

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

----- X

April 21, 2016
Start: 9:41 a.m.
Recess: 1:59 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Annabel Palma
Fernando Cabrera
Ruben Wills
Vanessa L. Gibson
Corey D. Johnson
Ritchie J. Torres
Barry S. Grodenchik
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

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

Steven Banks
Commissioner of Department of Social Services

Erin Drinkwater [sp?]
Human Resources Administration

Douglas Apple
Samaritan Village

Muzzy Rosenblatt
Bowery Residence Committee

Alexander Horwitz
The Doe Fund

Joan Montbach
Homeless Services United

Giselle Routhier
Coalition for the Homeless

Joshua Goldfein
Legal Aid Society

Stephanie Gendell
Citizens Committee for Children

Wendy O'Shields
Safety Net

Deborah Dickerson
Safety Net

Michelle Jackson
Human Services Council

James Butler

Catherine Trapani
New Destiny Housing

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

Terry Grace
St. James Madison Avenue Shelter

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning, everybody. I'm Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare, and I want to thank everybody for coming out this morning for today's important hearing. Last week, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the results of the comprehensive 90-day review of New York City's homeless programs. This review resulted in new procedural reforms and 46 substantive reforms broken out into four areas: First, prevention. Second, street homelessness. Third, shelter, and fourth, rehousing. For 90 days Commissioner Banks and his team consulted with clients, staff, providers, advocacy groups, former Commissioners, and other external partners to develop reforms that would build on the ongoing efforts of this Administration to tackle the crisis of homelessness. According to the Administration, if the efforts they have already taken over the past two years were not put in place, the shelter census today would be over 71,000 individuals instead of just under 58,000 which is what it is today. This review was intended to build upon the efforts that this Administration has undertaken over the last two years and several

months. Prior to 1993, HRA was in charge of services to the homeless. As a result of a Commission appointed by Mayor David Dinkins and chaired by now Governor Andrew Cuomo to develop solutions to the problems of homelessness, this Council enacted a law that created the Department of Homeless Services as a separate agency in the City Charter to oversee and address homelessness. At the time the law was enacted there were 6,000 families with 9,700 children and 7,500 individuals residing in transitional housing. Today, as we look again to the structure of this system, those numbers have just about doubled. As a result of this review, the Administration is proposing a partial merger of those two agencies. We will have one commissioner overseeing these two agencies and services will be combined to maximize efficiency. DHS's main focus will be overseeing the portfolio of more than 250 shelters that house homeless individuals and families across New York City. The review also proposes many substantive reforms including expanded preventative services to keep people out of the shelter system, increasing services to the unsheltered homeless population, improving conditions and creating programing in the

shelters, and streamline rehousing efforts. Today, we are here to discuss and evaluate these reforms. This committee is interested in learning how these changes to HRA and DHS's portfolios will serve to improve services to client. We also expect to hear more details on how many of these reforms--on many of these reforms and how the agencies expect to achieve these efforts. We are very interested in hearing from those of you who are here today to testify about your opinion on these reforms and any suggestions that you have for ways that these reforms can be changed and improved or expanded upon. I'd like to thank Commissioner Banks and his team for their dedication in improving the system and for providing the highest qualities of services to the 58,000 individuals living in shelter. I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues who are here today, Council Member Annabel Palma of the Bronx and Barry Grodenchik of Queens. We are also expecting other members of the committee to join us during the hearing. I would also like to thank the staff of the General Welfare Committee, Andrea Vasquez [sp?], Counsel, Tanya Cyrus, Policy Analyst, Doheni Sampora [sp?], Unit Head, Namira Nushud [sp?], Finance

Analyst, and the Public Safety Committee for their work in preparing for this hearing. I'd also like to welcome my new staff who are here today, new Chief of Staff Johnathan Bouche [sp?], new Legislative Director, Julie Barrow [sp?], who has done a lot of work in the last few weeks in leading up to this hearing, and Edward Paulino [sp?], new Budget Director. And now, Commissioner, I would like to swear you in before your testimony. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to Council Members' questions?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Feel free to begin.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good morning Chairperson Levin and members of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the outcome of the Mayor's comprehensive operational review of homeless programs to ensure that services are delivered efficiently and effectively as possible in order to prevent and alleviate homelessness in New York City. These were the reforms that were announced on April

11th. I'm joined here today with Erin Drinkwater [sp?] from HRA. My name for the record is Steven Banks, and I'm the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services overseeing the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services. On December 15, 2015, the Mayor ordered a review of homeless services and he asked First Deputy Mayor Tony Shorris, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations Mindy Tarlow, and I to conduct the review, and following her appointment, Deputy Mayor for Health and services Herminia Palacio joined in the effort. During the review period, I oversaw the operations of the Department of Homeless Services in my capacity as Administrator and Commissioner of the local social services district in New York City. As described in the 90-day review report, there has been a 115 percent increase in homelessness over the past two decades, from 23,526 New Yorkers on January 1, 1994 to 33,194 New Yorkers on January 1, 2002 to nearly 51,000 on January 1, 2014. Based on this trajectory we were heading to a shelter census of 71,000 next year before this Administration's prevention and rehousing programs took hold. During this two-decade buildup of homelessness in New York

City, New York City has faced increasing economic inequality as a result of low wages, the lack of affordable housing and an increased cost of living. Today, approximately 46 percent of New Yorkers live near poverty, and approximately 21 percent live below the poverty line. This income inequality and the resulting gap between income and rent combined with other drivers of homelessness such as domestic violence, overcrowding, eviction are what bring people to our shelter system. We did not arrive at this point overnight, and it'll take some time to address the multifaceted drivers of homelessness. The review directed by the Mayor was guided by three principles, providing quality services to vulnerable clients, efficient use of city resources, and achieving cost effectiveness by avoiding duplication. The 46 reforms developed as a result of this review build on initiatives this Administration has already undertaken to prevent and alleviate homelessness, including comprehensive rental assistance programs, historic funding allocated for civil legal services, for tenant and ant-harassment and anti-eviction programs, and a commitment to the preservation and creation of 200,000 units of affordable housing.

Over the past two years the new rental assistance programs and other permanent housing initiatives have enabled 32,352 children and adults and 11,038 households to avert entry into or move out of DHS and HRA shelters. The coinciding with the historic increased investment in civil legal services and the increased payment of rent arrears to prevent evictions, we've seen a 24 percent decline in evictions over the past two years. But these initiatives alone are not enough. That is why we didn't wait until the end of the 90-day review period to implement further reforms. During the review period itself we took these actions to enhance client services. We moved forward with a plan to provide 15,000 new units of supportive housing over the next 15 years. We moved forward with an initiative to provide additional tier two and emergency beds for the domestic violence shelter system, doubling the number of domestic violence survivor beds with the first increase since 2010. We move forward with a plan to triple the number of dedicated youth beds for runaway and homeless youth, and we moved forward with a plan to double the number of drop-in centers to provide services to help bring homeless individuals

off the streets. And during the review period we implemented specific reforms related to those living in shelter. We created the shelter repair scorecard to track improvements in shelter conditions. We implemented an enhanced shelter repair program. We increased security at all commercial hotels that house homeless families and individuals. We provided 24/7 security coverage at mental health shelters. We overhauled the city's reporting on critical incidents in shelters. We restored a program for domestic violence services at shelters that was eliminated in 2010. We initiated a New York City Police Department shelter security review and a retraining of Department of Homeless Services Peace Officers, and we announced and began to implement a plan to end the 16-year old cluster shelter program and the use of commercial hotels. For this 90-day review period, leadership and staff from the Administration including HRA, DHS and the Mayor's Office of Operations assessed the strengths and challenges of the current homeless services system in order to determine how to deliver client services more effectively and to improve client outcomes. We conducted a comprehensive review of this homeless

services policies and practices. The review included interviews with a variety of stakeholders. The Mayor's Office of Operations Director Mindy Tarlow, City Hall, Health and Human Services staff, PWC consultants, and I interviewed more than 400 people. We met with homeless people in shelters, on the streets and in focus groups, advocates, shelter and homeless services providers, other nonprofit organizations, national experts and researchers, former DHS Commissioners and elected officials, and staff union leadership and managers and staff at DHS, HRA and other city agencies. We also surveyed best practices in other jurisdictions and received feedback from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. In all, 24 different government agencies and 60 nonprofit providers participated in the review process. As indicated in the report, client focus groups were conducted with four homeless advocacy organizations in order to obtain direct client feedback. The focus groups were convened by the Coalition for the Homeless, the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project, Picture the Homeless, and VOCAL. More than 80 clients shared their experience directly with me and provided

feedback on the delivery of services to staff and me. Clients focused primarily on issues surrounding shelter conditions and policies, social services delivery and housing. Additional client discussions were conducted in shelters and on the streets during visits in the evening and during the day in outreach efforts. A survey was also sent to DHS staff and a random sample of clients to assess what services are most important to address homelessness from the perspective of staff and clients. More than 700 DHS staff responded and participated in the online survey, and 630 randomly identified clients across shelter populations and types were surveyed. Both clients and staff overwhelmingly reported that rehousing programs and processes are the biggest area of opportunity for reform with 34 percent of clients and 27 percent of staff citing it as the most critical issue. Within rehousing, staff and clients commented on the need to streamline rental assistance, have greater availability of affordable and supportive housing and provide recourse for landlord source of income discrimination. A process analysis of prevention and intake capacity planning and projections and shelter operations was conducted

to identify strengths of the system and areas of opportunity for reform. Through shelter and intake center visits, stakeholder interviews and review of operations, we were able to identify where clients interact with multiple agencies and where there are gaps in overlap and service delivery. Over the past two decades, homelessness in New York City as reflected in the DHS shelter system has increased exponentially, particularly after the precipitous end to the Advantage rental assistance program in 2011. This is a product of today's economic realities, increasing income inequality, rents rising and stagnant wages. The reforms resulting from a 90-day review will cost an estimated 66 million dollars, which will be offset by 38 million dollars in administrative savings. These reforms can be categorized in four broad categories, prevention, addressing street homelessness, sheltering, and rehousing. In terms of prevention, the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is a key proponent of many of the reforms that we have implemented over the past two years. In order to enhance our prevention efforts, we will take these actions: Move the HomeBase program management form

DHS to HRA. Expand HomeBase staffing and services. Expand the scope of HomeBase as the first point of entry for those at risk of homelessness. Use data analytics to proactively target prevention services for at-risk clients. Target services and rental assistance for youth in DYCD shelters at risk of entry into DHS shelters. Target services and rental assistance for clients with mental health needs, cycling between jail and homelessness. We're also proposing two new city state taskforces, one that will develop and implement alternatives to avert discharges from prisons to DHS shelters, and one that will work to implement community-based programs to eliminate the need for DHS mental health shelters. These two client groups account for a large proportion of the census in the city's single adult shelters. The City's street homelessness reforms work together to better identify, engage and transition homeless New Yorkers from the streets to appropriate services and permanent housing. The full launch of the Homeless Outreach Mobile Engagement Street Action Teams, HOME-STAT, builds on our street homelessness prevention response initiatives that have been in place, and enhanced funding for

additional safe haven beds, drop-in centers and supportive housing units ensures that those living on the streets have opportunities to come inside and connect to the services and support they need.

Implemented in March, HOME-STAT is the nation's most comprehensive street outreach program with nearly 500 workers to help transition homeless individuals from the streets and into shelters. The program will enable the city to better address the needs of New Yorkers who are homeless and on the streets, and we've also committed to developing 500 new safe haven beds. This increased availability of low threshold options for those who need assistance, but are not willing to enter shelter will be essential to connecting individuals to services and supports to ultimately bring them in from the streets and into permanent housing. The supportive housing plan will provide an additional tool to address street homelessness with a long proven track record of success. These reforms coupled with a citywide HOME-STAT case management system will enhance city service integration, continuous monitoring and outreach, and rapid response to individuals on the street improving the quality of life for both clients and City

residents. We're very grateful that Michael Jacobson will be working with us on this citywide case management initiative. He brings years of experience in government service having previously served as Commissioner of three city agencies as well as the President of the Vera Institute for Justice. All of these initiatives to address street homelessness recognize that the pathway to the streets is not linear, and the pathway back off the streets therefore could not be a one-size-fits-all approach, especially as we head into warmer months, it's also important to remember that not all who are on the street are in fact homeless. And as the Mayor has announced with the launch of HOME-STAT to better understand our street homelessness population, we'll be conducting more frequent street counts to assist us in determining solutions in the problem of street homelessness and provide transparent reporting on what we find. With the exponential increase in the shelter population that has occurred over the past two decades, it has become increasingly difficult for DHS to adequately oversee and monitor providers, ensure safe, clean and secure conditions and provide necessary services to clients. Shelter safety can be

improved through the deployment of an NYPD management team to DHS to develop an action plan to upgrade security at all shelters and the NYPD's retraining the DHS Peace Officers. The City is creating a multi-pronged approach to improving shelter conditions by establishing a unit of city staff to observe conditions, monitor services and determine vacancies, streamlining the inspection process for providers and expanding the DHS capital repair program. In addition to addressing the physical infrastructure and safety needs for clients, we are implementing new programs to create career employment pathways and enhance education and training services for clients in shelter. Phasing out the use of clusters and commercial hotels is also essential to improving shelter conditions and services. In addition to the reforms we have already begun implementing during the review period. The report includes a road map for further reforms including rationalizing shelter provider rates, addressing ADA compliance in shelters, expanding the scope of HRA's ADA coordinator to cover the shelter system, targeting services for emerging new trends in the single adult population, particularly for clients 50

and older and between the ages of 18 and 24,
targeting services for families based on individual
needs to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach,
eliminating the requirement of school-aged children
to be present at PATH for multiple appointments,
aligning access procedures for adult families with
procedures for families with children, streamlining
access to DYCD shelter for homeless youth,
implementing a tripling a DYCD shelter capacity for
runaway homeless youth, providing increased notice
prior to non-emergency transfers within the shelter
system, increasing transportation resources to reduce
placement waiting time, deploying social workers to
accompany families found ineligible who are returning
to a community resource to provide on the spot
assistance, expanding the shelter conditions
complaint process through HRA's info line, and
communicating information to clients through fliers,
posters and other media. Rehousing and keeping
families and individuals in their homes by assisting
them with rent or with legal services are
significantly more cost-effective for tax payers than
to pay the cost of shelter for a family or
individual. From our recent experience in

