't fall  
17 into that. I'd have to go back honestly and look at  
18 the full list that we looked at. But to answer your  
19 question, yes the system was rigid in areas that  
20 we're trying to lessen that to increase access. And  
21 we're doing it in a very thoughtful, honest, and  
22 thorough way, and this is one example of that.

23 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Did you have--?

24 BRIAN CLARKE: Yeah, just-- I'm sorry.  
25 I just wanted to add that we did hear that criticism,



2 and that's one of the reasons why we've taken a look  
3 at the list, and expanded it from 21 to 80. And we  
4 didn't do that in the silo. I mean we worked with  
5 NYPD's Office of Domestic Violence on that as well,  
6 and consulted them. So it wasn't just something that  
7 was done without sitting down with law enforcement  
8 and getting their take on it.

9 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Can I just--

10 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Of course.

11 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Just a couple  
12 of points that I quickly want to make is that one,  
13 when you're looking at the individuals that are  
14 responsible within the Administration for  
15 streamlining the process. These are individuals that  
16 have tremendous experience in serving vulnerable  
17 populations, whether it be a Chair Shola Olatoye, or  
18 Commissioner Steve Banks at HRA. He headed up the  
19 Legal Aid Society. He knows not only the housing  
20 issue, but certainly the issue of domestic violence  
21 as well as staff at NYCHA and OCDV. A couple of  
22 things: One, is that we have to bear in mind that  
23 within the DHS system upwards of 30% of people that  
24 are in the DHS system identify domestic violence as

2 the presenting issue as causing their homelessness.

3 So I think there is some either/or happening.

4           The other thing that hasn't been  
5 mentioned yet is that there's been a lot of  
6 engagement by NYCHA with the advocacy community and  
7 housing providers. I've been-- I was at the last  
8 meeting with Steve Banks, Deputy Mayor Lilliam  
9 Barrios-Paoli. So this is something the  
10 Administration is very focused on. Recently, HRA  
11 announced in partnership with DHS the Living in  
12 Communities Initiative, and there are different  
13 levels. There is one, two, and three. Link 3 is a  
14 rental subsidy program for almost 2,000 survivors in  
15 the DHS and HRA shelter systems, and will provide a  
16 subsidy. So there's a lot of initiatives that are  
17 coming forward. I think there is an opportunity to  
18 have more dialogue so that there's clarity about the  
19 Link Initiative, which is just rolling out. But  
20 there is a sensitivity not only to homelessness,  
21 which is something that the Mayor has made a top  
22 priority. But we also understand that vulnerable  
23 populations also include victims of domestic  
24 violence.

2           So I want to make sure that we're not  
3 talking about the only care. You know, it's an  
4 either/or. Domestic violence is intersecting in all  
5 of these areas, and we're doing everything that we  
6 possibly can to leverage the resources to do this in  
7 a coordinated way. Once again, the level of dialogue  
8 and thinking and collaboration not only within  
9 agencies, but certainly with many of the people who  
10 testified here today that have been part of these  
11 discussions. It has not happened before. I've  
12 handled these cases for 25 years. I've never see  
13 anything like this. I think that's a credit to the  
14 Chair of NYCHA, our Mayor, as well as our HRA  
15 Commissioner and Gilbert Taylor who heads up DHS.

16           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: And I do want to  
17 note that I admire the interagency efforts whether  
18 it's the subsidy program or the outreach. I know  
19 that the Mayor is making every effort to drive the  
20 problem down. Having said that, whether you're a DV  
21 victim in the HRA shelter or a DV victim in the DHS  
22 shelter, in my mind there should be no distinction.  
23 For me, who cares who's running the center. A DV  
24 victim is a DV victim, and we should give them all  
25 the highest priority. And so that's something about

2 which I feel strongly. In the City Limits article  
3 that Shola Olatoye expressed concerns about the sheer  
4 amount of documentation that NYCHA system requires.  
5 And as all of you know, domestic violence time is of  
6 the essence. And one concern is that the demands for  
7 so much documentation can come at the expense of  
8 time. So, I don't know if you can address that  
9 concern?

10 NORA REISSIG: Yes. You know, the  
11 documentation requirements there are-- There is some  
12 necessity to have some documentation requirements.  
13 We're looking at that as well. One of the big  
14 changes that we're making is with expanding the list  
15 of what we were just discussing the crime categories  
16 that would only require the one incident. We're also  
17 looking at, and I think it was alluded to the  
18 testimony that we're working with HHC and Greater New  
19 York Hospital Association so that visits to emergency  
20 rooms. In any hospital in New York City a visit to  
21 the emergency room for domestic violence reasons  
22 could be documented and used as documentation that  
23 would provide the priority. Because again, we've  
24 heard from advocates. We've heard from victims  
25 themselves. We've heard from service providers that

2 having to go to the police or to the court for  
3 documentation for some is not an option.

4           So we've expanding or we are expanding.  
5 We hope later this month we'll be able to implement  
6 that change that the hospital emergency room visits  
7 will be acceptable. So if you really look at those  
8 two substantial changes, it will decrease  
9 tremendously the number or the times or the types of  
10 documentation that domestic violence victims would  
11 have to submit. And it would also hopefully move  
12 victims away from having to go through criminal  
13 justice or court based systems.

14           COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: If I could  
15 just also-- And one of the benefits of the NYCHA  
16 DVRT team is that we will be able to assist victims  
17 that we identify through our outreach team. And our  
18 DVRT specialists through our Family Justice Centers  
19 to assist them in this process to provide letters as  
20 well as we have DVPOs on site at our Family Justice  
21 Centers that can assist us with the process of other  
22 types of documentation that may be needed. But once  
23 again, I want to say that with Chair Olatoye from  
24 when she arrived in March, this was one of the first  
25 things that she tackled. And one of the first

2 conversations I had with her I think day four of her  
3 being here, is to talk about how do we streamline the  
4 process. I just want to emphasize that this kind of  
5 conversation on domestic violence I know for me I  
6 have not seen this level of conversation around  
7 domestic violence. Not in the Council. Not within  
8 an administration. And this is something  
9 particularly for NYCHA that for the Chair is an issue  
10 that is extremely important. And trying to  
11 streamline the process. And connecting to agencies  
12 like OCDV that has the expertise, and has the staff  
13 on hand that will be able to take the burden off of  
14 survivors to have to navigate systems to get help.  
15 And so, we are very much looking forward to being  
16 able to provide that kind of assistance to residents  
17 within these 15 complexes in NYCHA.

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: As I noted in my  
19 opening statement, I think two facts to consider  
20 about domestic violence: It can escalate quickly,  
21 which is why time is of the essence. And so many of  
22 these cases go undocumented. I found these numbers  
23 staggering. So in 2013, you had 62 domestic violence  
24 homicides. Seventy-four percent of them had no prior  
25 police contact. Eighty-six percent of them had no

2 order of protection, and I worry that we have a  
3 system that is so bureaucratic that it's incapable of  
4 capturing these cases. That's my concern.

5 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Can I take  
6 that one?

7 NORA REISSIG: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: And that's  
9 why as I mentioned I give you these numbers around  
10 outreach. It's not outreach. Just for outreach  
11 sake. We know directly that outreach can impact our  
12 ability to identify individuals that are not coming  
13 through other systems. Once again, by having a NYCHA  
14 DVRT team on the ground that is solely focused on  
15 NYCHA will help us to identify, as I mentioned,  
16 individuals that are going and dealing with law  
17 enforcement. But individuals for whatever reason  
18 concern about immigration status, which is not  
19 something that should stop someone from coming  
20 forward. Or, just concerns about the abuser losing a  
21 job. Whatever the reasons may be, we are looking to  
22 strengthen the safety net to identify them.

23 Today, this afternoon we're going to  
24 actually be in the Speaker's district. We are  
25 working with the New York Legal Assistance Group that

2 has a legal van, that has a mobile van. We will be  
3 providing legal consultations. So we're trying to do  
4 this kind of innovative work. I know that with  
5 Council Member Gibson and certainly Council Member  
6 Cumbo, who we've done a number of outreach in OCDV.  
7 We do subway visibility two or three times a week.  
8 We are going to neighborhoods that we know are  
9 disproportionately impacted by domestic violence. As  
10 you know, I'm meeting with every elected official in  
11 New York City.

12 I'm doing this because domestic violence  
13 is that important to the Mayor and to this  
14 Administration. And so, our goal for DVRT was to  
15 specifically identify those individuals that you're  
16 talking about. Every person that we think that we  
17 think that we can touch the goal of OCVD is to be on  
18 the ground to do that kind of work. And that's why  
19 we've been very effective at doing that. As I  
20 mentioned, just think about it. It's only October.  
21 We've already had 44 client visits.

22 So that speaks tremendously to the  
23 capacity for the kind of collaboration that we have  
24 with not only our partners, within City government,  
25 but also with elected officials that have joined with



2 us. We're doing Diva Talk. We're on radio, on TV.  
3 We did the DV Walk that you were part of as part of  
4 the Bride's March. So I think the kind of awareness,  
5 and the discussion that is happening about domestic  
6 violence I think will also encourage people to come  
7 forward. But even those that are still concerned, my  
8 goal is through our liaisons that are going to be on  
9 the ground is to identify those individuals. You  
10 also have the NYPD that's doing wellness visits. You  
11 have the DVPOs that are going back and identifying  
12 households that may be high priority.

13           So we want to identify individuals that  
14 just need information and help and resources. We  
15 want to identify people who are in need of services  
16 whether it be civil or legal services. But we also  
17 want to identify those individuals who are at high  
18 risk. And that's why the assessments that you're  
19 talking about the legality assessments. For us at  
20 the Family Justice Center that's something that we do  
21 day in and day out. Many of the service providers  
22 that are sitting here today-- I see Maureen Curtis  
23 from Safe Horizon. This is the kind of work that we  
24 do, and this all about strengthening the safety net,  
25 and indentifying individuals that are in need of

2 services that come to the attention of law  
3 enforcement. But certainly with NYCHA DVRT I think  
4 we will do a lot to identify those people who are not  
5 seeking criminal just assistance.

6 NORA REISSIG: And if I may just add a  
7 few more things to that because I think that in terms  
8 of NYCHA it is a three-prong approach. It's the  
9 collaboration like the one that we had with the  
10 Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence and the  
11 advocates. It's the education that we're doing for  
12 us our staff to train them. Almost 700 NYCHA staff  
13 we're helping train on domestic violence by the end  
14 of this month, front line staff. But it's also the  
15 protection for our residents who are domestic  
16 violence victims or who are presenting themselves as  
17 domestic violence victims. Since 2012, we've approve  
18 over 1,100 domestic violence transfers for residents,  
19 and those transfers come through a host of services  
20 that are through HRA's After Care Program they  
21 receive. So I think that it's the collaboration, and  
22 it's the approach on all levels.

23 There is also the Domestic Violence  
24 Intervention Education and Prevention Program, which  
25 is based on all of the PSAs. Any household, NYCHA

2 household that reports domestic violence to the  
3 police they do outreach to that household. So  
4 really, if you live in public housing if you look at  
5 all of those different services and the safety net,  
6 and that early intervention. Living in public  
7 housing if you're a domestic violence victim you have  
8 a lot of different services, a lot of protections,  
9 and lot of access to things that someone who does not  
10 live in public housing simply doesn't have. So I  
11 think we can always do better. We're working on  
12 doing better, but we really work very hard everyday  
13 to provide protection to domestic violence who live  
14 in public housing.

15 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I want to give my  
16 colleagues an opportunity to ask a few questions.  
17 But I will say first no criticism of OCDV. I commend  
18 the work you're doing. My only criticism of NYCHA is  
19 I would say I have two demands. First, I feel  
20 strongly that HRA shelter DV victims should receive  
21 the highest priority. For me, it's clear-cut issue.  
22 The second is I feel like there should be some  
23 thought given to a comprehensive risk assessment  
24 because I worry that if the system is too rigid and  
25 too bureaucratic, we're going to have domestic

2 violence survivors. And we should call them  
3 survivors rather than victims. Survivors who are  
4 going to lose hope, and as you know, time is of the  
5 essence. So those are my only two demands. With  
6 that said, I will hand over the floor to the  
7 Chairwoman of the Committee on Public Safety Vanessa  
8 Gibson, and I appreciate your testimony.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you again,  
10 Chair Torres, and thank you all for your presence.  
11 And I echo all of the sentiments that have been  
12 shared. And certainly OCDV Commissioner you have  
13 been such a tremendous advocate on domestic violence.  
14 Each and every day you work to serve the needs of all  
15 clients and their families, and I truly appreciate  
16 all the partnerships from the Brides March. And  
17 everything else we will continue to do.

18 I guess I just have a couple of comments  
19 to make because there is a lot of information to  
20 absorb today, and I do share the Chair's concerns  
21 about the discrepancy in terms of the priority  
22 status. There has to be some uniformity. We don't  
23 want to set up a distinction where if you are  
24 homeless and not DV then you are more important than  
25 anyone else. And I think that is a huge, huge

2 barrier that we can certainly overcome. And I  
3 encourage you as you have further conversations to  
4 please keep that in mind.

5           One of the things that I think this  
6 Administration has done, which is tremendous and  
7 certainly unprecedented is given a lot of attention  
8 to DV. I was a part of the advocacy to remove the  
9 prohibitive language in the State law that does not  
10 allow the City to draw down on funds for rental  
11 subsidy programs. So we are finally giving attention  
12 to DV clients solely on rental subsidy. And I think  
13 that's a great testament to the work that we're  
14 doing. But I also want us to be very realistic about  
15 some of these requirements that we're asking clients  
16 to fulfill. When you're going through these  
17 situations, you cannot always think about all the  
18 paperwork. I am concerned and I know you will  
19 probably provide us with some information on the  
20 faces of these domestic violence victims. Whether  
21 it's a more intimate partnership or family domestic  
22 violence, I am very concerned about the habitual  
23 abusers.

24           Before the Brides March that we had  
25 several weeks ago, there was a young 21-year-old

2 woman in Bronx River Houses who was fatally stabbed  
3 by her abuser. But before he killed her, he was  
4 arrested three times, and he was never put in jail.  
5 Not only should he have been put a secure facility,  
6 but he had an exorbitant amount of mental needs.  
7 Mental health is huge. And so, I guess my first  
8 question with this new initiative around the Response  
9 Team does safety planning, the risk assessment, case  
10 management, crisis intervention is there a focus on  
11 mental health? Is DOHMH one of the agencies that  
12 working with us in this partnership because mental  
13 health is huge. We've done a lot around it, and I  
14 think it has to be a key focus of this.

15 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Thank you for  
16 your question, Council Member Gibson. So I'm  
17 certainly understanding the intersections is what I  
18 think is one of the things that I think we've been  
19 able to do at OCDV. And certainly understanding the  
20 comprehensive needs of a victim. Once again, I want  
21 to clarify, will be focusing in on intimate partner  
22 survivors of domestic violence. As you know from  
23 touring out Family Justice Center in the Bronx, we  
24 have a unique collaboration with Columbia University  
25 to provide survivors with mental health services.