1 establishing a unified management structure to
2 achieve the goal of ending chronic veteran's
3 homelessness as certified by HUD, we will replicate
4 such a structure to promote overall shelter move-
5 outs. The current rental assistance programs will be
6 streamlined through a consolidation HRA and process
7 improvements. And in order to ensure effective usage
8 of the programs, the City will increase enforcement
9 of the source of income discrimination local law.
10 Additional rehousing reforms include streamlining the
11 HPD housing placement, continuing to utilize NYCHA
12 placements to address homelessness, implementing a
13 more effective aftercare program, providing
14 assistance to obtain federally disability benefits
15 for clients to promote shelter move-outs,
16 incorporating the federal continuum of care strategic
17 planning process in homeless strategy development,
18 and establishing leadership reporting structure for
19 the continuum of care in New York City, providing
20 clear and concise information and written materials
21 to clients about available assistance and programs.
22 We're also proposing to the State to permit use of
23 Medicaid funds for apartment search and shelter
24 relocation services for homeless clients with
25

disabilities and to approve HRA's requests FEPS plan modifications. The 90-day review concluded that client services can be provided more seamlessly and effectively through integrated management for HRA and DHS. Both HRA and DHS report to a single Commissioner of Social Services. The City will leverage shared services functions across agencies resulting in better day-to-day management and building on an integrated mission across the agencies. Prevention rehousing will be moved out of DHS operations integrated within current HRA prevention operations to advance accountability for preventing and alleviating homelessness across multiple city agencies, the city will create an Interagency Homelessness Accountability Council, reporting to the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, Herminia Palacio. The accompanying slides that we have been presenting to you provide more detail concerning each of the 46 recommendations contained in the 90-day report, and I look forward in this testimony to explaining them in further detail as your question ask for that detail. However, as we proceed with implementation of these reform efforts, we will continue to identify ways in which our

programs to prevent alleviate homelessness can be improved beyond these 46 reforms. While a lot has been accomplished through the 90-day review period, we know there is much more to do. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and we welcome your questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Commissioner. I really appreciate the comprehensive review here for the committee and the public. I want to start by just asking some very general questions. If you can explain the, out the outset here, the structure of how you as Commissioner of Social Services will be leading both agencies, because it's somewhat--obviously, it's a different structure than has been in place for the last couple of decades. Can you just explain a little bit of how that will work? Who's then going to be kind of the lead individual for DHS itself under you as Commissioner, and kind of explain a little bit more of the structure there?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure, and let me also go back to the underlying factors that we looked at in developing and implementing the structure, which is from the client perspective, and the sense

that clients go to multiple places frequently being asked the same questions by multiple different city agencies and city contracts, and that that structure impeded the fact of timely efficient delivery of services, and by bringing all of the services whether they're called HRA services or DHS services under the same roof, we see opportunities for addressing those client perspective problems that we saw and heard about during the review. At the same time, there are distinct services provided by DHS and distinct services provided by HRA. We wanted to preserve the distinctness of the mission of each of the agencies by bringing them under one roof, but similarly we saw efficiencies that could be repurposed for the reforms by providing administrative support in a more efficient way by having there be one, you know, legal operation, one finance operation, one program integrity operation, one facilities operation, one contracting operation, that that would streamline services for both the two agencies and also streamline interactions for external active [sic] contractors for example. And so the approach is one of taking all of the so-called back office functions, administrative functions, and have those support both

of the agencies, both HRA and DHS. Those support functions will be reporting to the Commissioner of Department of Social Services, and each of the agencies, HRA and DHS, will then be left with an operational mission as opposed to dealing with budget and all that there is administrative support, and there are already existing ways in which the administrative processes will be led, and you're correct to identify that each of the agency components, the HRA direct services component and the DHS direct services component, will each have an administrator, a chief social services administrator and a chief homeless services administrator. Those individuals are being selected, and we, when we're ready to announce it we will, but we think that's a structure that will have a commissioner overseeing to interconnect integrated services, homelessness and all of the range of HRA social services and also a unique, an integrated administrative structure, and the administrative structure will be overseen by the Commissioner, but two individuals will lead one social services, one homeless services.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, in your review, obviously you looked at the history of how DHS came

1 to be and through significant number of reviews back
2 in the 1990's as well as legislation from the City
3 Council, multiple pieces of legislation with the City
4 Council at the time, and what led you and your team
5 to believe--what's changed on the ground that makes
6 that structure or you believe that structure either
7 no longer optimal or perhaps obsolete now?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think it's
10 also important to remember that in choosing an
11 integrated structure, I mean, we had a continuum of
12 potential choices. One was a merger of the agencies.
13 One was to leave two separate functioning agencies.
14 Another was to create an integrated service delivery.
15 So, in seeing the perspective of the clients we saw
16 the need for integrated service delivery from a
17 client perspective, but also from an efficient use of
18 city resources and an administrative efficiency
19 perspective putting the administrative support in a
20 unified support structure we think will result in
21 more effective service delivery for clients and more
22 efficient use of city resources. The structure that
23 we're moving forward with preserves all options. At
24 some future time one could merge the agencies. At
25 some future time one could pursue separate agencies,

but we think for this moment for what we've seen happen over the last two decades with 115 percent increase in homelessness over the last two decades, that there's a critical need to focus on integrated service delivery and that's the model we selected.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Beyond the client perspective issues that you're identifying, is there anything else that jumped out at you or that you did not anticipate encountering in this review that has led your team to believe that it's more appropriate to combine functions of the agencies? Is there anything that jumped out at you that you did not realize was there, a certain inefficiencies, things that weren't functioning in the way that they ought to have been?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, look, in my perspective, as you know, comes from suing both agencies for about 30 years in one case and 20 years in the other case and running one of them for the last two years. So, the team and I looked at what were service delivery inefficiencies that affected timeliness and effectiveness for clients, but also from a city perspective were there potential for

savings that we could reinvest in the reforms, and
so--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But was
there anything that jumped at you, you said, whoa,
this is an area that is in desperate need of reform,
or this is not--structurally, I'm not talking about
anything that's having to do with any personnel. Is
there anything that you said jumped out at you and
you said this is really--or maybe you were aware of
it because of your experience with the system
already?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I took a lot of
depositions over the years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: But I think also from
just an operational perspective, you know, some of
this comes from my perspective of becoming head of
the Legal Aid Society when we were--when the agency
was about to go bankrupt, and what were the
structural changes that made that organization into a
healthy financially stable organization. So, looking
at duplication services, looking at streamlining
administrative processes were the kinds of tools that
were used there and they were certainly from my

colleagues in government and elsewhere. Those are the same kinds of tools that we have looked at to improve operations here, looking for administrative efficiencies, looking to use city dollars most effectively, and looking to repurpose city dollars to support the reforms, but I don't think in looking at how things were operating that it was, "Well, that was something we didn't know about." It's been a, "Okay, well that makes sense from client perspective in terms of issues clients are raising, makes sense from a staff perspective at DHS and HRA, in terms of issues the staff had identified, makes sense from a, you know, overall city government analysis of things." I think, too, there's been a lot of focus on the structure of DHS and HRA. I think that the Accountability Council is particularly a point, important. They'll be led by Deputy Mayor Palacio, in that it brings together all city agencies to really focus on the importance of preventing and alleviating homelessness. That's an equally important initiative to the structural reforms within HRA and DHS.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: On that point, actually, the Administrative Code requires now an

1 Interagency Coordinating Council on Homelessness
2 under Section 21-307 and an Advisory Board which is
3 to include homelessness individuals in Section 21-
4 306, neither of which have been in existence for some
5 time. Ninety-day review recommends the establishment
6 of an interagency task force. Can you explain? I
7 mean, what's been the perspective there? Obviously,
8 you've been aware of that requirement under the
9 Administrative Code, and is that--is there a reason
10 why that has yet to been in panel? We, obviously, we
11 looked at doing legislation around creating
12 interagency taskforce that came back to us that
13 something's been--that that law's been in existence
14 for 15 years.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think, you know,
17 like many aspects that I touched on in the written
18 testimony, that's another problem that didn't happen
19 overnight; built up over many years. One thing that
20 I think has been unique from my perspective, outside
21 government now being inside government, is--one of
22 the things that I think has been unique for this
23 Administration actually has been coordination among
24 the housing agencies and social services agencies and
25 regular ongoing discussions and meetings. So, the

process that the interagency council legislation was intended to address has been operational. The 90-day review recommendation is actually to take the process to a much more enhanced level. So we think that the formality of even the language that we're using in terms of accountability is part of moving forward from past efforts and continue to make the progress that we've been making with collaboration and cooperation and regular ongoing meetings with the housing agencies and the social services agencies.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sure this is true for you as well, but over the last several years, some of the most insightful advice and recommendations that I've received have come from both advocates, homeless individuals and providers. Is there any intent to include those groups or individuals in the Advisory Board or on the, you know, on the coordinating counselor, the taskforce whatever--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Well, as you can see in the review itself there is a great prominence placed on obtaining input from clients, input from providers, input from organizations that advocate for and provide services to people who are

1 facing imminent homelessness or are homeless, and
2 certainly as we move forward we're going to be
3 looking for structures to make sure that kind of
4 input that was invaluable for the 90 days continues.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean, it's
6 certainly something that I'm going to be continuing
7 to look at as we move forward, because I think it
8 would be very appropriate just on a long term
9 structural level to have that type of input ongoing,
10 you know, on into the future and future
11 Administrations.
12

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely. Again,
14 it was extraordinarily valuable as part of the 90-day
15 review, and it will continue to be valuable as we
16 move forward, that sort of input.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. As you're
18 well aware, I mean, the last thing we want is, you
19 know, something of an echo chamber within the
20 Administration. We need outside voices.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely. As you
22 know, I've testified fairly frequently before the
23 Council, so there's plenty of opportunity for outside
24 voices, and there will continue to be, and as I said,
25 it was quite conscious that we provided structures

for clients receiving the services to be able to speak directly to a commissioner about concerns that they had.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Last question, and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues. Is there a reason why you and your team decided not to fully combine the two agencies, you know, and go for a full merger?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We wanted to preserve all options, and also we wanted to move--we wanted to move as quickly as possible. Certainly the conversations with the clients reinforced the urgency of moving as quick as possible. So we thought by integrating services that we could preserve the option to merge fully at some future point or return to a separate agency in some future point determining--depending on how things proceed.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues. First, I just want to welcome Council Member Donovan Richards of Queens, and Annabel Palma for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Commissioner, and I just want to applaud this Administration for continuing to

recognize that in order to move this city forward in a positive way we need the collaboration of agencies and to tackle the issue of homelessness we definitely need to make sure that all agencies who are dealing with this population are working together. So, I want to commend you for that. I want to focus on the reform of HomeBase. The review includes several reforms to the systems made [sic] prevention program of HomeBase. Program management of HomeBase will move from DHS to HRA. Staffing and services will be expanded and the scope of the program will be expanded to make it first point of entry for those at risk of homelessness. So, I want to know a little bit more about what changes by moving HomeBase to HRA and what are those benefits that the public can expect by that move.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you for your kind words. In terms of HomeBase, one of the first reforms that we made at HRA two years ago was to put HRA staff in the HomeBase offices to try to address the problem of clients going to HomeBase, but then needing to go to an HRA center even to have a preliminary evaluation of whether or not the client might be eligible for a benefit or not. So, by

1 deploying HRA staff already in the HomeBase offices
2 as we did two years ago, we were tending to
3 streamline those services. One of the--among the key
4 tools that HomeBase has is the payment of rent arrears
5 and the connection to legal services, and those are
6 already operating within HRA as part of HRA's
7 prevention, homeless prevention services, and so it
8 made sense to consolidate the remaining piece of
9 prevention with those other--with the oversight and
10 management of those other services. In meeting with
11 the HomeBase providers, they talked about service gap
12 in terms of the focus on evictions and not having
13 within their scope the ability to focus on other
14 kinds of services that people may come to HomeBase in
15 need of that could keep them housed, mediation
16 services, other kinds of social services. And so by
17 partnering HRA staff with not-for-profit staff, the
18 HRA staff having the tools for connection to legal
19 services and the tools for payment or rent arrears, we
20 want to expand the scope of the terrific partners in
21 the HomeBase offices to provide additional services
22 to help keep people in their homes. The model of
23 entry into the shelter system that gave rise to
24 HomeBase was in part focused on eviction prevention
25

exclusively, and we're obviously having an impact on preventing evictions in the City with expansion of legal services and rent arrears payments reducing evictions by 24 percent. We want to keep making progress there, but we also want to expand the scope of what the HomeBase staff can do to reach other kind of problems that people are coming to HomeBase in need of. There are many people that we see that come to PATH, the shelter entry point at DHS, who could have been helped at an earlier point, and we want to make sure that everyone who could be helped in an early point is, and so we will be developing new programs with HomeBase providers to experiment on new service delivery models to encourage clients to get those services in the community and to encourage us to make sure we're providing the services that are needed in the community to avoid having to go to PATH to get services that we should be providing the community.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: So, I know that through the HomeBase campaign and making the public aware of the homeless prevention services that we're providing, many people took advantage of that and actually instead of going to PATH went directly to

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

effectively as we can along exactly the lines that you're wanting us to.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Will homeless families be able to apply if they qualify to be in shelter at their HomeBase office, or will they then be told to go to PATH and apply?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, we don't want to make a full systems change on that type of process until we can see how best to make it work, and we're going to begin to roll it out. That's been the approach we've taken with a number of the reforms at HRA over the last two years. Implement, see what the response is, fine-tune, and then implement system wide. So we will be working exactly on the lines that you're describing, and I know you have been working with many clients that we periodically talk about, and I'm happy to receive any input you have from your perspective on the client experience.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Will--have any communities, those specific HomeBase offices, have been identified already through the 90 review period to start this model?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're in conversation with certain HomeBase providers. I

think as we proceed we'll be making that information available, but we're at the stage now of the discussions with which HomeBase to expand and how to get going with that, and we'll have more to say as we proceed.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Great. And then my last question is around the HRA and DHS to report to the single Commissioner of Social Services. Has that person been identified? How often will you be reporting to that person, and what should be the outcomes in terms of the reports?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: In terms of the Chief Homeless Services Administrator and the Chief Social Services Administrator, we're in the process of identifying those two individuals.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you so much, Commissioner, and I look forward to being a partner and making sure that this rolls out in a correct way where we're helping more families stay in their communities and out of shelter. Thank you, Council Member Levin.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Palma. We've been joined by Council

Member Corey Johnson of Manhattan, and we're going to turn it over to Barry Grodenchik of Queens.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I have to pull on my glasses and take them off, so if you'll excuse me.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I understand that problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I just want to follow up on what the--a bit of what the Chair talked about. Can you tell the Committee and the people here what is the single biggest problem that you think you've identified with this review?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I wish it were as simple as to say there's one big problem. Let me tell you several if I may.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I'll take several.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay. I think that what we found when we've implemented reforms at HRA and now looking at the shelter system and homeless

issues as well through the DHS perspective that there's a confluence of many different drivers that are leading to homelessness, and the built up of it is 20 years. That's why there's been 115 percent increase. For some people it's a question of the gap between income and rent, and the minimum wage increase is important there. That's also important from an HRA perspective because there's 27,000 heads of household on the HRA case load that are working but are eligible for HRA cash assistance because of the current level, and so that's a hopeful path forward. The rising rents are a factor there. And so, if you sort of look at a series of solutions to that, the rental assistance programs, the Mayor's Housing Plan, those are solutions aimed at that big problem. Mental health needs are a significant problem and the supportive housing plan is aimed at that, and the street homelessness services are really aimed at that, but one of the things that's become evident is, you know, we have 27 mental health shelters, and so we're running essential defecto [sic] mental health system within the shelter system, which is reflective of challenges in the broader society. The First Lady's and the Mayor's

1 initiatives in expanding mental health services ear
2 critically important, but we really want to focus on
3 the need for mental health services in the community
4 to move away from centrally running a mental health
5 system within the shelter system. That's one series
6 of issues. I think the employment is an important
7 issue and that's why the services of increasing
8 employment within the shelter system and the precinct
9 access to education and credentials is helpful to
10 move people out. Source of income discrimination is
11 something that's been the subject of hearings--of
12 questions at hearings here and that's one of the
13 reasons why we're expanding efforts there. Shelter
14 conditions and security are issues that have built up
15 over many years, and so the police review is
16 important to help us with that, the focus on street
17 homelessness and creating pathways off the streets.
18 There are a number of really big substantive issues.

19
20 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: The big
21 tamale.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But I want to also so
23 that as a--look, I'm an optimist by nature. I've
24 said this before in testimony, so I'm still saying it
25 under oath. I remain an optimist by nature. The

structure that we are moving forward with is one that think gives us a lot of positive forward motion by looking for administrative efficiencies and repurposing those savings to the reforms, and I know in prior hearings regarding HRA that the committee asked a lot about that we were able to keep the budget at HRA relatively constant notwithstanding a full reform effort, and so we've been trying to take the full effort. That's effort here, but I want to continue to caution us all. The trajectory for homelessness was 71,000. We have obtained some stability in the system and we will be moving to make reductions, but it is not going to be an overnight process. It took two years to break the trajectory where we had gotten to with the increases that we had seen, but we will continue to make that progress, and we'll be continuing reporting to this committee. Obviously conditions in shelter and safety in shelter are prominent issues for us, which is why we're investing so much resources in both police--about the shelter condition repairs and then the police review in terms of providing recommendations for an action plan to improve safety.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: You know, follow-up on your comment, you know, about running a mental health system within, you know, the homeless services world, I am, and a lot of my constituents, are reporting to me, you know, just a seemingly dramatic increase of mentally ill people. I know you're not the Commissioner of Health. Is there a lot of outreach in the subway system? I haven't seen an outreach team. I assume they're there. I'm just wondering how you're getting to those folks.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Actually, there's a joint effort that we have with the MTA. We have--we contract with the Bowery Residence Committee that does outreach in the subways. I've been out with them and seen directly the kind of work they do. That is very difficult work to persuade people to come in off the streets. These are people that have fallen through every social safety net that there is, and the work that BRC, the Bowery Residence Committee, is doing is bringing people in one by one, but I do think that the observations that constituents and others have are reflective of the larger drivers that have built up over a period of time. We want to get those people in. The safe haven expansion, the

supportive housing expansion are critical tools to give to an organization like BRC that's in the subways in this joint effort with the MTA.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I appreciate the expansion of those programs because I think, you know, it's always been very frustrating going back for many years. You have history, as you've said, of suing to keep people in their homes. That's the number one step, I think. Once they're out of the home, a lot gets lost, all those support networks that they may have.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: And with the Chairs permission I would ask that he and you or we'll have an agreement that you would come back perhaps in the early fall after the summer to discuss how the reforms are going.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I know there'll be an invitation, and I'll certainly be here.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I should add, by the way, to your question. One of the things that HOME-STAT did was expand our ability to have increased staffing in the outreach teams. So, BRC, as the

subway team, has gotten additional staffing, and we value that effort in the same way that I know you're concerned about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Grodenchik. Council Member Donovan Richards of Queens?

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Commissioner Banks. I want to thank you for all the work you're doing to really reform our system, and I know it's a big task and has been systematic challenges here for before you came on board I'm sure, but I wanted to delve in a little bit into shelter operations.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: So, I know your particular department sent out letters regarding code violations to shelter operators basically telling them they could be removed from the system based on the state budget and wanted to know how many letters actually were sent out to operators who are--who do have particular amount or significant amount of violations from your agency.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We did two things.
One is we sent out a letter to all shelter providers
highlighting the fact that many had--

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: [interposing]
How many?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Every shelter
provider, so that's hundreds of shelter providers.
We sent a letter out to all of the shelter providers
highlighting our appreciation for those who are
working with us to make the repairs and reduce
significantly the number of violations, which I'll
get to in a moment, and also highlighting our concern
about those who are not working with us and
indicating that we were going to begin to communicate
to shelter providers who are not working with us.
So, we communicated that to all of them, and then we
also communicated to them our interest in whether any
of them would be--would avail themselves of working
with us to replace deficient shelter providers,
because obviously simply removing the provider, you
have to a provider willing to operate in place. We
then began the process with deficient providers by
starting with two that had a high number of

violations, and we are in the process with those two providers--

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: [interposing]
What's a high number?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We looked at initially more than five violations per unit, and--

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: [interposing]
Per unit?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Per unit.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Wow, okay.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we will continue to work through the list of providers once we conclude the process with those particular ones. This is a fluid process. We took--during the 90-day review we took the following approach to shelter conditions. First, let's inspect everything from a baseline. So we said--we started with a process to be able to make sure that we knew how many violations there were, and let me sort of give you the top line. At the end of March, following inspections and following repairs, and I want to give you some more detail on that because I appreciate your question. At the end of March in the non-cluster shelters, so the traditional shelters, there were 5,852

violations. This is in more than 300 shelters. That's compared to 10,474 violations at the end of January. So, that's a decline of 44 percent. How was that accomplished? It was accomplished by city staff and city contractors making repairs and providers making repairs, but we wanted to--in order to fix things, we needed to know the full extent of the problem, and there's been, as you know, audits that have been done by the State, by the Comptroller. We appreciate the partnership with both the Comptroller and the State Comptroller and OTDA in identifying problems, but we wanted to make sure that things that have built up over many years because of disinvestment, that we understood what's the baseline. So we went out there, we inspected, and we began to work with providers. So, we got to the point of the communication last week, because now we're through 90 days, and we've made substantial progress, but we want to continue to drive that number down so that the families and the individuals--

-

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: [interposing]

So--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: can have appropriate-live in appropriate conditions.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: So when will all 5,852 outstanding violations be cured?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, here's the challenge with the remaining violations. Many of those are significant capital problems that have built up over years. So what we have focused on is the violations that can be addressed without major capital repairs. One indicator that we focused on were the number of high priority violations. So there were 641 high priority violations. This is your, you know, common problems, you know what I'm saying, to be a C violation. That's been reduced to 249. Some of those C's relate to systems problems, which we're continuing to work through, but again, clearing 7,496 violations at more than 300 different sites over a two-month period of time is a substantial undertaking, but I want to again level said expectations. Now we're in into systems changes that need to made in some of these buildings, and as part of our capital budget process for the next month, we will be able to make some projections about the timing for those capital repairs.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: And how--and you'll be able to come back to us, to the Chair in particular, and give him the exact amount obviously of how much capital you're putting aside and how much of this capital will cure violations. Can you give a guestimate of how many violations could be cured with the proposed--some of the proposed capital allocations you're looking at?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'd prefer to wait until we get through the Executive Budget process. Our focus right now, and I appreciate your question, our focus now during this last two months has been on clearing the violations that we could clear without major capital repairs, and then assessing the major capital repairs as part of our budget process. But again, we will continue to make repairs that are non-capital, but as they get more diffuse in smaller numbers of locations, it's harder to reach more locations, but we will come back to you with that information.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Okay. So, I'm sure there's some bad actors that I'm sure have a history of significant violations. What are we doing to ensure that these people have no place in securing

any contracts with the City of New York moving forward and possibly revoking them from operating shelters, period?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, I want to answer your question, but if I may I'd like to move to talk about the clusters, because the information that I've been giving you relates to the non-cluster shelters. The cluster program is that 16-year-old program in which apartments were rented in buildings via, and now they're rented via contracts with a range of not-for-profit providers, and we've identified the closure of the clusters as a high priority for us, and the clusters have more violations than the numbers that I just described to you. Currently there are 12,579 violations in the clusters. That's down from 14,604 at the end of January. One of the two providers that we identified, LGC, is a holder of a contract for cluster units, and our process for those cluster units overall to adjust the violations is to move forward with our efforts either through various enforcement methodologies, like the one I just described to you in terms of calling people in and advising them that their continued contracting was at risk with us, but also identifying owners

1 directly who are willing to convert--and identifying
2 owners directly of those cluster units who are
3 willing to convert to permanent housing and to work
4 with us to upgrade their buildings so that families
5 can remain in upgraded units. For the June 30th
6 period, we've targeted 260 of what we consider to be
7 the most concerning cluster units for closure, and
8 so--and a short answer to your question, we're
9 proceeding with a closure plan for those that we
10 think are most concerning. We are calling in others
11 who we have concerns about to try to address their
12 conditions, and if we don't succeed we'll take action
13 with respect to them, but our goal with all the
14 clusters is to convert as many as possible to
15 permanent housing and upgrade the conditions so that
16 families can remain in them as permanent housing.
17 They were permanent housing units. We want to
18 restore them to permanent housing.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Just last
21 question, because I know I've been taking up a lot of
22 time. So, how much time would you give to providers
23 before, or can you give me a timeline of how much
24 time can a violation be cured before the State

actually steps in to address the issue, or are we trying to avoid that, I hope?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think, look, there are parallel efforts going on here. The State has its role. The City has--we have our role. I also want to highlight that the kinds of efforts that I've been describing to you have not been efforts which historically the City has taken. So, it's a very fluid situation and to which we have initiated brand new processes that didn't exist before for decades in terms of this kind of intensity of inspection, this kind of intensity of repairs, and this approach to calling in providers who are not providing the conditions that our families and individuals should be receiving. So, I want to answer your question, but I also want to communicate very clearly that it's a fluid process because each provider has a different set of circumstances. I'll give you an example. One provider may have conditions in their buildings that are not appropriate, but may be able to work with us to convert the units to permanent housing to allow us to upgrade them. That's one approach. Another provider may have no interest in working with us. The clients

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: So how long
12 before the State steps in?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Alrighty,
20 alright. So, I want to commend you for certainly the
21 work you're doing on the 90 review stuff, and say
22 it's definitely a step in the right direction, and I
23 hear process, I hear process and new innovative ways
24 of looking at things, but at the end of the day, you
25 know, families deserve quality living space, and I'm

hoping that your department is really going to move even more aggressive than we have, and I'm not saying you're not, but more aggressively to ensure that if we're going to give contracts to shelter operators, that they are providing quality, a good quality of life, for people who are trying to not necessarily look for a handout, but a hand up, and it's government's responsibility to ensure we are giving them just that. So, I hope we're putting a whole lot of inspectors out there. I don't even know the number of inspectors HRA has, but we should be moving faster than we are to ensure we can get these violations cured.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate that. I agree with you. I want to also not mislead you. The inspection effort is a multiagency effort. We're very grateful for the work of HPD, the work of other city agencies that are conducting inspections, posting the violations, and then the Mayor's Office of Operations which is working directly with us every day to deploy city resources to make repairs. But of course, one of the things that is important here even as we're moving to upgrade conditions, we want to be moving people out of shelter, which is why the other

pieces of the reforms which are taking hold are important. I mean, moving the 32,000 children and adults out of shelter or preventing them from entering is what kept us from going to next year to 71,000 people in the system, which would have made providing the standard of shelter that you and I are both very focused on even more challenging. So it's a multifaceted approach to a problem which is built up over many years. But you're absolutely right to focus on conditions. We're going to keep focusing on conditions and on prevention and move-outs.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to ask an hour worth of questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council Member Richards. Council Member Palma?