2 Because we know that victims of domestic violence are  
3 experiencing trauma. Whether it's physical or not,  
4 there is some trauma that is happening.

5           And so, as part of the assessment will  
6 assess all the needs that victims have whether it be  
7 as it relates to housing needs, civil legal services,  
8 immigration needs. The New York City Family Justice  
9 Centers are the largest submitter of these  
10 applications in the State of New York. Certainly, in  
11 terms of mental health services, Dr. Bassett and I  
12 talk about domestic violence issues and the needs all  
13 the time. And certainly mental health services is  
14 one of the areas that we'll be looking at. And we  
15 will be through our partner agencies, and at the FJCs  
16 to sure that their mental health needs also are  
17 addressed. So the DVRT team will be looking at that.  
18 We do have people that have expertise in that area.

19           And the other thing, too, that I want to  
20 mention with our DVRT Initiative and NYCHA is also  
21 language proficiency in terms of being able to do our  
22 work in a culturally competent manner. The eight  
23 members of our DVRT team collectively speak French,  
24 Haitian, Creole, Italian, Portuguese, and Arabic, and  
25 Dutch, right? And Dutch. And so, we have a pretty

2 diverse team, and so we are looking at all of the  
3 comprehensive needs of victims of domestic violence,  
4 and certain mental health is an area that we'll be  
5 looking at as well.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And in addition  
7 to some of the languages differences, I would also  
8 urge you to consider the cultural differences.

9 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Sure.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: So within my  
11 community in the Bronx I represent probably the  
12 largest concentration of West Africans that speak a  
13 number of different dialects. And, you know, very  
14 unique needs in that community, but certainly a part  
15 of the larger conversation. And while I know that  
16 this effort is focused on the 15 developments, I  
17 happen to represent one of them, Butler Houses. But  
18 I have been getting a lot of concern from other NYCHA  
19 leaders that represent the other developments that  
20 are not in the 15. And so, I've been assuring them  
21 that they are not forgotten. We're continuing up the  
22 focus. It's just the 15 that we're looking at that  
23 are responsible for almost 20%. But we're not taking  
24 away our priority on the entire 334 developments. So  
25 I just wanted to make that clear.



2           And I just had one other comment. It was  
3 something that came up to me from one of the advocacy  
4 groups who do a lot of this work working with all of  
5 you. How are we addressing many of our DV clients  
6 and families that do not have a criminal domestic  
7 violence incident? So there are many forms of  
8 control and domestic incidents that are not  
9 necessarily criminal. There's financial. There's  
10 emotional. There's social. If a client came to one  
11 of the Family Justice Centers, do we have anything in  
12 place that can kind of look at what I would call some  
13 of the triggers. Some of the factors that we could  
14 look at before it gets to a criminal nature.

15           COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Sure.

16           COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Does that make  
17 sense?

18           COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Sure. So a  
19 couple of things. Anyone who is a victim of domestic  
20 violence can come to one of our four Family Justice  
21 Centers, and to our Domestic Violence Response Team,  
22 that we have in Staten Island. So, while the DVRT is  
23 going to be focused on the 15, anyone who is in need  
24 of help will get assistance through our Family  
25 Justice Centers. So I just want to be clear about

2 that. In terms of understanding how domestic  
3 violence can escalate, and the different forms of  
4 dynamics of domestic violence, we know from hearing  
5 that victims that the psychological is just as  
6 impactful as the physical. In Staten Island, we have  
7 an initiative that is--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]  
9 Stalking?

10 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: On stalking.  
11 Thank you very much. And we've seen a 250% increase  
12 in prosecutions and arrests for stalking in a two-  
13 month period. As a result, once again, of a  
14 collaboration with D.A. Dan Donovan and with the NYPD  
15 and our community based partners. So in terms of  
16 identifying the kinds of dynamics of domestic  
17 violence we have trained staff that understand how  
18 domestic violence can manifest itself. That's why we  
19 don't just always talk about the physical abuse,  
20 which people seem to feel that that's how domestic  
21 violence is real. We do look at the intimidation,  
22 the fear, the harassment, the verbal abuse, and the  
23 controlling behaviors that may be manifested by an  
24 abuser. And some of the stalking can be the  
25 indicator of legality. Violence towards an animal or

2 also use of a gun, or the presence of a gun in a  
3 household. So there are a number of factors that we  
4 look at as part of legality assessment. To ensure  
5 that we in developing a plan of services, and  
6 advising a victim of what their options are. So that  
7 they can make an informed decision about the course  
8 of action they want to take in terms of the  
9 eradicating the violence in their lives. So it's not  
10 just oh some-- Many of our clients don't necessarily  
11 come because of an arrest. Many people come in  
12 because at the end of the day, as you know Council  
13 Member, individuals, victims just want the violence  
14 to stop.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

16 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: So at the  
17 Family Justice Centers, we are able to assist victims  
18 in their comprehensive needs.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. Well, for  
20 the sake of time, I'll pass it over to my Chair. But  
21 I thank all of you for your work, and I want to  
22 certainly applaud all the advocacy groups that I've  
23 met with throughout my tenure here at the Council.  
24 And I am asking all of you and my colleagues to  
25 really join me in January when Albany starts a new

2 legislative session. This is a very unique  
3 opportunity for all of us to travel to Albany to make  
4 sure that we strengthen order of protection, and make  
5 them real. And we also provide a lot of other  
6 support to support other legislation in Albany that  
7 is traditionally passed in the Assembly, and not  
8 passed in the Senate. To really close a lot of the  
9 loopholes that we have.

10           It is really interesting when you speak  
11 to a lot of clients, and their families and you  
12 recognize that the abuser has been arrested, but the  
13 case is not prosecuted because of some barrier, some  
14 loophole that exists in State law. And so, I am  
15 working with my colleagues, and we'll certainly put  
16 together a team. And I would love for you to join me  
17 so that we can really get a lot of that work done in  
18 Albany. Because that complements the work we do. We  
19 need the criminal justice system to work with us.  
20 And so, I thank you for all of your work, and I want  
21 to thank you again, Chair Torres, for your  
22 leadership. Thank you.

23           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: As the Commissioner  
24 has noted, we're speaking about domestic violence at  
25 a level we probably have never seen in City

2 government. And the person responsible for elevating  
3 the conversation here in the City Council has been  
4 the Chairperson of the Committee on Women's Issues,  
5 Laurie Cumbo, who would love to ask a few questions.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair  
7 Torres and Chair Gibson. Thank you so much for  
8 organizing today. I'm so pleased that all of you are  
9 here because this is such an important time for us to  
10 bring greater visibility to domestic violence. And  
11 you all spoke very much about the collaborations, and  
12 I'm thrilled at the collaborations on all levels. It  
13 seems like the entire administration has recognized  
14 the importance of this. But what I wanted to ask is  
15 with the increase of reported domestic violence  
16 incidents that are happening, are we at the Family  
17 Justice Centers-- Are we feeling that we are able  
18 to, or have an understanding that we're able to meet  
19 this new? Demand is not necessarily the right word  
20 that I want to use, but individuals that are seeking  
21 services. Are individuals able to within the centers  
22 able to provide the level of service that this  
23 increase has created?

24 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Thank you for  
25 your question, and thank you for all the support that

2 you've provided on this issue. And really the focus  
3 of the Family Justice Center is to-- We approach  
4 our work from a client-centered perspective. And so,  
5 our goal is to help everyone that comes through our  
6 doors. Obviously, capacity is always an issue, and I  
7 think one of the things it's going to be extremely  
8 helpful by having a team that's focused on NYCHA and  
9 these 15 complexes it has expanded our capacity.  
10 We've also brought additional staff just generally to  
11 deal with capacity issues.