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: I just have one quick question and it's around the State. I know that the review mentions State participation. Has there been any indication from the Cuomo Administration to be part of the taskforce to lend some of their, you know, folks to sort of deal with what we're facing here with the homeless population?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, look, the State is an important partner of ours. We are in communication about moving forward, and you know, the State has its role in terms of oversight and regulatory responsibilities. We have our role in terms of direct delivery, and I am optimistic that we will be able to work together and move forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: I thank you for your diplomatic response. I would definitely would ask you to let this committee know if there's any representative on any of the task force that are created moving forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council Member Palma. Council Member Grodenchik?

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you. We've talked before about domestic violence shelter bed expansions. Can you tell us when we might expect to see more beds come online, how long that process is going to take?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right now we've already brought--we had the two pieces. One was the emergency beds and one is the tier two more ongoing 400 units. So, it's 300 emergency beds, 400 units. We have one facility up and running that was approved

by the state for more 50 beds on the emergency bed side. We have another that's upwards of 100 beds that is entering the state approval process, and we're continuing to make progress on getting to the 300 number. In a relatively short period of time we'll be in excess of 150, and then the RFP for the 400 tier two units is shortly coming out. It's a sequence between the emergency beds and then moving forward with the tier two beds. So, we're optimistic on the emergency beds, that they'll be up in short order with the work we're doing with the State, and that the tier two beds will follow after that.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Grodenchik. I think we're expecting some of our other colleagues to join us, and I think Council Member Johnson is coming back. So, I'm going to just kind of go. I might jump around a little bit.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But I wanted to touch on a number of different issues here. With following up on Council Member Richards' line of questioning,

what is the difference between Shelter Repair Squad 1.0 and Shelter Repair Squad 2.0?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the desire to move forward really came from taking a look at what progress had been able to be made by Shelter Repair Squad, you know, 1.0 before the review period, and again, that had never been an initiative that had been tried.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And so a lot was learned, and so when we began the 90-day review and we looked at what was needed, we saw what was needed was a inspections of every shelter so that the baseline could be determined and then a direct repair by the City or city contractor's part of the initiative, and that providers have their own challenges in terms of the capital needs that I discussed with Council Member Richards and also challenges relating to issues around rates that had built up over years. So, we made the determination in Shelter Repair Squad 2.0 that we would go and make repairs wherever we could and that that would accelerate the repair process. In addition, the 2.0 has the publicly released score card where one can

1 see the progress shelter by shelter system wide the
2 kinds of different shelters. So, that really--2.0
3 builds on 1.0, if you will, and has the aspect of
4 public transparency, has the aspect of making repairs
5 directly where possible and has the aspect of having
6 the repairs be based on a baseline that from
7 aggressive inspecting. Again, you know, as I said
8 before, you can't fix it if you don't know it exists,
9 and so that was really a key component of 2.0.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This issue of shelter
12 conditions came to the floor over the last year or so
13 because of third-party reviews, the Department of
14 Investigations, City Comptroller's Office. Is there
15 any indication or commitment from either of those
16 entities or other third-party review entities to
17 assess how Shelter Repair Squad 1.0, 2.0, how it's
18 been working? In other words, some type of third-
19 party analysis of the job that's been going on over
20 the last several months.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think, I
22 mean, all of the oversight entities have audit
23 authority and have oversight authority.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, I mean, they
25 continue to have the authority. I'm wondering the

Comptroller's office, for example, is going to be doing a follow-up review?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, look [sic]. I think we've had a good working relationship with the Comptroller's office, and I think that that'll, you know, come out of conversations that they'll have with us and we'll have with them about where we are with making repairs and moving forward. This comes up in the context of registering contracts where we have to address conditions issues in order to have them registered. So there's an on--there's certainly an ongoing working relationship there. But I want to also say that we think it's really important to have a joint approach to the overall effort, whether it's at the State level, at the City level, because we're out making--we're out inspecting and making repairs, and we want to ensure that the inspection process, the audit process is lined up with where we're actually making repairs. As I said to Council Member Richards that we're going through buildings where things have built up for many years, and if you went out and audited a building tomorrow, even though we've made thousands of repairs in the last two months, you may find a building that's got challenges

1 where we're still trying to address capital issues
2 that are built up over years. So to us what's most
3 useful is to take a joint approach, focus on where
4 the work has been done, identify areas where the work
5 still needs to be done, and determine the pathway
6 forward, and we are anxious to work with all
7 oversight entities in that type of a partnership.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think one concern
10 that I could see in being an issue is, you know, part
11 of this is--there's a--the public understands the
12 issue as a result of these, you know, bombshell, if
13 you like to call them that, reports over the last
14 year, you know, with the DOI report and the
15 Comptroller's report and the striking findings, and
16 that's how the public sees the system, and is--I'm
17 just-- I'm concerned that if there is progress made,
18 how is the public going to know about that or be able
19 to--how can the public--what can the public compare
20 it to if it's coming from HRA or DHS as a, you know,
21 you're the ones that are running the system. You
22 know, maybe you might, you know, might seem like you
23 might have a bias. I'm not saying you do, but it
24 might seem like you might have a bias whereas the,
25 you know, outside agency or third party might, you

1 know--that's how the public probably best understand
2 it.
3

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. I mean, from
5 our perspective we think that the best thing we can
6 do is to be transparent to what we're doing, which is
7 the reason why we've been posting the report cards
8 showing each individual shelter progress or the lack
9 thereof. Certainly, the Comptroller has shelter
10 [sic] obligations. The State has regulatory
11 obligations, and they will, you know, at the time
12 that's appropriate make whatever findings they make.
13 We just want to make sure that the findings are being
14 made post work done on particular buildings rather
15 than pre, and that's why we appreciate working
16 relationships with the state and with the Comptroller
17 to move forward on that kind of a level so that what
18 is being looked at is something that we've actually
19 repaired. Fair criticism that some things take
20 longer to repair, but we want to make sure that a
21 building that we haven't gotten to yet is being
22 audited as a building we haven't gotten to yet as
23 opposed to a building that we may not have addressed
24 appropriately. But again, I have confidence that we
25 are making progress, but I also have confidence that

1 we have a lot more to do, and as I said in the
2 testimony very candidly it didn't get this way over
3 night; it's not going to be fixed overnight, but the
4 level of violation clearing in a two-month period of
5 time is unprecedented, and I'm sure that with
6 oversight that there'll be other problems that
7 identify that we ourselves are identifying. You
8 could look at the shelter repair card and score card
9 and see exactly where we've identified their
10 problems, and that is very transparent information
11 when conveying to the committee, to the public, to
12 the oversight agencies of where there are problems.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: with regard to
15 capital repairs, is there going to be a change in how
16 tier two providers are--there are major capital
17 repairs that are needed in our tier two shelters and
18 our single adult shelters both city run and not-for-
19 profit run, and you know, it's been a longstanding
20 issue for providers that can't get their roof fixed
21 or their boiler fixed or things that are, you know,
22 significant needs that may be impeding them from
23 getting an appropriate C of O, which is something
24 that was cited I think in the DOI report. Is there
25 going to be a reform of how tier two providers are

able to submit for large scale capital projects and how's--what's your assessment of how that's been working in the past and how has that informed how you're going to be moving forward?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think one of the things that we highlighted in the 90 day review is that for many years it didn't work well, and that if you look at a particular provider, they may have violations for things that they were unable to get support from in the past to address particularly systems problems, systems needs like the ones you identified. We have communicated to Housing Homeless Services United that we will be working with them on a process and we will be meeting with them shortly to move forward with that. It's obviously an important one because if the roof wasn't fixed years ago, the units below the roof are going to have rain leaks and there are going to be violations in those units, and to simply fix the units without fixing the roof doesn't make sense to us.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you identify what the problems have been in the past, specifically?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think some of it is capital dollars in non-city buildings. Some of it is

1 just a contracting process. Some of it is the
2 receptivity to new needs in years past, but you know,
3 as the Mayor has made clear, we're owning the problem
4 to correct it notwithstanding the fact that it goes
5 back over many years because we have to take these
6 steps to ensure that children and adults have
7 appropriate conditions that they're living under.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, would this, you
10 know, like other agencies that have large capital
11 needs they have, you know, five-year capital plans.
12 Is this going go to be part of a--

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is this going to be
15 identified as part of a long, long-term capital plan?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes, some of it as I
17 testified previously has already been dealt with in
18 terms of the city-run buildings in terms of the
19 capital commitment to make repairs, and we're
20 continuing to look at as the budget is being
21 finalized what more needs to be done there.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So then specifically
23 for like the tier twos or not-for-profit run
24 shelters, those capital needs that will be
25

potentially identified as kind of within a large-scale multi-year capital plan?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll be looking at the capital needs for the city-owned business and also looking at processes to deal with the capital needs and the privately owned buildings. Again, some of the things we're repairing directly, and some of the things are going to need more extensive capital projects, either done by the providers themselves with our assistance or done directly by us.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Obviously, Executive Budget's coming out I think next week, and our-- sometime in the next few weeks, and we are going to be conducting Executive Budget hearings. Is that something that we plan to be addressing in an FY 17 budget?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I know I'm going to be seeing you in May or June.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In terms of inspection repairs as it relates to contracts, will the inspection repair work lead to DHS to review or revise the price it pays for shelters? Or is it in your view that the current rates are sufficient to

cover the costs of operating shelters in a state of good repair?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: One of the issues-- one of the reform items is actually to rationalize provider rates and that is a process that we'll be implementing. One of the things again that we saw in the 90-day review is when we looked at different rates there were wide variations among rates and providers have identified that that's a problem in terms of providing services and addressing conditions, and that was why we identified that as one of the specific reform items to rationalize shelter rates.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is the City going to be looking at violations when contracts are renewed?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: You know, as I indicated to Council Member Richards, services in terms of shelter move-outs, services in terms of conditions are all things that we will be looking at as part of this process going forward. Again, if the roof couldn't be fixed because we didn't provide the funding or the ability to do it, that's one thing. On the other hand, if there were worse conditions that built up for other reasons, that's another

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

4
5
6
7

8
9
0
1
2
3

4
5
6
7
8

24
23
22
21
20
19

going to have to be a case by case evaluation depending on a whole range of factors.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I', going to turn it over to my colleague Corey Johnson for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good to see you, Commissioner, and I apologize. I was stepping out for the bill signing that the Mayor was having.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Congratulations.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you. Times Square, so I don't know. I read through your testimony, and the numbers I think are pretty startling seeing the trajectory over the past 20 years in the exorbitant increase in homelessness that we've seen in New York City, and I think you laid out both in your testimony and in answers to questions today the many different, you know, factors that the City is undertaking whether it be rental assistance or prevention services, legal services, anti-evictions services, and the preservation and creation of supportive housing and affordable housing, that's all great. I think Council Member Grodenchik sort of asked about seeing an increase of individuals who are suffering from untreated mental illness that we're

seeing on the streets. I have a question, though. I understand that the approximately 60,000 individuals that are in shelter, 59,000, whatever the number is.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Fifty-eight.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Fifty, it's 50 now?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Fifty-eight.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Fifty-eight. So the 58,000 individuals who are in our City shelter system are folks who, you know, many of them are working fulltime. Many of them had a health emergency and they ended up homeless, something happened to them. Why are we seeing such a dramatic increase in street homelessness, folks that are alcohol or drug-addicted and are struggling and need services and support and help, have untreated mental illness, why is there such an increase there? Are those folks that were previously in shelter? Are those folks that were previously in a type of supportive housing but lost it? It just seems to me--I understand sort of the 58,000, those are folks that lost their homes, something happened to them. They lost their job, but the chronically street homeless, folks that aren't able to gain employment,

why are we seeing such a large increase there? What happened?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to answer your question, but I also want to just note that there are 27 mental health shelters within the single adult shelter system, and that's reflective, as I said earlier, that were essentially, you know, running a defacto [sic] mental health system within the shelter system, and that is one of the reasons why we want to work with the State and others to address the importance of community-based mental health services so that we're not essentially running mental health facilities within the shelter system. We think that's reflective of the kinds of gaps and services that the First Lady and the Mayor's mental health road map, Thrive, are aimed at addressing, and the issues that you're highlighting in terms of whether it's the street or in the shelter system, this is why the Thrive initiative is so important, because it's meant to address people who fall through the cracks. I think it's also indicative of what I know you've been very focused on which is the need for more supportive housing, because there are individuals who historically have been taken from the

1 street and moved into safe havens or other low-demand
2 kinds of settings and then into supportive housing,
3 but that's what led to the historic 15,000 unit plan
4 and that's why we're moving very quickly to get units
5 up this year to begin to address the kind of things
6 that your question is really directed at me, which is
7 what do we do about the situation. Why are there
8 people in these circumstances? And they're in these
9 circumstances because the housing that we know works,
10 supportive housing, hasn't been there to meet what
11 the need is which is why we're now at the city level
12 investing in 15,000 units, which will help deal with
13 what you're highlighting. But again, I think it's a
14 piece of different things going on at the same time.
15 It's the kinds of problems that the Thrive initiative
16 is aimed at, but it's also this need for supportive
17 housing, that the supportive housing plan is aimed
18 at. But it's not just in the streets. I want to keep
19 focusing on the people within the system that have
20 the same kinds of mental health challenges.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: It's