12 I also want to highlight while we are a  
13 staff of 50, when you think about over 35 community  
14 based organizations are on site at our Family Justice  
15 Centers that provide a variety of services. And so,  
16 we've just over the last 12 years, we've brought on  
17 four Family Justice Centers. So we continue to  
18 expand our capacity to understand that domestic  
19 violence is just not limited to a particular borough.  
20 And that's why we are going to have the largest  
21 network of Family Justice Centers. So that we can  
22 meet the demands. Because we know the more outreach,  
23 the more awareness that we do, the more demand it's  
24 going to have on our centers. And certainly, there  
25 are a number of service providers here that victims

2 are also accessing services independently through the  
3 programs that they offer as well, whether it be  
4 Sanctuary for Families, Safe Horizons or some of the  
5 smaller community based organizations that are  
6 located within communities.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Do clients that  
8 come through the Family Justice Center as well as the  
9 other partners, do they have opportunities to  
10 evaluate the services that they've received? So if  
11 they come in for a visit, whether it's a one-time  
12 visit, or they have ongoing services that are going  
13 to be required. Do you have an opportunity to have  
14 an evaluation to understand how clients are receiving  
15 the information? How helpful it is. Where there are  
16 loopholes. Where issues aren't being addressed that  
17 they would want more services then?

18 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: So one of the  
19 things that we are definitely looking into more is  
20 how do we evaluate the impact of the Family Justice  
21 Centers and the services that we provide. Certainly,  
22 one of the things that I pride myself on is ensuring  
23 that victims know that they have access to me. So if  
24 there is an issue, they can contact me directly. And  
25 I'm throughout the city talking to survivors to let

2 them know that there are resources there. I also  
3 think that in terms of if there are issues, there are  
4 OCDV staff, five to six staffers on site at each of  
5 the FJCs. So if there is an issue, there is an  
6 infrastructure in place. But I think one of the  
7 things that we are looking to formalize more is a  
8 survey regarding the services that are being  
9 delivered. And certainly evaluation and data will  
10 also be part of the DVRT Initiative as well. So I  
11 think you're bringing up something that is definitely  
12 an area that we'll be expanding more into.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I think that  
14 that's a critical component to this work is to  
15 understand how the information and the services are  
16 being received. I wanted to know. We had a  
17 constituent in the district, and she had reported a  
18 case of domestic violence. And was subsequently  
19 after reported called by one of the centers, the  
20 Family Justice Centers. But what she wanted to know  
21 at that point is the person who is the victimizer in  
22 this way, are they also contacted for services by the  
23 Family Justice Centers or not?

24 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: So jut once  
25 again the Family Justice Centers provide assistance



2 to victims of intimate partner domestic violence.  
3 There are a number of organizations that provide  
4 services for individuals that are abusive. I do  
5 think recent current events really raise the issue  
6 around what are the services that are available? I  
7 know that with probation, our Probation Commissioner  
8 this is a conversation that we've been having. There  
9 is a working group of service providers that provide  
10 this kind of assistance that I met with last week.  
11 And we were talking about ways in which we can expand  
12 the conversation on this. But I do know that this is  
13 an area worthy of further investigation, and further  
14 dialogue, and really understanding what kinds of  
15 services need to be provided. And I think the  
16 conversation also is looking at this also from a  
17 trauma informed lens as well. So I do think there is  
18 room for conversation on the issue of programs for  
19 individuals who are abusive. And currently, there  
20 are programs, but I think many may feel that now is  
21 the time to do some kind of evaluation, and study the  
22 efficacy of these programs.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Because I do  
24 believe that the services provided for those that  
25 have been-- Those who are the victimizers, who I'm

2 sure at some point have been victims themselves, it's  
3 so critical that in these opportunities that we also  
4 get them services as well. Because they're here, and  
5 thing going to be engaged in other relationships.  
6 And it's important that we get them those services.

7 My final question goes into the 15  
8 developments that were identified are these the same  
9 exact developments that were identified by the Mayor  
10 to receive services previously in terms of the  
11 additional lighting, different--

12 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: [interposing]  
13 Yes. Yes, it's part of the coordinated initiative.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Was it because  
15 those same 15 also were in alignment with DV  
16 incidents? Were they also the same developments that  
17 were reporting high incidences of violence throughout  
18 the city? Did it also coincide exactly with  
19 developments that were having high incidents of  
20 domestic violence as well?

21 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: These are  
22 complexes that have incidences of crime generally. A  
23 significant number of domestic violence is a big  
24 reason for the increase of crime in those complexes.  
25 And that's why they were also included, and they're

2 in the five boroughs. And I know Queens and  
3 Queensbridge, and the Borough of Queens and Staten  
4 Island we're looking at Stapleton Houses. So it was  
5 a combination of factors in identifying the 15. It's  
6 one where crime has increased dramatically, but  
7 within that we're looking at increases as it relates  
8 to domestic violence.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And can you just--  
10 And my final question. Can you just give me, because  
11 one of those developments are in my district  
12 Ingersoll. What does that increased presence look  
13 like in terms of how individuals will be made aware  
14 of the fact that services are available? That there  
15 is some place they can go? That there is something  
16 where--? What does it look like when I go into  
17 Ingersoll now?

18 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: So once again  
19 the NYCHA DVRT Team has not launched yet. It will at  
20 the end of the month. But I want to say that in  
21 terms of the overall Map Initiative, the Mayor's  
22 Action Plan, that that's already started this summer.  
23 Many immediately in terms of lights, taking down  
24 scaffolding. DYCD and NYCHA keeping community  
25 centers open. We have provided workshops. What I

2 anticipate is once we have the team on board for the  
3 NYCHA DVRT, that we will be working closely with  
4 resident leaders; Nora's team, staff at NYCHA to  
5 begin to strategize individual plans for each one of  
6 the 15 housing complexes. Understanding you want to  
7 work with key stakeholders whether it be small  
8 business owners where NYCHA residents may go, elected  
9 officials, to make them aware about the NYCHA  
10 Domestic Violence Response Team. That's why we're  
11 going to be doing that outreach. Not only within the  
12 complexes but outside the complexes. It's subways.  
13 It's salon [sic] outreach, which also been an  
14 effective tool for identifying individuals in need of  
15 services. So our goal is to really be on the ground.  
16 What you will see is representatives from the Mayor's  
17 Office to Combat Domestic Violence from our DVRT team  
18 on the ground within the complex doing that kind of  
19 outreach whether it be family days. Which we will be  
20 doing all throughout the summer at different events  
21 that are being sponsored at NYCHA. We are certainly  
22 participating this week. I'll be speaking at the  
23 conference. My colleague Ed Hill has met with the  
24 Tenant Association leaders to give them an initial  
25 briefing on the Domestic Violence Response Team. But

2 I view this as it's going to be a high touch process  
3 where individuals will have and leaders within NYCHA  
4 will have the opportunity to meet with our team to  
5 develop strategies on how best to identify victims.  
6 As well as working with the NYPD, and certainly with  
7 HRA and with Nora's, the Domestic Violence Services.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Can the community  
9 centers be used as a space for individuals to meet  
10 with a counselor or mental health provider to discuss  
11 issues that they have? We do a number of things like  
12 legal clinics in our district. We do things such as  
13 housing clinics and know your rights clinics. Will  
14 we let people know that either you can call and  
15 schedule an appointment, which would probably be more  
16 apropos in this situation. Or you could call and  
17 people would know that if there is something that's  
18 happening in your household that there is a time and  
19 a place where you could go to? Have resources been  
20 allocated so that community centers could be used in  
21 that way for mental health practitioners?

22 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: So we are  
23 talking to NYCHA and DYCD to develop a schedule to be  
24 able to do that. As I mentioned earlier, we are  
25 going to be in East Harlem. We're trying to leverage

2 all kinds of resources. So we are working with the  
3 New York Legal Assistance Group to bring attorneys on  
4 site. Because I think you also have to go where  
5 people are to bring them services. And so, we will  
6 have our team as well as NYLAG's team of lawyers that  
7 will be providing legal consultations. And we  
8 anticipate doing the same thing at various centers  
9 and using different resources. We know that for  
10 clergy leaders they are on the front line in  
11 responding to domestic violence. So it's really a  
12 multi-pronged approach in terms of identifying  
13 victims of domestic violence, and we certainly--  
14 That's why we want to do this kind of individualized  
15 planning with each one of the complexes to ensure  
16 that we're doing it in a way that will maximize  
17 opportunities for victims in need of services to come  
18 forward. Whether they have had contact with the NYPD  
19 or they're just seeking to get just some basic  
20 information about resources and courses of action.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, and I  
22 guess I'll see you at the house [sic] later on today?

23 COMMISSIONER PIERRE-LOUIS: Yes, in about  
24 an hour and a half. [laughs]

2 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So I want to thank--  
3 Even though I have been ferociously critical of  
4 NYCHA's system, I do commend the Administration for  
5 the mobilization of resources across city agencies.  
6 And I understand that it's a complicated problem for  
7 which there are not easy answers. Criticism is much  
8 easier. My job is much easier than yours. So I will  
9 concede that much. Before I conclude the panel, I  
10 will ask someone from the Administration to remain  
11 present because we will have a few DV survivors  
12 testifying. And I believe they are entitled to be  
13 heard by you. So, with that said, we will conclude  
14 this panel. Thank you so much.

15 So I would like to call up Maria Torres,  
16 Ms. Hutchinson, and forgive the mispronunciation if  
17 I'm-- Faline or Praline.

18 [Pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Can we freeze the  
20 timer? There is no reason to impose time  
21 constraints. So whoever wishes to begin, you may.  
22 Okay, thank you.

23 PRALINE TISCAL: Good afternoon. My name  
24 is Praline Tiscal [sp?]. I'm an immigrant from  
25 Zimbabwe. I've been in this country for 16 years.

2 Since I've been here, I have been depending on  
3 myself, and I'm a victim of domestic violence. I've  
4 been married to my husband for 23 years. So this is  
5 thing. Every time he abuse me, I couldn't call the  
6 police because he threatened me with deportation. So  
7 I just say in the house, and I would like deal with  
8 it. So finally, I saw this poster on the subway. It  
9 show that if you are a victim of domestic violence  
10 you should call this number. And then this violence  
11 kept on escalating, and I would call the police. And  
12 then finally I managed to escape, and I stayed with  
13 some friends.

14           And then he kept on calling my friends  
15 harassing, and then I ended up going to a shelter.  
16 So this is my question. I am undocumented, and I  
17 don't have any benefits. I have a child who was born  
18 here. She's eight years old. So she is the only one  
19 who get benefits. We got into housing. I applied to  
20 NYCHA, and I was denied because I didn't have all the  
21 documents they wanted. And also I went to the Family  
22 Justice Center, which has been working with me, and  
23 they were giving me like agencies to go. But the  
24 thing is I am undocumented, and I have been working  
25 on my own and not asking for help from the State or



2 the government. But then I lost my job because of  
3 this violence. So I want to know what is my future.  
4 I'm going to be in the shelter for like six months  
5 after the extension. So from there, where am I going  
6 regarding, you know, housing and the jobs and  
7 everything like that? Thank you.

8           LATICIA: I'm a little bit nervous. Good  
9 afternoon. I'm Laticia. I am currently living in a  
10 DV shelter. I have five-year-old, but I think part  
11 of the reason I'm here today is because I want to  
12 find out from NYCHA like why don't they put DV people  
13 on NYCHA's separate wait list? I mean we didn't  
14 become homeless because of a choice. We became  
15 homeless because we had to. We had no other choice.  
16 My son's father would fight with me everyday. I even  
17 had a gun to my head on two occasions. The last time  
18 I just said it was me or him. I had to leave. So  
19 we're not homeless because we want to be homeless.  
20 So I think, if anything, we should be given the same  
21 priority or even a higher priority as persons that  
22 are homeless because we are homeless, but maybe in a  
23 different sense.

24                       Secondly, I am, too, not from here. My  
25 son was born here, and I never wanted to leave

2 because I had nowhere to live. But I think if NYCHA  
3 made it easier for people to apply, then they  
4 wouldn't be in domestic violence situations for so  
5 long. You know, if you had somewhere to go, you  
6 would walk away. But when you don't know where to  
7 go, and you don't know where you're going to live and  
8 you don't want to live on the street, you stay. You  
9 don't stay because you want to stay. I'm sorry.  
10 This is hard. But I just wish they would change some  
11 of the rules so that people who are undocumented we  
12 can still apply and be eligible. So I just wanted to  
13 point that out. Thank you.

14 [Pause]

15 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

16 TRANSLATOR: My name is Maria. I am a  
17 domestic violence survivor. I am currently living in  
18 a shelter, and I am very thankful to be living in a  
19 shelter and be protected.

20 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

21 TRANSLATOR: I lived with my children's  
22 father for 15 years being victimized both emotionally  
23 and verbally and physically.

24 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

25

2 TRANSLATOR: And after many years of  
3 abuse, I decided-- I came to the understanding that  
4 he had the intent to kill me. So, decided to make  
5 arrangements, and it was very difficult because I  
6 lived with his family.

7 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

8 TRANSLATOR: If I wanted to bring him up  
9 on charges, it was very difficult because they would  
10 try to proceed and to evict me from the apartment.  
11 And it was very difficult because I had five  
12 children.

13 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

14 TRANSLATOR: Not being able to support  
15 any more, we left with just the clothes on our backs.  
16 And besides the physical abuse, it's also the  
17 psychological abuse, and the instability of not  
18 having a place.

19 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

20 TRANSLATOR: I'm undocumented and that  
21 also makes getting a job very difficult, and this  
22 instability is just very disturbing to myself and my  
23 family.

24 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

2 TRANSLATOR: And it's very emotionally  
3 traumatizing on the children to be in such an  
4 unstable position of not being able to be in one  
5 home, and being in a shelter together.

6 MARIA TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

7 TRANSLATOR: What kind of future are they  
8 going to have without having a stable home?

9 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I want to thank you  
10 for your testimony, and thank you for telling your  
11 story. We are inspired by your courage and strength,  
12 and we want you to know that you have a Commissioner  
13 and you have elected officials who are fighting for  
14 you. And all we ask is that you don't lose hope, and  
15 I admire the courage that you have. Thank you so  
16 much. [applause]

17 [Pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I'm going to call up  
19 the next panel. Ms. Charlena from Food First Family  
20 Project, Aaron Kaley [sp?] from Food First. Judith  
21 from the Center Against Domestic Violence. Theresa  
22 from Voices of Woman. We had Nadine from Voices of  
23 Woman. We have Charlena Powell, and Stephanie  
24 McGraw.

25 [Pause]

2 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Whoever wishes to,  
3 you can begin. You can start.

4 THERESA MACINTOSH: I'm sorry. Can you  
5 hear me now?

6 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Yes.