23 heartbreaking. I mean, in my district I think the New
24 York Times did a map last year, and they went out and
25 surveyed and they showed where the highest

1 concentrations of chronic street homeless was
2 persisting in New York City, and in Hell's Kitchen,
3 Chelsea and in the Village, there are countless
4 individuals, and I see them every day, who are living
5 on the street. They're not folks that are just out
6 panhandling during the day. They're actually folks
7 that are living on the street and are really, really
8 suffering, and it's heartbreaking that it's--that
9 that's the situation that we're in.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, but I think
12 the HOME-STAT approach is really a substantial
13 breakthrough because it's an approach that says
14 alright, we're going to increase the outreach
15 workers, which we've done, but we're also going to
16 focus on a case management approach, which is to
17 identify the barriers for each individual about what
18 is keeping them from coming off the streets and to
19 not give up on anybody. And I think the week before
20 the HOME-STAT announced, at the announcement I said,
21 you know, just the week before that providers had
22 brought in 25 people from the streets, and that's
23 really the level of the work. It's case by case to
24 bring people in and to really say that we can focus
25 our efforts by increasing outreach staff, by the

canvassing that's identifying people by the case management work that is really focused on barriers to bringing people in and to take a person-by-person approach rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So I just have a couple of questions.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I'll breeze through them on DCYD and HRY, runaway homeless youth. So, you know, the Mayor I think rightfully over the last couple of budget cycles put in additional HRY beds, and there's a commitment to do 100 new additional beds per year until fiscal year 2019, which is going to get us up to about 750 HRY beds. DO you think that's a sufficient number of beds? I mean, does that get us to where the actual need is at this point?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, it's, again, it's tripling the number of beds that we--that were in place.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: It's a great thing. I'm just wondering if it's enough.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, I hear what you're saying, but I think it's important to sort of

see it as a piece of multiple strategies. So tripling the number of beds is part of it, but also, and this was something that when we met with youth providers, particularly LGBTQI service organizations, identified a barrier in terms of people, young people, having to move from DYCD shelter to DHS shelter because the rental assistance programs were only for people in DHS shelter. So, one of the reforms is to--as we did in the DV system, we targeted rental assistance to people who were about to move from one system to the other so that we could prevent DV survivors from moving from the HRA shelters to the DHS system. And so we're going to take the same approach with people who are about to go from DYCD to DHS because one thing that certainly providers made clear to us and to me in the review was if we know a young person has nowhere to go and they're going to go into DHS, why make--why have them go into DHS if you could target some rental assistance to them? So, I think the beds are one strategy, and a more targeted rental assistance is another strategy.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: How is that number determined, 750? I mean, is there a

population--is there a population estimate of homeless youth in New York City and that's how we arrived at that number?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, it's really determined based upon, you know, an analysis with DYCD about what their occupancy levels were, what they thought they needed to accommodate more people. Part of it was also--as you know, part of the announcement of the additional beds was coupled with a request to extend the length of stay in certain [sic] beds so that we could keep young people in place. It's the combination of things led to that number. Obviously if other events unfolded and we see there's a need to make changes, we'll continue to make changes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And do you know what the current population is in the DHS system of individuals who are 24 years of age and younger?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, a fluid number. I'll get that to you, but I want to highlight that in the reforms we are specifically highlighting that there's two different population groups that we want to enhance our focus on. One is clients over 50, which is an increasing number of

people in the single adult system, and also young people between 18 and 24.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So there are currently two single adult shelters specifically targeting this population that are within the DHS system. Is there any consideration to create more of these type of shelters that specifically are targeting the population that is outside of DYCD and that's sort of the 21 to 24 age range?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, it's an age group which we're prioritizing to focus on exactly what the solutions are. You know, we'll evolve as we move forward with the reforms. I think as we found with HRA at our first hearing--I think we probably announced here are 30 reforms that we are going to do, and as you know, we're doing many more reforms than that. So, these are the top line 46 that we're focusing on now. I expect as we continue to look at the need for improvements that there'll be more and the kinds of shelters we need and the kind of services we need for young people is certainly going to be something we're going to focus on. We welcome--the input we got during the review from providers of services to young people was very helpful.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Does the fact that DYCD is under a different Deputy Mayor affect the implementation of these reforms at all?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, I think again the citywide taskforce, citywide homelessness accountability council is focused on the importance of preventing and alleviating homelessness, all the agencies that are relevant here including DYCD and the Deputy Mayors will be participating in that effort.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And lastly, not on this topic, but I wanted to ask about people who have chronic health needs that end up in the shelter system. I know we have all sorts of different types of shelters. We have the cluster site. I mean, we have all sorts of different facilities. What are we doing to ensure that people that have chronic health needs, whether it be diabetes, HIV and AIDS, I mean, whatever the issues is are getting the appropriate medical treatment while they are in shelter in the City?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: One of the other-- one of the 46 items that we did focus on is that we are going to be assessing ADA issues throughout the

shelter system, and that will help us make reforms in that area. I think as you know we have extensive ADA reforms at HRA itself as a result of reaching a settlement of many, many years ago litigation in Federal Court, and we want to take the same approach in the DHS system to evaluate the kinds of health needs particularly focusing on disabilities in the DHS system.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I'd love to talk to you more about that--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: and I know that the Chair and I are working on issues like that together as well. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Happy to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you. I mean, I just want to say that you have been tremendous to work with in your role as HRA Commissioner. I am really grateful the amount of time, energy, dedication, and effort you've put into trying to expand HASA services. You and I have been able to work on that together. Unfortunately we've run into a roadblock up in Albany, but we're going to continue to fight over the next couple of months to

1
2 get HASA for All Rental Assistance expanded with
3 additional resources from the state, and I would say
4 that I think over the past two and a half years of
5 this Administration there have been many difficult
6 things that have come up in the City, and I think
7 what the past two and a half years have shown is that
8 you have been, I think, one of the Mayor's finest
9 choices to be Commissioner of a particular agency,
10 and I'm glad he undertook this 90-day review, and I'm
11 glad that you oversaw it, and that you are going to
12 be overseeing both HRA and homeless services because
13 I don't think there's a better individual to be doing
14 that. So I'm grateful to be able to work together.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you very much
16 for your kind words, but since we know each other
17 well, you know what I'm going to say. I am blessed
18 with working with extraordinary staff at HRA and now
19 DHS, and it's not one person alone, and similarly
20 within the City there are tremendous partners in City
21 Hall--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing]
23 They have a good leader at the top. Thanks, Mr.
24 Chair.

25 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council Member Johnson. We've been joined by Council Member Salamanca, and we're going to ask him for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, how are you?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good, how are you today?

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Commissioner, I have a few questions. Last time you were here I spoke to you about contracts for certain community-based organizations in my Council District which are providing services. Yet, they're having a difficult time getting paid. There's this one particular organization, Acacia, who over--who took over a building that DHS asked them to take over from another CBO, and they don't have their contract, their full contract, now, and they're not providing adequate services such as having security 24 hours in this particular building which they had before, and a lot has to do with the fact that they're getting paid 67 dollars a day per family, and 60 of those dollars are going to rent and seven dollars are going to services. My question is, when will these contracts be signed and finalized.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, one of the things that I--and I'm sure Acacia will tell you this, is that in order to register contracts we had to have a plan of correction to address the violations in the buildings in which they're providing services to clients and a plan to close out the units that both Acacia and we felt should no longer be used for families. We are working closely with the Comptroller on now being able to register a contract, but I think in connection to Council Member Richards' questions earlier in the hearing, we are looking at each contract with each provider to determine what the conditions are for families, and we are working with the Comptroller to ensure that a contract can be registered, and where there are buildings that don't have certificates of occupancy or there are units with significant violation, numbers of violations, we have to work with the provider for plan of correction before we can get that contract registered. We've been making loans to that particular provider and I think that they have been asking for loans we've been providing to them as this process is continuing and we'll keep doing that. I'm happy to work with you offline at any time if

there are particular concerns, but I think a top of the line way to look at it is as part of the review process we looked at the all the contracts, we looked at all the conditions, and we wanted to work with the providers and work with the Comptroller to be able to be in a place where we could submit a contract that could be registered, and for our providers in the meantime, we've been arranging for them to get loans through the revolving fund. I also want to highlight that Acacia's been helpful in working with us in identifying units that could be converted back to permanent housing, because that 60 dollars a day in rent for that unit is more than we would pay if we could restore that unit to permanent housing, which is the reason why we announced the closure, or the Mayor announced, and we're implementing the closure of the clusters, because that 16-year-old program essentially took units of the market that people could rent, and I appreciate that Acacia stepped in when they were asked to previously by DHS, and I also appreciate their working with us on a plan to restore units to the permanent housing stock.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So, my other question would be--Acacia came in and took over this

1 program at the request at DHS. There was another
2 organization there, Aguila [sp?]. So they took over
3 that contract from Aguila and Acacia took it over. I
4 just--and so these violations that existed in this
5 building was not Acacia's doing, but it was another
6 organization's doing in terms of that negotiating
7 with that landlord. Why are they being held
8 accountable or why is there a delay in this contract
9 if they were not the responsible from the very
10 beginning in terms of these negotiations with that
11 landlord?
12

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think again,
14 as I answered in response to Council Member Richards
15 on sort of the flipside of that which is the
16 conditions under which families are living, we can't
17 register a contract without having there be a plan of
18 correction that's in place, and we've been able to
19 negotiate that with some providers, and we were able
20 to negotiate that with Acacia. We appreciate that
21 they did negotiate with us, and therefore we
22 submitted a contract to be registered based on upon
23 their plan of correction.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. My
25 other question is what is DHS's policy in terms of

1 there's a new building, the landlord wants to get a
2 lease out with at community-based organization to
3 bring in shelter families in this building, yet, this
4 landlord has multi--other buildings in which he has
5 violations in these buildings. Is there a policy or
6 is there a vetting process in which you look to see
7 what's this landlord's history with their other
8 buildings?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, first of all,
11 if that landlord, if there is actually a landlord
12 trying to come and offer new cluster units to us,
13 we're not going to accept them because we're phasing
14 out these clusters. We want our clients to be in
15 permanent housing, and so a landlord who has units
16 that have violations will work with the landlord to
17 address the violations so that we can move families
18 into those units.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And then my
20 other question is, is it possible you can provide me
21 with an update on the Pyramid [sic] Houses, what's
22 happening there? I've heard conversations about
23 eliminating some beds, bringing in new services into
24 this building?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I apologize, I didn't hear the question.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Pyramid Houses.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: The Pyramid?

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yes, the Pyramid.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: That is a facility which we're looking to reduce the capacity and to look for other things that might be available to be done in part of that building, but I'd be happy to talk to you about that as we proceed.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, it would be great if someone from your office or your staff could reach out and we can have a conversation offline in terms of the Pyramid.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Salamanca. We have some guests with us today in the Chamber. So I'll get the information about the class that joined us, but we've also been joined by a number of interns from the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing. They are from

all over the world, and I want to give them an opportunity to stand up and I'll announce them, Shaneen Marjon Najase [sp?], Juliana Falmay [sp?], Manu Nond [sp?], Jonpa Dokar [sp?], Naomi Saraumen [sp?], Rigsen Wongmo [sp?], Zareng Dorji [sp?], and Ronif Roy [sp?]. We want to thank them and welcome them here to the General Welfare Committee. We'll also get the information-- and we've also been joined by PS 166 of Queens who are joining us in the balcony. Welcome. So, Commissioner, I want to switch gears a little bit here on--and talk about shelter safety and reforms that are going into place. We're planning on having a hearing either later this spring or early summer on shelter safety issues, but I do want to talk about the reforms that are part of the 90-day review. Can you be a little--get a little bit more specific on what the reforms are on shelter safety, and then I'll ask a couple of follow-up questions.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I mean, there are a number of steps we took during the 90-day review, but I think the most important going forward is the NYPD review and the NYPD retraining of Peace Officers. NYPD had deployed a management team at the

Chief level to work directly with us to assess and provide an action plan for addressing security at all of our facilities, and we know that they're going to do that in an expedited fashion, and depending on the timing of your hearing, we would hope that it would coincide in some way or other when we're at the conclusion of that review. During the 90 days we did take a number of steps to address security. First, we provided--we made sure there's 24-hour security staffing at all commercial hotels and enhanced staffing that was already there in a number of cases at commercial hotels housing homeless New Yorkers. We also increased deployment of Peace Officers and security at mental health shelters and we have re-evaluated, essentially overhauled the system for reporting on critical incidents to ensure that there's a fuller picture of those incidents so that we can identify service gaps, and one of the gaps that we have identified that had built up over many years was the prevalence of domestic violence within households that entered with two adults in the adult family system as well as the families with children system, and so we're in the process of restoring a essentially an in-reach domestic violence program

that had been eliminated in 2010. So, the series of steps that we took during the review to increase security to improve transparency and identify service gaps in terms of reporting but then most importantly the determination that the Police Department would send a management team to develop an action plan, which again we're very grateful that they're doing that in addition to the retraining of the Peace Officers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you could tell us up 'til this point, what is the range of security that one would find in the various types of shelters?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: You know, I think as I testified last month, over the two decades of the Department of Homeless Services' creation, the security has really has broken it down into three different methodologies of providing security. DHS Peace Officers, security provided through the citywide contract services currently a contract held with FJC, and then providers have their own, may have their own security.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And so where, when are Peace Officers employed and when are the other forms of security?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Peace--a combination of Peace Officers and FJC contracted security are deployed in the city-run facilities, and FJC, city contracted FJC security guards have been deployed to augment security in the commercial hotels. Some of the providers, by the way, may deal--have direct contracts with FJC or other contracted providers, other contracted security providers. And so this multi-work stream approach to security is the one that we looked at in the 30-day review, which is the reason why we thought it would be most effective to have the police do a review of the overall system. Essentially, you've got three different work streams addressing security throughout the system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, obviously there's been some significant incidents over the last year. Just most recently there was an individual that was murdered in the Bellevue men's shelter, and there was another incident several months ago where another man was murdered in a shelter in East Harlem. Do those two cases where these are in city-run shelters, I believe they're both city-run--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] One was a city-run, one was not.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Do--those are both cases where--do those two cases indicate anything that has jumped out at you or has jumped out at your colleagues at the Police Department as areas that are major sources of concern? Specifically in those two cases?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, these are tragic circumstances, and they highlight the importance of re-evaluating security and safety in the shelter system. In the first instance it was tragic death in a mental health shelter, which highlights the issue that we raised in the 90-day review which is what further reforms can be taken to address the service delivery for people with mental health needs. The evaluation of security at that particular shelter, you know, did not determine that there was any particular deficiency and security there. Obviously, you can always enhance it and so we did enhance it post the event, the tragic death of that individual, but we believe that by having the Police Department take a look at the entire system, we will not be reacting to individual situations