7 THERESA MACINTOSH: Okay. Sorry. Good  
8 afternoon. My name is Theresa MacIntosh. I am a  
9 member of the Voices of Women Organizing Project also  
10 known as VOW. I am the Chair of the Housing Justice  
11 Campaign. VOW is an organization that works to  
12 improve systems and services that victims and  
13 survivors of domestic violence and their children  
14 turn to for safety and justice. We're calling on  
15 NYCHA to speed up the application process. So that  
16 women and children are not being shuffled from system  
17 to system while waiting for their permanent housing.  
18 Victims of domestic violence have immediate needs for  
19 safety. When trying to leave their abusive  
20 relationship, victims of violence face a decision to  
21 leave all they've known. Once the survivor steps  
22 into the shelter, and the clock is ticking between  
23 their shelter time and the NYCHA housing. There  
24 continues to be a serious disconnect in timing  
25 between the maximum stay allowed and domestic

2 violence shelters. And in the NYCHA application  
3 process many of these families are then forced to  
4 either start all over in the city homeless system, or  
5 return to their batterer out of desperation and risk  
6 further abuse or even death.

7 VOW calls for NYCHA to accept a wide  
8 range of documentations as proof of domestic  
9 priority, domestic violence priority housing. VOW  
10 believes the following recommendation should be added  
11 to the eligibility criteria:

12 1. A letter from a domestic violence  
13 shelter allowing that the resident qualifies to  
14 admit, and is in danger because of domestic violence  
15 shelter has a thorough screening process.

16 2. Current criteria states there's a need  
17 to be two separate incidences in order to be eligible  
18 for housing. This creates loopholes that are in  
19 danger, but only have one incident. These women end  
20 up homeless, and remain in danger.

21 Safe and affordable housing is a basic  
22 human right. The fact is that thousands of women and  
23 children are in domestic violence shelters. But  
24 let's not forget all of those survivors that are left  
25 in homeless shelters. On the record, there is about

2 9,000 in the New York homeless system. We encourage  
3 you to learn more about the cycle of domestic  
4 violence. It is the basic human right of public  
5 safety, and need to live free from violence.  
6 Affordable housing is a priority need for victims.  
7 We are happy to see that the subsidy programs are  
8 being implemented in the Link. We look forward to  
9 more assistance to help those most vulnerable. Thank  
10 you so much.

11 GITSY AJOBI: Hi, my name is Gitsy Ajobi  
12 [sp?]. I'm a Program Director at Food First Family  
13 Project. Family Project is serving victims of  
14 domestic violence. Every day I have direct contact.  
15 When I started this job, so my mission, my goal was  
16 to help survivors, to help victims. All three of  
17 these are part of my job. When I used to go outside,  
18 I'm giving them the message so leave that abusive  
19 situation. Don't feel yourself alone. We are here  
20 to help you. We will give that goal or destination,  
21 but you really deserve it. Now after what NYCHA is  
22 saying about not having the first priority, believe  
23 me I am always feeling guilty about that when I'm  
24 telling them, and I'm conveying the message. Am I  
25 doing right or wrong?

2 I'm making them to leave their house  
3 where at least they have that roof for their  
4 children, and now I'm going to put them in the street  
5 with the wrong message, the wrong promise. Where are  
6 they going to go? After that, they are going to be  
7 in a more difficult situation. I help pregnant  
8 women. I help disabled people. How are they going  
9 to raise their kids? How are they going to be a good  
10 mother to give us a good nation when all those trauma  
11 and problems with them. That's why a lot of mental  
12 health issues are going around when they are unable  
13 to support themselves or their children. And,  
14 children they are in more dramatic situations and  
15 traumatic situations.

16 When I saw that to asking the home where  
17 we are going next? In which shelter? A homeless  
18 shelter where they cannot study properly? How we can  
19 have a proper nation? How we can have socialized or  
20 a society when we are giving them these wrong  
21 messages to making them leave that situation? And if  
22 they have to go back to their abuser, the situation  
23 is going to be more critical for them. More  
24 critical for them. We are not helping. We are  
25 making them in a more worse situation. We are



2 responsible for that. We are leaders of this society  
3 or for this organization or for any of them. This is  
4 not right. This is wrong and we need to think about  
5 it. We are educated. We are working in this  
6 civilized society. We have to work honestly and  
7 professionally.

8           We have to give them the right message  
9 not to mislead them to put them in a worse situation  
10 where they cannot go anywhere just either to kill  
11 themselves or to kill their abuser. Then we're going  
12 to be knowing maybe, but this is not a right thing.  
13 I'm requesting please reconsider. Give them a chance  
14 to have that peace in the moment where they can live  
15 with their children. They deserve it by themselves,  
16 and give me a chance not to feel guilty, not to be  
17 feeling ashamed of my profession. I'm working. I'm  
18 working for them not to make them be put in a worse  
19 situation. To help them. So I'm begging please give  
20 me my peace of mind because day and night I'm feeling  
21 guilty. I'm in a feeling that I'm not doing right.  
22 I'm doing something that is wrong with those people.  
23 So I'm begging to give that reality back. Thank you.

24 [bell]

25

2 ERIN FEELY-NATHEM: Good morning. Thank  
3 you for all your support, Council Member Torres. My  
4 name is Erin Feely-Nathem. I'm the Executive Director  
5 of Food First Family Project, which is a non-profit  
6 agency incorporated in 1993 to provide supportive  
7 services and emergency shelter to domestic violence  
8 survivors. I am also the Co-Chair of the New York  
9 City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential  
10 Providers Housing Committee.

11 On July 24, I testified at the NYCHA Town  
12 Hall Meeting expressing surprise and concern  
13 regarding the amendment to the agency's 2014 Annual  
14 Plan, which limited access to NO homeless priority  
15 preference to DHS referred clients, omitting HRA  
16 domestic violence shelter residents. Historically,  
17 NYCHA has not discriminated against HRA domestic  
18 violence shelter residents, allowing clients within  
19 both systems to qualify for their homeless priority.  
20 The amendment to the NYCHA 2014 Annual Plan was  
21 adopted in July 2014. And along with the agency's  
22 2015 plan scheduled for submission on October 18,  
23 2014, it places HRA domestic violence shelter  
24 residents long-term safety behind the immediate  
25 housing needs of DHS shelter residents. As well as

2 behind those DHS families who are on the NYCHA  
3 working family wait list. Changes made to  
4 documentation requirements to the N1 priority  
5 announced on July 18, 2014, are not enough to address  
6 this inequity. The move a domestic violence expert  
7 administered risk assessment tool to award priority  
8 status is a positive development. But should be  
9 utilized for all survivors inside and outside of the  
10 shelter system. Historically, HRA shelter residents  
11 were able to qualify for both priority preferences,  
12 N0 and N1, placing them at the top of the list.

13           On July 31, HRA submitted 631  
14 applications to NYCHA, all eligible for N1 priority  
15 preference. To date, none of these applications have  
16 even been coded much less interviewed. During the  
17 same period starting July, DHS has referred and  
18 placed over 730 of their homeless residents into  
19 NYCHA apartments either under N0 or W0. We have  
20 witnessed the housing options available to domestic  
21 violence survivors within our shelter system shrink  
22 over the years. Without access to a decent housing  
23 subsidy or a viable priority like N0 for public  
24 housing our residents will be unable to find

2 permanent housing during their shelter stay, employed  
3 or not, facing continuous risk of serious abuse.

4           They spoke of Link 3. Link 3 is only a  
5 subsidy if you're in shelter, if you are tied to  
6 public assistance. Landlords don't want to touch it.  
7 Link 1, which is another subsidy is only open again  
8 to DHS shelter residents who are employed full time.  
9 The woman you heard speak here today is entitled to  
10 none of them. She's not entitled to Link 1 because  
11 she's not in DHS, and she's not entitled to Link 3  
12 because she's not on PA because she works, and  
13 doesn't want to give up her job.