1 where we're--that situation we said, alright, do we
2 have enough guards deployed? Is there a magnetometer,
3 or is there, you know, their bags being searched.
4 All those procedures were in place. What other steps
5 do we need to take?
6

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What type of security
8 is going on in terms of rooms that are being shared,
9 or you know, not just in common areas?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, this of course
11 presents the challenge of bringing people in off the
12 streets where people say I'll come in if I could have
13 a door that I could pull or close behind me as
14 opposed to being in a big open room. And so that
15 particular room in the tragedy that you're describing
16 is a room in which two people were sharing a room
17 behind a closed door. The guard's people had just
18 made the rounds and then they were making the rounds
19 again. So--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] This is
21 the incident on East Harlem or--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Yes,
23 East Harlem, East Harlem. Or if you took the
24 incident at the East Third Street shelter relatively
25 recently it was a dispute between two older men in an

open area, in the dorm area. The security guard was on the scene, intervened, and unfortunately one older individual struck the other. The other fell to the ground, hit his head on the ground and died as the result. So, each one of these is a tragedy and it tells us that we need to look at the system overall, but each one of them has particular circumstances that relate to the kinds of services overall that are needed for the population. So we said we have to look at what are the services for people over the age of 50? Is there a way to make sure that everybody has SSI's so that we can promote shelter move-outs? Is there a better way to deliver mental health services than by having 27 mental health shelters in our system? And, you know, another issue is the one we talked about which is releasing the relationship between jails and prisons and shelter usage, and the issues that relate to that. And so each one of these situations that has been so tragic has highlighted the need for focusing on service issues, but also want to come back to--in the meantime we have to make sure we have property security in place and we've been taking significant actions, but the Police Department is a very important partner in this effort.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In the case of the death of Marcus Guerreio, I'm sorry, what was the-- you didn't refer to that one just now. What was the circumstances that led to that man's death?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, there was an individual in a room with a door that he could close.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This was at 30th--East 30th Street?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: The death--the murder happened behind closed doors. The individual who committed, who allegedly committed the act was apprehended after also allegedly stabbing or slashing a cab driver, and there is prior criminal history there as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In terms of what happened in the shelter itself, was there--were the guards making their usual rounds? Was this in between their rounds? How often are they doing the rounds?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: There are guards posted on that floor, but none the less, someone was able to get into the room, commit the act, ultimately, the shelter and commit another crime in Queens. Again, the individual charged in these

instances has a criminal record, extensive criminal record.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I visited a Win shelter a couple of weeks ago. They have a C-TV [sic] system that is enviable. It is--it's got, you know, it was probably or 20 monitors. Is that--does that exist in the city-run shelters for single adults?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: In the three decades that I've been in and out of these buildings, there has been no security system like the one you're describing at Bellevue and certain other shelters, and as part of the 90-day review, it has been determined to put in that kind of a system. Again, this is an example of the kind of things that we talked about earlier in the hearing that there are problems that have built up for many years and we're fixing them now. And the review highlighted, the tragedies highlighted the need to address things that have built up for many years. The lack of that type of a camera system is something that we identified as a reform that needs to be addressed.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is that something that would be part of the findings of this review at the Police Department, that every city-run single adult

shelter needs to have some type of closed circuit television system in place?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, we've already made determinations as a result of the review and input from the Police Department and our security that we want to move forward at key locations with that kind of surveillance system, but we're going--we asked the Police Department for reason to conduct the review, because they're professionals and can do it, and we'll be guided by what their overall recommendations are, but we didn't want to wait until the end of the review to move forward with installing that kind of surveillance system at Bellevue and other locations because that was something that was highlighted as a need during the 90-day review.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And this would be part of like an overall--I mean, these are capitals.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: These are capital expenses that will be part of the capital needs that we have to implement reforms that we've already identified, and then as more are identified, we'll have to seek additional funding.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, what I would expect is that every city-run shelter at the very

1 least, and really it should be every shelter has a
2 system that's akin to that. This is, you know,
3 obviously it was not invasive of anybody's privacy,
4 but monitors the hallways and the common areas and it
5 gives--the stairwells give the security guard that's
6 sitting there at the front desk, you know, the
7 opportunity of knowing what's happening throughout
8 the building. I was very impressed.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, I've seen the
11 Win system that you're describing as well. It's a
12 terrific security system, and as I said, as part of
13 the review we looked at things as they've existed for
14 decades and said, you know, just because for decades
15 there's been no camera system in the shelter, we want
16 to move forward with it. SO we are moving forward
17 with it with that type of surveillance system in
18 multiple locations and again, we'll be guided by the
19 Police Department's recommendations for other
20 locations. Some locations there may be different
21 approaches, but I agree with you in terms of the
22 impressive system that exists at the Win shelter.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There was a horrible
24 tragedy this winter in Staten Island. Rebecca Cutler
25 and her children were murdered in a hotel she was in

shelter at. Can you explain a little bit about what--
-a little bit more in-depth as to what the security
situation was at that time or up until--leading up
until that incident, her murder, and how is security
at hotels and clusters for that matter going to be
changed moving forward?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, during the 90-
day review, we enhanced security at all commercial
hotels by providing additional FJC contracted city--
city contracts with security.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But what does exactly
does that mean? Does it mean they're in the lobby--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]
Twenty-four hours, 24 hours security at that
location, at commercial hotels. But the Cutler
families' tragedy illustrates the challenges here.
The alleged perpetrator has no--had no criminal
history whatsoever. There had been no complaints
with respect to this involvement with the family.
The family was observed on a security system tape.
They did have security cameras at that particular
hotel. Their families observed together, and the
horrible murder took place behind closed doors within
a matter of minutes. After security camera caught

the family together without any signs of any discord at all, but again, it highlights just how pervasive domestic violence is in our society that a situation which there were no complains and no criminal record whatsoever could turn into such a horrific crime, but none the less we wanted to make sure that we had even more security there notwithstanding the fact that there were cameras, and the cameras recorded the family together without discord prior to going into the room and this terrible, terrible tragedy occurred.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Liz Crowley for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you.
Thank you, Chairman. Good afternoon, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good afternoon.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I'd just like--
congratulations on your new role as you have this new Department of Social Services which really looks over two agencies. I'm confident that you're the best person to do the new job of taking on both. I want to congratulate you on what you've been able to do in the 90-day review and the plans that are being discussed here today, especially with you immediately

moving forward to do more supportive housing, especially for domestic violence victims and runaway youth. So I'm going to ask some questions about the need right now for drop-in centers. Are you looking to do more contracts for drop-in centers, and are these with current providers? Are you interested in new providers? And what does it mean to--what you need to have to be a drop-in center?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. One of the reforms that we've asked during the review is we're doubling the number of city provider drop-in centers. There had been reductions in the numbers in prior years, and we're doubling the number now.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Sorry, Commissioner, what double mean? Like at 3,000?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Up to eight. Increasing the number up to eight.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Eight thousand?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Eight total drop-in centers.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Oh, eight centers.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we're working with our outreach teams to open additional drop-in

1 centers and some of our existing drop-in center
2 providers. The drop-in centers essentially are an
3 important tool to provide a weigh station to help
4 bring people in off the streets where we can work
5 with them off the streets. It's not intended to be a
6 shelter. It's intended to be a place where we can
7 provide services, although there can be at different
8 locations some beds where people can get some respite
9 as we try to work with them to get them off the
10 streets and into other shelters. So we really see it
11 as part of the pathway off the streets, drop-in
12 centers, safe havens, ultimately supportive housing.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Good. When you
15 have homeless families living in hotels, is there
16 always a provider that provides the social type of
17 services those families need, or is it just that
18 they're getting vouchers for that particular hotel?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: There are providers
20 identified who work with families in those hotels,
21 but again, I want to highlight that as part of the
22 review we'll be moving to get out of commercial
23 hotels. Can't happen overnight. One of the concerns
24 we have is about the ability to provide services in
25 that kind of setting.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right, because those commercial hotels don't have kitchens and types of--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Exact, right.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And is it a law, I don't know this but I've heard it from other people, that you need to have a kitchen within a unit in order to really provide the adequate shelter that these families need?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. Again, we've inherited a lot of challenging conditions that have built up that we are moving forward to get out of. So, I take your question. I don't want to--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I don't want to say that the situation is one that we want to continue with in any answer I'm giving to your questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]
Yeah.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to be clear--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]
Right, right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: and describe it to
you that I--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing] I
understand what you--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] that
we're moving out of these.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But in terms of
the success that you've had with the rental
assistance and keeping people from getting evicted,
which deserves, you know, a congratulations or, you
know, job well done. The City is keeping more people
out of the homeless shelters had they done--had you
not taken on these measures through HRA. So, I'm
just trying to wrap my head around the whole
situation right now with those hotels. It looks like
we're not going to want to do any more of those
hotels because we have enough families in hotels, and
as we're looking to do more supportive housing, we
want to make sure supportive housing has kitchens and
social services workers on premises.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's true,
although I also want to highlight something that we

1 have said. As we move out of things like the 16-
2 year-old cluster program and the commercial hotels,
3 we also have to deal with a night-to-night reality,
4 which is as we're making progress to phase out the
5 use of things that we've identified are appropriate
6 to phase out of, there may be occasions to have to
7 use more of something because we want to make sure
8 that we continue to provide shelter even as we're
9 phasing out the overall programs. We're continuing
10 to make the progress as we've talked about earlier in
11 the hearing. You know, we identified 260 cluster
12 units that we're closing out. We have been limiting
13 the hotel use and trying to consolidate hotel usage
14 as best we can, and we'll continue to make the
15 progress, because what you said is exactly the kinds
16 of accommodations and services that are needed by our
17 clients, supportive housing, rental assistance and in
18 where we can keeping people in their homes. You put
19 your finger right on it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right, but my
22 last line of questions will really just get at the
23 quality of services and the effectiveness of the
24 services in two different types of buildings. One
25 type of building is owned by the nonprofit or the

1 City and then the other type of building has this
2 third-party owner, and it appears that those other
3 buildings that you have social service providers in
4 contract with owners of the buildings. Those
5 buildings are the ones that are falling apart. Those
6 buildings are the buildings that more money is going
7 towards maintaining the building or in rent rather
8 than in services, and it seems like there's a few
9 groups of people in the City getting very wealthy off
10 not maintaining these buildings, and what I think we
11 need to look at is making sure these nonprofits that
12 run and provide the services are able to own their
13 own buildings or operate their own buildings so
14 they're not paying so much in rent to these building
15 owners that aren't maintaining their buildings.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I agree with you
18 that that's absolutely what the goal is with this
19 review, that we're in a much better position where
20 it's a purpose built or developed location that's
21 intended to be provided for some type of a
22 transitional situation. Part of the cluster take-
23 down involves where necessary substituting the new
24 kinds of approaches which combine shelter with
25 permanent housing and community space. So, I

1 appreciate your focus on exactly what we're focused
2 on too.