14           Awarding NO priority to all persons in  
15 shelters, whether it is within the HRA shelter system  
16 or the DHS shelter system, is the only fair way to  
17 implement a homeless priority. We call upon the City  
18 Council to encourage NYCHA to codify these changes in  
19 their Annual Plan to ensure that all homeless persons  
20 have meaningful access to housing, and that all  
21 survivors of abuse have a reasonable chance to obtain  
22 pathway to permanent housing and the safety it  
23 provides. Thank you.

24           CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Yes. sir.

2 JUDITH KAHAN: I'm going to read very  
3 fast.

4 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you, and for  
5 the record, we will be advocating for those changes  
6 very strongly.

7 ERIN FEELY-NATHEM: Thank you. I know  
8 you will.

9 JUDITH KAHAN: Good afternoon. Thank you  
10 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Judith  
11 Kahan. I am the CEO of the Center Against Domestic  
12 Violence and Co-Chair of the New York City Coalition  
13 of Domestic Violence Residential Providers. We are  
14 deeply concerned by NYCHA's decision to omit HRA  
15 domestic violence shelter residents in the N0  
16 priority designation for a public housing admission  
17 preference. In the past, in addition to the N1  
18 domestic violence priority, domestic violence shelter  
19 residents have been given access to N0 homeless  
20 priority. Families using HRA DV shelters have made  
21 themselves homeless in trying to protect themselves  
22 and their children. These families are homeless  
23 because it is unsafe for them to return to their  
24 homes.

2           They are just as homeless as those  
3 residing in DHS shelters with an important  
4 difference: Domestic violence survivors are not  
5 permitted to stay in a shelter beyond 180 days. If  
6 they do not obtain appropriate housing during that  
7 time, they frequently must enter the DHS shelter  
8 system. We have been informed that even after these  
9 families time out of the DV shelter system, and enter  
10 the homeless shelter system, they will not be  
11 permitted to access the NO priority. This punishes  
12 families who have made the difficult decision to  
13 leave abusive relationships. There is no justifiable  
14 reason why these families should be made to wait in  
15 the line behind other homeless families simply  
16 because they chose to seek refuge in a shelter system  
17 designed to keep their safety and service needs.

18           The NO priority should be available to  
19 all folks. NYCHA NO priority is especially important  
20 because it is literally the only viable housing  
21 option for many victims of domestic violence.  
22 Families with a head of household struggling to  
23 maintain employment will rarely be able to afford New  
24 York City rents without assistances of a subsidy. On  
25 the new Link Subsidies, providers have been informed

2 that contrary to written material, the only one  
3 available for those residing in domestic violence  
4 shelters is Link 3 subsidy. That subsidy is only  
5 funded for a period of one year, and requires  
6 families to have active public assistance cases. The  
7 failure to include meaningful access to housing for  
8 HRA shelter residents or create a positive incentive  
9 to choose the DHS system for fear that entering DHS  
10 shelters will mean long-term homelessness. The  
11 choice would result in families not receiving  
12 specialized counseling, legal advocacy, and other  
13 services designed to meet the needs of DV victims.

14 With regard to the N1 priority, the  
15 recent changes made to document requirements are a  
16 beginning but not sufficient. On July 18, 2014, it  
17 was announced that persons living in HRA domestic  
18 violence shelter can qualify for N1 priority status  
19 if their shelter work is complete and NoVA assessment  
20 form in lieu of the otherwise stringent criminal  
21 justice based documentation currently required by  
22 NYCHA. It is meaningless if this change is only  
23 applied to survivors living shelters who will take a  
24 back seat to those in the DHS shelter system  
25 receiving an N0 priority.

2           As I have already stated, award N0  
3 priority to all persons in shelter is the only fair  
4 way to implement a homeless priority. However, for  
5 those survivors who chose not to access shelter  
6 because they have a safe place to stay on a temporary  
7 basis the N1 priority has not been, but should be  
8 amended to allow the use of the NoVA Risk Assessment  
9 Tool to establish priority eligibility. We and many  
10 of our colleagues have long lamented the reliance on  
11 criminal justice documentation to establish risk and  
12 appropriateness for priority designation even though  
13 it does not establish link between prior police or  
14 court contact and elevated risk of abuse. In fact,  
15 according to most recent New York City domestic  
16 violence fatality review only a quarter of families  
17 in which family related homicides occur during the  
18 prior year-- I think you've heard this from others.  
19 Public housing is an important resource for families  
20 struggling to maintain their independence. We  
21 believe that all survivors of abuse should have a  
22 reasonable opportunity to attain a pathway to  
23 permanent housing and the safety it provides.  
24 Unfortunately, the current priority status does not  
25 allow for this. Thank you.



2 [Pause]

3 NADINE SIMON: Good afternoon Community  
4 Council. I haven't put the morning because we've  
5 been here that long. [laughs] My name is Nadine  
6 Simon. I'm a member of Voices of Women Organizing  
7 Project. I went through Safe Horizons and I'm going  
8 to permanent. I have chosen to turn my pain into  
9 power. I'm here representing the survivors of  
10 domestic violence. We organize. We have campaign  
11 development. We have movement building, power  
12 building, and membership and development. What I  
13 wanted to talk about, which you talked about earlier,  
14 of the victims of domestic violence the priority  
15 documentation requirements. Thank you so much for  
16 going through that with the panel. It was so  
17 necessary. We have the same concerns. The primary  
18 documents have about seven listings, and the second  
19 document category has five, and then the advocacy  
20 letter.

21 The advocacy letter must be dated within  
22 60 days from the date of the application or priority  
23 upgrade request. The advocacy letter must identify  
24 the perpetrator's relationship between the victim and  
25 abuser; when and where the domestic violence

2 occurred, and details of the incident. And an  
3 advocate for the relocation of the family. We have  
4 come together. We have gotten signatures from about  
5 2,000 people, and we have this form that we ask for  
6 the signatures so we can meet with NYCHA. We would  
7 like to partner with them. We want to ask NYCHA to  
8 modify the documentation that domestic violence  
9 victims must provide in order to qualify for priority  
10 housing. And you talked about that earlier.

11           So there are two other things that we  
12 would like to request from NYCHA. We would like to  
13 disclose basic information regarding the number of  
14 housing units allotted to domestic violence  
15 survivors. And, we would like them to disclose the  
16 number of people who qualify for priority housing  
17 that are victims of domestic violence. We ask this  
18 because for many years, and Laurie she talked about  
19 it earlier, how there are no statistics on this. So  
20 when we ask for something, there is nothing for us to  
21 show, or nothing from NYCHA to show how many people  
22 they helped. They mentioned like 200 families, but  
23 this has been going on for many years. So we would  
24 just like to have a meeting with them to modify the  
25 documentation. Thank you.