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Do we know the
5 inventory of units owned by the nonprofits such as
6 Help USA or the Doe Fund.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well,--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [interposing]
9 They own their buildings, but do we know how many of
10 the units are owned by a provider rather than a
11 third-party real estate owner?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Those agencies don't
13 necessarily own their own buildings. The many not
14 for profits are in buildings owned by the City or in
15 buildings in which they have essentially master
16 leased or leased the entire building from a private
17 entity.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But that differs
20 from the model that you are, I think, in agreement
21 with us that we want to eliminate which is where
22 essentially you're renting something by the unit or
23 by the day as opposed to a more comprehensive
24 approach.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Do we understand just how many owned by the City or the nonprofit provider versus third-party real estate owner?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we can get you that breakdown, but by way of example, you know, there are 3,000 families in cluster shelter units, that 16-year-old program in which apartments are being rented in private buildings. That's a substantial number of the families with children in the shelter system.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right. Okay, if you could provide those numbers--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I'd like to get at those, because I bet if you go to those buildings that are owned by the City or the nonprofit in agreement with the City or the nonprofit altogether that you'll see those are the buildings that are in better shape that probably don't have mold or rats or vermin, roaches.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I can certainly tell you we'll get that information to the Committee, but I could certainly tell you in the shelter score card shows you that, which is that the most number of

violations are in the cluster units and that the shelter buildings are either owned by the City or owned by the not-for-profits or rented in some leasing fashion by the not-for-profits have fewer violations than the cluster units. So you're absolutely right.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right, okay.
Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Council Member Crowley. I also want to use this opportunity to welcome another class from PS 166 from Queens. So, welcome everybody. Thank you for joining us. So, Commissioner, I want to thank you. You've been here for almost two and a half hours. I just have a few more questions for you.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to make sure that we get all of these on the record to the extent possible. Let's see. In terms of budgetary issues here and if you address this also at the Executive Budget Hearing, but the merger of back office operations in these two agencies you said is going to save 38 million dollars. There's also new needs associated with actions being taken here. What are

the costs associated with that and how does--what's the net on the--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Twenty-eight million. The 38 million in savings is being repurposed towards the 66 million dollars in expense needs for the reforms, but I think one way to look at the processes here are similar to the testimony that you received or obtained from me at earlier points in terms of the repurposing of positions in the HRA budget. In prior testimony--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: we talked about essentially the budget was able to stay relatively flat because we repurposed a number of positions for the reform initiatives that we wanted to do. Took some time, but we thought it was an important route to go to be able to seek administrative efficiencies, and so we're taking the same approach with the supportive of functions for the two agencies.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you expect there to be any issues in terms of civil service titles, individuals that are being--if they're being moved over if they have a certain level of seniority at-- and the civil service at DHS and moving over HRA, is

there any issues there? Have you thought that through? How's that going to work?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we've had a very productive working relationship with our labor in the approach that we took at HRA. We're going to continue that approach with this integration of DHS and HRA functions. Obviously, we're going to be guided by some service limitations, but we found when we implemented the reforms at HRA that we're able to redeploy and repurpose certain kinds of positions to the benefit of clients and also to preserve people-- preserve jobs in the process. So, we're approaching this the same way in terms of working together with the unions to move forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What is the timeline then on how that's in terms of that action of moving over back office?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we're already beginning the process now and we'll have more to report during the Executive Budget hearings.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But there will be no layoffs, right?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Moving over to

HomeBase, I'm still a little bit unclear. If HomeBase is now going to be the preferred place to go, is it a point of entry if a family is actually, you know, lost their apartment, they never went to HomeBase before the eviction took place. They're evicted. They're vacated. They're out of their apartments. Is HomeBase a point of entry now in their neighborhood, or do they still have to go up to Path in the Bronx?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, as I said to Council Member Palma, we'll be expanding the scope of services that one can get in HomeBase locations. One of the challenges is that person has already been evicted. We may be able to get them back into their apartment. So, regardless of whether they go to Path or HomeBase we want to immediately intervene with them, and we have those kinds of services at Path as well as at HomeBase. But we're--we will be putting in place some new approaches to deal with the non-eviction situations where people need mediation and other kinds of supportive services that have been helpful in other jurisdictions that the HomeBase providers identified as services that they would like

1 to be providing, and in addition we're not going to
2 make a systems change overnight that says, "Alright,
3 everybody goes to HomeBase." We're going to be
4 working with the key HomeBase providers to create a
5 model in which someone could go to a HomeBase
6 location in their community and the tolls that we'll
7 use we'll be aimed at keeping them in the community
8 and keeping them out of shelter, and if they had to
9 go to shelter, to try to make those kinds of
10 placements directly out of HomeBase.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But if a family is
13 going--it's, you know, say they've exhausted all of
14 their other options. Are they--is HomeBase now the
15 point of entry, or is the Path still the point of
16 entry?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As we make the
18 systems change I don't want to mislead anyone who may
19 be watching on the recording of this. Path is
20 available. We encourage people now to go to HomeBase
21 as the first point of entry, because there are tools
22 that we have that could people from having to go to
23 Path, but we're going to be experimenting with new
24 tools at designated HomeBase locations, and there'll
25 be, you know, some of the information communicated in

the communities about what services those are, and we will evaluate and study the effectiveness, and if they're effective we'll roll that out citywide.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But just to be clear, HomeBase's priority is not going to be--their current priority is eviction prevention.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Eviction prevention.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Their priority moving forward will continue to be eviction prevention not intake is that right?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Abs--well, let me say this. We don't want to in any way diminish the excellent work that HomeBase providers, the legal services providers and the city staff are doing in terms of rent arrears, legal services and other interventions for the next [sic] that's driving down the number of evictions by 24 percent. So we want to keep doing that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: But what we're looking to do is expand intervention services beyond evictions and we're not making a systems change overnight to say, and go to HomeBase instead of Path. We would prefer that everybody goes to HomeBase in

the first instance, because there may be tool s that currently do, but as we roll out some of the new models we'll be able to offer boarder services for prevention and if necessary placement directly from HomeBase.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, will--in terms of like new resources at HomeBase, what type of--what will be existing six months from now in a HomeBase office that isn't currently there?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, again, I don't want to mislead you in terms of an overnight systems change. We're going to be rolling out the new services in a very calibrated way to make sure they're effective in the same way that we've rolled out different initiatives at HRA. We roll them out sometimes center by center, location by location to make sure that they work before proceeding system wide. So, here, a service that HomeBase providers identified as a critical one as mediation, and that's a service where someone's not coming in because of eviction, and previously there would have been a challenge about what services to provide to such a family, but we have found to our own initiatives that by--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] The reason it would have been a challenge is because it wouldn't be a critical juncture yet?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: It wouldn't be an eviction.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Wouldn't be an eviction.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: There's no court [sic]--if the person doesn't have an apartment there's no eviction. They're doubled up somewhere.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And there are different services that the HomeBase providers themselves have identified that they think could be effective in those circumstances which currently haven't been services that are provided to any great extent. Certain providers provide a range of services because that's who they are. That's what they've been able to do. We want to work for a more systemic approach with those kinds of mediation services.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you believe that HomeBase being at HRA can help the providers leverage

additional assets that--or services that HRA has in its portfolio?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, we found that the primary tools that are available for HomeBase providers are legal services and rent arrears which are HRA tools. And so from an overall management perspective, it would make sense to consolidate everything in the same--with the same perspective so that all the metrics are lined up. All the services are lined up. We can avoid duplication and intervene as quickly as possible.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Moving over to the various subsidy programs, how does HRA envision streamlining the programs or is that determined yet? Also, there are a couple of Link programs that were in the DHS budget. Are those being moved over to HRA?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So at this point now, every subsidy program within the portfolio of subsidy programs is all going to be in HRA's budget now?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes, because all the processes to issue the grants were HRA anyway, and so we want to streamline the ability to get access. As I

1 said, we want to enhance income, sources of income
2 discrimination enforcement efforts. In terms of the
3 streamlining, remember we rolled them out from a
4 perspective that one-size-fits-all didn't work with
5 Advantage, notwithstanding the issues around the
6 precipitous termination of the program. There were
7 issues about how the program operated, and so in
8 rolling out the different Link programs city FEPS and
9 SEPS, we've been trying to target different
10 populations to get away from a one-size-fits-all
11 approach. Now that we've got, you know, years' worth
12 of experience or so with all of these programs, we're
13 looking for ways in which we can simplify eligibility
14 both from a client understanding from a provider
15 understanding and from a landlord understanding, and
16 so that's really the area of streamlining that we're
17 looking to do.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, jumping around
20 here a little bit. One of the recommendations is
21 that target outreach to double up families with
22 school-aged children, HRA will work with DOE to
23 identify and proactively target prevention services
24 for students with family living and doubled-up
25 situations are reported as homeless [inaudible].

That's obviously an enormous task in and of itself because we're talking about, you know, many, tens of thousands of children. I mean, this --I think it's 80,000 according to McKinney Vento [sp?] there's 80,000--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: homeless, homeless children. So, can you talk a little bit about how that would work administratively between HRA and Department of Education, because that's -- a lot of that then falls to DOE. We obviously had the hearing a couple of months ago on the how City addresses homelessness among children, but it--does that--can you delve a little bit more into that?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how is DOE a partner in this?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure. The issue there, that particular reform relates to two others which is using data analytics to identify the people who are at risk of potentially applying for shelter and using data analytics to look at people who applied for shelter, been found ineligible, left, and are at risk of coming back and being found eligible

at some later point, and this relates to back to, I think, might be our very first hearing that we had at HRA when we identified that certain percentage of people whose cases were closed or sanctioned at HRA and ended up applying for shelter based upon 2013 cohort that we looked at in 2014. And so we've been developing a risk profile of--not everyone whose case was closed, not everyone who had a sanction applied. So what is it? What are the risk factors about particular groups, particular clients who had cases closed or sanctioned that would potentially lead to an application for shelter, and so we've been working over the last year identifying such standards and reaching out to one providing the services. Similarly we're going to apply that same approach to that group of families who applied for shelter, found ineligible but are likely to come back at some later point because of a change in eligibility or a change in some other circumstance, and as an intervention point. So we looked at the McKinney Vento number as another area to look at risk factors within that 80,000 number. You're right 80,000 is a large number, but within it we're hopeful that we'll be able to identify certain patterns and certain risk

1 factors in which we could intervene with particular
2 families, and that's what we want to work with the
3 DOE on in terms of helping us develop the risk
4 profiles of that particular group of families. It
5 may turn out that the risk factors are the same in
6 all three groups, but that will help us narrow and
7 target services to be as effective as we can be.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, back to Path for
10 one second here.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This issue of
13 children being required to go to Path for every
14 appointment, that's no longer the requirement? Does
15 this represent a programmatic change here or was that
16 rule already?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's a programmatic
18 change, but like the --

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] It is a
20 programmatic--

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] But
22 with like all these changes and we found this, you
23 know, in terms of our reporting to you on changes at
24 HRA, it's a really important change to make.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're going to make it, but we can't make it tonight. We have to work through the process. We're going to implement, and we're going to make that change. It was an important one that was identified by clients during the review process and we're working on making that change.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And what exactly is the change, from what to what?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, previously the system was one in which even though there might be other ways to verify whether the child was in the household, that there was a requirement to have the child be present at all times. We're going to work through in consulting with the Coalition for the Homeless, with the Legal Aid Society and others about how to develop a system in which we can identify for all of the State and Federal eligibility reasons, we need to identify that the child is actually in the household, but to eliminate the disruption of school this resulted from the past approach.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Gibson in a moment here. Regarding the proposal to have two new city and state taskforces, you went into that a little bit before,

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 123

2 has there been communication between the City and the
3 State on those issues in terms of specifically on the
4 topic of a taskforce or rural [sic] taskforces?

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we've
6 communicated to our state partners our desire to do
7 this work together, and--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Have
9 they communicated back?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We communicated with
11 our state partners about our desire to do this work
12 together and we're hopeful that we'll be able to
13 proceed together, because together there's a lot more
14 we can accomplish.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So at this point they
16 have not agreed to do that?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We just announced
18 the reforms last week.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's a short period
21 of time. These are significant issues, and we're
22 looking forward to working with the State.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The invitation is
24 open.

25

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're looking forward to working with the state.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Turn it over to Council Member Gibson for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much, Chair Levin. Thank you and good afternoon, Commissioner. Good to see you, and I know coming off of the recent announcement we made in the Bronx, thank you for coming to Bronx Works Community Center. I really appreciate that of all the places that this announcement could have been made, you chose the district I represent. I appreciate that and certainly I recognize in this 90-day review, all of the different components around the shelter repair score card are re-instituting DV services, which I appreciate. One I'm probably most proud of is eliminating cluster and scatter sites. I really think that's something we should do. I wanted to focus and ask several questions, and I know that there was a little bit of talk with the NYPD as it relates to the security, and I wanted to find out in terms of the DHS and NYPD partnership in terms of security, could you describe right now what the DHS metrics are used to track crime in shelters right now

as we speak? What are the factors that we use and how are we tracking crime?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: First of all, thank you for coming to the announcement. It was great to have you there. I know you've been a real supporter of the kind of changes we're trying to make. So I appreciate that you were there. We announced at the Preliminary Budget hearing last month that we had overhauled the critical incident reporting on the shelter system. Previously for many years the reporting of a priority incident was that resulting in death or life-threatening injury.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And so we re-evaluated all of the 2015 incidents in shelter in order to take a broader reporting on what was occurring in the shelters and we've created the data that will show you all the kinds of things that have been going on in shelters. I know that you have a particular interest in reporting on these issues, and I'll be looking forward to sitting down with you and showing you the kind of data that we're able to collect, and I believe it will meet your appropriate concern for transparency on what is occurring and

1 what is not occurring. In terms of the NYPD, there
2 are sort of two tracks, if you will, that are
3 ongoing. First of all, we're very grateful that the
4 NYPD has sent a management team to develop an action
5 plan for all the DHS shelters, and we've already
6 begun working closely. In addition they're doing the
7 retraining for DHS Peace Officers, but what they're
8 taking a look at is a system, and I said this to the
9 Chairperson, a system that's developed up over two
10 decades in which you have one security work stream,
11 if you will, of DHS Peace Officers, one security work
12 stream of private contracted security to a city
13 contract with FJC and providers having their own
14 contracts. And so we've asked the Police Department.
15 Obviously, they're professionals and they'll look at
16 however they think beset to develop the facts, but
17 we've asked them to look at that, kind of set up and
18 to develop an action plan for us to ensure that we're
19 providing the best security, and the reporting that
20 we've already developed is--will be helpful for the
21 Police Department to look at that through the
22 management team, and in terms of any transparency
23 reporting we're happy to have that be a component.
24 Historically, and I think this may get to part of
25

what your question, but if I'm missing a piece I know you'll--

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]

I'll--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] ask me again. Historically, the Police Department's been very involved in responding to calls from either DHS Peace Officers or FJC guards contracted with the City or the providers on security, and so the incidents that we overhaul to track reflects that kind of reporting, and again, I think it will get at what you're looking at, but we're very anxious to work with you on--

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]

Okay, what I'd like to know is, is there any comparison to the current NYPD system that looks at the seven major crime categories. So, you talked about priority crimes, but what types of crimes does the NYPD respond to now?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. We, as part of our overhaul, did exactly what you're asking me to do, which is to--

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]

Okay. So there'll be some consistency.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, yeah. Because the original approach that has been taken for many, many years was looking at death or life-threatening injury and that missed the kinds of things that you and I would want to know--