2 [Pause]

3 CHARLENA POWELL: Hi, my name is Charlena  
4 Powell. As a single female with no family-- Sorry,  
5 no children in my family composition, it was  
6 difficult for me to find resources that I was  
7 entitled to, but they are out there. My case is  
8 still pending in NYCHA, and my application has been  
9 approved, and it's been two years now. I have one  
10 case of a serious felony of 130.67, an order of  
11 protection, and an advocacy letter from the domestic  
12 violence shelter in which I resided in for 135 days.  
13 Since then, it's been extended to 180, and when I  
14 heard that news, I was very exhilarated for the  
15 future of domestic violence survivors coming in. But  
16 at that time, I was not a part of that rolling out.  
17 I found that in my experience, I went through HRA and  
18 they take care of their daily population at a faster  
19 pace. I did find that in my own opinion. They may  
20 be exempt to certain programs for a period of time  
21 that normal clients would have in order to perform  
22 almost immediately. I worked elections for extra  
23 money. There were plenty of food resources. In this  
24 case I called 311, and I found my nearest panty and  
25 hot meal center. At first, I felt really weird going

2 into homelessness, and going to some places. But I  
3 got to know who were the key persons that I would be  
4 interested in talking to and meeting with, and who  
5 could help make a difference. I also volunteered to  
6 get to know new people, and be surrounded by new  
7 circles. I learned how to swim through a lottery  
8 program from the City Parks website. The public  
9 libraries were a great place for me to fill out  
10 applications and use the free WiFi. I say this to  
11 any survivor who is in this room. You may take light  
12 in my experience. After all this, VOW, Voices of  
13 Women Organization Project has been pivotal in my  
14 growth and survivorship. Voices of Woman  
15 Organization Project exists to improve public policy.  
16 Its implementation and the services that women and  
17 their children turn to when escaping abuse. Our  
18 Housing Adjustments Campaign has been continuously  
19 working to improve the aspects of acquiring safe and  
20 affordable housing. And I would just like to thank  
21 everyone here for voicing this whole element of it.  
22 [sic] Thank you.

23 [Pause]

24 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: I want to thank--  
25 Yes.

2 JUDITH KAHAN: I just wanted to say  
3 there's a whole issue of single battered women that  
4 really needs to be addressed because the domestic  
5 violence shelter system is really based on a family  
6 model. And there are numerous single women who are  
7 not getting services. In addition, many of them are  
8 not really single. Many of their children are in  
9 ACS, and it's an issue that the City should begin to  
10 address.

11 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you. Thank  
12 you for adding that. I want to just thank you for  
13 the work that you do, and you can count on us to be  
14 allies. And this is only the beginning of a  
15 conversation that we're going to have here in the  
16 Council. So it's a continuing commitment. Thank you  
17 so much.

18 FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you so much.

19 JUDITH KAHAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Thank you. Thank  
21 you. Go ahead.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: So as you leave,  
23 I just wanted to just echo the sentiments of my  
24 colleague in just say that, you know, this is the  
25 beginning stages of a new administration that is

2 going to get it right. And I want to applaud Brian  
3 only who remains here from the Housing Authority,  
4 which is not often the case with a lot of our  
5 agencies that stays toward the end of a hearing. And  
6 to me it speaks to the commitment and the fact that  
7 we are going to be partners in this moving forward. I  
8 really want to applaud the DV, and I know Council  
9 Member Torres-- I don't want to say victims so I'm  
10 going to say clients. The clients that really stood  
11 tall, and shared their story, they are the reason why  
12 we do the work we do.

13           And for all of the voices we hear, we  
14 know there are many more than we don't hear. They  
15 are voices that are living in silence, and struggling  
16 in silence. I always look at these circumstances as  
17 setbacks, and it just means that you are preparing  
18 yourself for a comeback. And there are so many  
19 services out here. And we're going to have the  
20 conversations with the Housing Authority, and all of  
21 our partners in what we can do to make it right, and  
22 make this process work better. I am very concerned  
23 about the multitude of paperwork, and requirements.  
24 Because if you are in a situation where your life is  
25 at stake, you don't have time for paperwork, and I

2 recognize that. So we have to do more to streamline  
3 this process. And Ritchie and I have been working  
4 together on Public Housing and Public Safety.

5 We have had a lot of conversations, and  
6 we're going to continue to do that. Because I know  
7 that there are so many out there that don't see the  
8 work that is happening. They don't see a way out,  
9 and we're here and we're emotional because we know  
10 that lives are at stake. And I also want to  
11 recognize we received testimony from a group that's  
12 talking about elder abuse as well. Which is  
13 something else that we want to focus on. Not just  
14 domestic violence clients, with children, singles, as  
15 well as those that are seniors as well. And so, I  
16 want all of you to know that the City Council we  
17 understand what's at stake, and we're going to work  
18 with you as we move forward. So don't give up on us,  
19 and we will not give up on you. So I want to say,  
20 Gracias. [Speaking Spanish] And thank you for coming  
21 today.

22 [background discussion]

23 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: We actually have one  
24 more, a panel of one more person, a DV survivor.  
25 Thank you, sir. Thank you. Hayden Cattori [sp?].

2 Are there any other survivors who wish to speak.

3 Okay. So this will be our final panel then.

4

5 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

6 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. My name is

7 Hayden. I'm a survivor of domestic violence.

8 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

9 TRANSLATOR: I wanted to speak for a

10 woman who was here with a child, but she had to

11 leave. So I will just speak about my problem.

12 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

13 TRANSLATOR: I have three years

14 experience in domestic violence, and I just recently

15 went out for the first time seeking help.

16 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

17 TRANSLATOR: I am also undocumented, but

18 it's good to know that documentation doesn't

19 necessarily mean that you don't have a right to be

20 here.

21 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

22 TRANSLATOR: What I do want to say is

23 that we know we need a safe and stable home.

24 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

25



2 TRANSLATOR: Not for us, but for our  
3 children. Having a home definitely affects them  
4 psychologically, not having a safe home.

5 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

6 TRANSLATOR: My daughter just started  
7 school. She's three years old.

8 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

9 TRANSLATOR: At the end of November, I  
10 have to leave the shelter.

11 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

12 TRANSLATOR: That means my daughter has  
13 to leave the school and start another school  
14 depending where she goes.

15 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

16 TRANSLATOR: As adults we at least could  
17 have reason and to understand and could rationalize.

18 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

19 TRANSLATOR: But it pains me when I hear  
20 my daughter say, Mommy, we have to move again, and  
21 she is only three years old.

22 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

23 TRANSLATOR: And that's really sad, and I  
24 only have one daughter so I can't even imagine those  
25 who have multiple like three to five children.

2 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

3 TRANSLATOR: That's why I think the  
4 priority should change if we're not at the highest  
5 priority.

6 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

7 TRANSLATOR: For the person that was here  
8 and had to leave, I want to speak on.

9 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

10 TRANSLATOR: She is also undocumented.

11 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

12 TRANSLATOR: Besides being in a lower  
13 classification, we have to deal with the language  
14 barrier.

15 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

16 TRANSLATOR: She has a disabled son. So  
17 it's a special needs case.

18 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

19 TRANSLATOR: She received a letter from  
20 Housing saying that she didn't qualify, and listing  
21 her priority, which is unclear.

22 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

23 TRANSLATOR: She think she deserves a  
24 home for that special needs child.

25 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

2 TRANSLATOR: She went through 12 years of  
3 abuse, physical abuse and is very fearful.

4 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

5 TRANSLATOR: I think somebody with a  
6 special needs child deserves even more priority. Not  
7 so much my case. I think they deserve a higher  
8 priority.

9 HAYDEN CATTORI: [Speaking Spanish]

10 TRANSLATOR: Thank you.

11 [applause]

12 [Pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: So that concludes  
14 today's hearing. Chairwoman Gibson, would you like  
15 to just end with a few comments or--?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [off mic]

17 CHAIRPERSON TORRES: Okay. So obviously,  
18 I feel strongly that we're able to tackle violence in  
19 the home, and violence in our most intimate  
20 relationships with the mobilization of resources that  
21 this problem deserves. And what will flow from it is  
22 a much better society. And so when we solve domestic  
23 violence, we're not just solving that problem. We're  
24 solving a much wider range of problems. With that

25

2 said, it was not at all today's hearing. And this  
3 hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

4 [gavel]

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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 October 19, 2014