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]
Right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: about in terms of service delivery. So, the reform of the critical incident reporting actually even goes beyond the FBI indicators to take a broader view of incidents and shelter.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: But again, I'm anxious to show you what we're doing and to see whether or not it meets your concerns, and if there are other things we could do, we're happy to look at that.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And you talked about the two different tracks, the Peace Officers and private security staff. Now, I can imagine both get different or maybe similar types of training. With the overhaul and assessment of the NYPD coming in, is there going to be a broad-based

1 approach to training all of the staff, or is there
2 going to be one for Peace Officers and then for
3 private security? Is there going to be a consistency
4 in that regard?
5

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to add a third
7 work stream just to not lose track of it, there's--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: [interposing]
9 You're adding a third track?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The Peace Officers,
13 the contracted security directly with the City and
14 then the providers have contracts with security.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, it's really
17 three different strands. The re-training, and I want
18 to emphasize it is re-training, of--there is already
19 training for DHS Peace Officers. The re-training is
20 an immediate thing that can be done now, even while
21 the Police Department management team is looking at
22 the overall picture. But I think the question of
23 what kind of training, and there is training for the
24 security guards that they do. We've looked at it,
25 but whether or not there should be uniform training,

whether or not we should continue to have these three strains of security, all of that is on the table for the management team from the NYPD that we're working with on this review.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And within the conversation, I know we're talking about closed circuit TV, CCTV cameras. Do you know who's going to maintain those cameras? Who will have access in terms of PD or the provider, DHS? In terms of the maintenance, who's going to absorb those costs, and then for the shelters that are not DHS, but the private providers, what happens when the assessment is done and they believe that they need cameras as well? Is that something that we're going to incorporate into the assessment if they determine that additional security measures are necessary for that particular location, is that something that will be considered, and if so, who's going to pick up the cost of all of these security measures?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, let me sort of break each of those down.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: As part of the 90-day review, even before the NYPD management team

1 initiative was put in place, we began to evaluate
2 certain key DHS shelters as needing security cameras
3 that have not been in place. As I said to the Chair,
4 I've been in and out of these buildings for about 30
5 years in some cases, and they haven't ever had these
6 systems, and it's part of the 90-day review of
7 putting them in place. So, those are being paid for
8 out of the capital dollars, and the monitoring of the
9 cameras will be done by DHS staff with--DHS security
10 staff, with the FJC staff depending on the location,
11 but how that's going to be done will be something
12 we're going to get good recommendations from the
13 NYPD's management team. They may have a different way
14 it should be done, but we don't want to--with certain
15 things that we can get in place now, we don't want to
16 wait until the outcome of the review. So, we're
17 going to--particularly Bellevue moving very quickly
18 to get those cameras in place. At the not-for-profit
19 or private locations that you identified, again,
20 we'll be guided by the Police Department in terms of
21 what their recommendations are for what the standard
22 should be and how we should do it, many of the not-
23 for-profits already have camera systems that are in
24 place. We talked about Win earlier in the hearing,
25

and they have a terrific system in place for monitoring hallways and entry points and so forth, but in terms of cost, again, we'll be guided by what the recommendation is from the Police Department management team and then determine how we're going to meet the costs.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. And within the NYPD management team, are there other non-NYPD stakeholders that are involved in this assessment? So, in terms of the actual curriculum that the Peace Officers, security officers are going through, is DHS involved in that or is it all really overseen by only NYPD?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: NYPD is conducting the training. DHS and HRA have had input into what we thought would be helpful, but I have to say this agreement, there's no difference of opinion about what would be helpful. But the NYPD management team at the chief level that is looking at this there's ongoing communication between directly with me and we've set up a--are setting up a schedule of regular meetings to report in real time. So, again, if we can make changes that are identified by the NYPD

management team, we'll make them and not wait for the end of the process.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, and my final question--Chair is looking at me. In terms of time frame and implementation, once the NYPD management team comes up with this assessment, what's the timeframe by which we're going to implement some of the recommendations and then also the timeframe by which we're going to determine the factor we're looking at to make sure that--you know, obviously crime numbers and violence in shelters, decreasing is important, but also the added security measures. To me, it has to also raise the quality of life for the families that are living in these residences on a temporary basis. So, can you just give me an idea of what the timeframe will be for each of the different categories, the assessment, the implementation, and then the performance where we're looking to see how successful it is, if we need to make any changes, do you have an idea of that at this point?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think a good guide is the speed at which we proceeded during the 90 days in announcing policy changes and implementing them.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Right.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Here, I want to--I think it's important to give the NYPD the time to do it, do the review and make the recommendations, and depending on how extensive they are, that will determine the timeframe, but that will clearly be something we're reporting to this committee on, and as I said, as we proceed, if there are interim immediate steps we can take and not have to wait for the review, we'll do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay. Well, I certainly look forward to working with you, not just as a member of this committee, but in my capacity as Chair of Public Safety. It's extremely important. I think, you know, the overall message we want to send to all New Yorkers is that everyone deserves to be safe no matter where they are, what types of transitional housing they live in, but I do think it sends a larger message that we are looking at public safety as a real priority, and we're making sure that, you know, the NYPD, working in concert with them, that there is a focus. Sadly, there are too many New Yorkers that are living on the streets, because they simply think they're safer on the

1 streets than they are in our shelters. That's the
2 absolute wrong message. We want to make sure we can
3 get families into long term housing as quickly as
4 possible, but while they are in this temporary state
5 we want to make sure they're safe as possible. So, I
6 know that as an Administration we had to react
7 because there have been too many incidents. Anything
8 greater than zero is cause for concern, injuries and
9 people who have lost their lives. So, I recognize we
10 have to do something, but I want to make sure that
11 what we're putting in place are things that can
12 really last in not just the short term, but the long
13 term. Many of us, I'm a fan of cameras. I think
14 they're great, but I think there's more to security
15 than just cameras. Training is extremely important.
16 Security officers need to be protected too. So, I
17 appreciate the work that your agency has done and,
18 you know, what the NYPD will do. I do think we have
19 a lot more work to do, but I'm certainly looking
20 forward to working with you and our Chair to make
21 sure that a lot of these measures can be really
22 implemented.

23
24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I really appreciate
25 that, and I want to assure you that the urgency that

1 we have proceeded [sic] to the 90 days will continue,
2 particularly on the security issue. I think you also
3 make an excellent point that the issues are also
4 about services. They're beyond--you know, they
5 involve training. They involve cameras. They involve
6 deployment, and the so forth, but when we identified
7 that the vast majority of critical incidents in
8 family shelters both the families with children and
9 adult families involved domestic violence among the
10 heads of the households, that it highlights the need
11 for services that are--that's a broader need than
12 simply looking at other aspects and the way that
13 safety and security has been provided, and I couldn't
14 agree with you more in terms of the message to the
15 people on the streets. During the review I spoke to
16 many people on the streets about how they perceive
17 things, what their needs are as well as people coming
18 in off the streets and the intake centers and what
19 their needs were, and we want to continue to
20 encourage people to come in, even as we're addressing
21 problems that have built up over many, many years
22 that cause concern, and it resulted in tragedies.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you. Thank
25 you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council Member Gibson. Just following up on that, I mean, I think it's important to add that it's not--it's unacceptable situation for the City for individuals to opt to sleep on the street rather than go into the shelter system, particularly single adults. And that's something that is a refrain that we've heard over and over again, and that's simply unacceptable, and we need to--that perception does not turn around overnight, but the message has to get to individuals in a compelling way that they will be safe, and if they go into the shelter system, if they're under the care of the City of New York, that they know that they're not going to put their life at risk, their possessions at risk, that they're not going to be harassed. They're not going to be threatened. So, that's a tall order, but it's something that's very important.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Couldn't agree with you more. I mean, the homeless people that I spoke to on the street during the reviews certainly talked about the importance for them of going someplace where they could close the door behind them, and even as we focus on making the existing shelters that may

not have a door that you can close behind you, safe an habitable in terms of both conditions and security. I think it's really important to continue to focus on one of the tools we have. So, preventing entry in through safe havens and supportive housing is an important message for us to be also conveying to people because that's where I've seen success with the outreach teams when they've been able to offer that kind of an alternative, and so we need to keep focusing on the complexity of the problem, but that there are solutions that we know work and continuing to emphasize those solutions like supportive housing, like safe havens, like legal services, like rental assistance, all of which are playing a role in helping us move forward, and the reform is focused on the importance of doing more in all those areas.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With regard to safe havens obviously they're effective. The numbers that are shown recently are pretty incredible in terms of the number of individuals that--On April 14th of this year, 697 individuals utilize the safe haven bed. Five hundred and 39 clients were served by drop-in centers and overnight drop-in census was 211 individuals. So, obviously that's a very effective

program, and so the expansion is something that I think will be very welcome, and it's something that people use and people are comfortable with.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Three other questions here and I'll try to get through them quickly. I know it's been a long morning, but the big topic. In terms of HPD involvement, one of the things that has concerned me over the last couple of years is we don't get a--we don't have a clear picture of how HPD has been working with DHS, HRA on providing, making sure that individuals who are homeless are able to get into affordable housing in New York City. We have this tremendous affordable housing stock, this built affordable housing stock that's been built over the last 40 years that is available. There's apartments that become available. They're not-for-profit managed. They're well-maintained for the most part. They're safe, and they're permanently affordable. What has HPD done and what is HPD going to do as part of you coming out of the 90-day review to open up affordable housing in the existing housing stock to those that are homeless and how are we going to measure that?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, HPD's been a very important partner in these efforts during the 90-day review and in several of the reforms. In terms of shelter itself, it's HPD that's been providing substantial resources for the inspections and certain other repairs. HPD's also been a very important partner in helping identify units that we can use for the various rental assistance programs, and one of the particular reforms among those that are listed in the report is streamlining access to the affordable units exactly as you described them, and you know, over time people have been left to negotiate the system, and HPD, HRA and DHS are committed to creating a process in which we can identify individuals who would qualify for those kinds of set asides that you described that have been built on the last 40 years, and a referral system to HPD would then refer the individuals into those units. So that's a new initiative that would very much streamline access to affordable housing units to turnover or become available through one way or the other by creating that pipeline directly from HRA and DSH to HPD, and that had not existed. HPD is committed is building and it had not been built in

all the years in the past. They've been very helpful during the last two years of identifying units for move-outs, but this is a very different more streamlined effort that the two agencies--three agencies are going to do together.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But outside of the set-aside process, I mean, there's--right. For newly built HPD development that there's a set aside that's one thing, but the turnover of units presents a significant opportunity.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely. That's--I was picking up on your reference of the 40 years. There have been affordable housing units that have been built, some of where there are obligations to continue to rent to homeless individuals, which I know you were highlighting, and HPD and HRA and DHS are going to be putting in place a system to enhance the ability of clients to get access to those [sic].

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But even those that are not even required, I mean, I'm talking about the general affordable housing units that are managed by not-for-profits. I mean, if we have so many homeless individuals in the shelter system that are working that are able, that are, you know--that are making

30, 40, 50 percent of AMI, you know, that should be an option. And just to reiterate, we need to have a way to measure that. We should know how many HPD managed units or HPD overseeing units are going to individuals coming out of the shelter system.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're looking at how to do that for our own management purposes as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Obviously, the same goes for NYCHA. I think that there's a little bit more oversight there, but as we said before, 2,500 units annually is really where that should be because that is the--that's the sustained housing stock that we know works. We know it's--we know it leads to permanency, and you've heard the refrain many times over. I think at one point I heard you echoing the refrain, you know, previous job.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I'd say if you look at the reform it talks about 1,500 units from--directly from DHS shelters and 300 for DV survivors. And obviously we continue to work with the Housing Authority on an annual basis in terms of move-outs.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Source of income discrimination.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Obviously a very big issue. Can you explain a little bit about what more HRA now--what role HRA is now going to play?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think as we testified at some prior hearings, we have a hotline that was set up at HRA and we'll be deploying additional staff within HRA to work with our partners at the Human Rights Commission to enhance the ability to investigate, follow up and move forward with instances where there are source of income violations.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, we had heard that there was very few testers that were hired to do this work. You know, because to be able to establish discrimination it's not exactly an easy task, but it involves being able to conduct a, you know, a test of sorts. Are those individuals going to be working--for one thing, are you familiar with how--there's been a challenge of hiring up, because we heard that four people were hired, four testers. It was under HRC, but obviously it's inter-related here.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. I think from the perspective of our partnership with Human Rights which has, you know, investigating a number of

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 144
2 complaints, we want to provide additional resources
3 to enhance all the ongoing efforts, and so we'll be
4 deploying specific HRA staff to help with testing and
5 help with investigating complaints.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because this is a huge
7 issue as you know.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Understood.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, this is
10 absolutely an essential issue to address broadly
11 because the success of all of the programs depend on
12 landlords being willing to take the subsidy.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. As, you
14 know,--two things first. As to people who may be
15 listening, we appreciate the landlords that have
16 participated in the program.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We encourage them to
19 keep doing it.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But for those that
22 are not, one of the reasons why we prioritize this as
23 one of the 46 recommendations is because we do see
24 this as an important reform to make.
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The City's been very accommodating and very nice. There needs to also be--there's the carrot. There's got to be the stick, and landlords need to know absolutely 100 percent if you're discriminating against people based on their source of income, based on subsidies, it is illegal, and they are going to face punishment.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And that's why we deploy--exactly why we're deploying more staff to be able to pursue that stick.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Want to make it very clear it is unacceptable. It's illegal, and it's going to be prosecuted.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's exactly why we have the staffing as part of the reform to do that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And last question, regarding--one thing that I was hoping to see a little bit more of was around aftercare services and social services in the shelter system for children, for families. You know, the experience of being homeless, particularly for a child but for everybody is a traumatic experience in and of itself, or every often it's a traumatic experience in and of itself,

1 and particularly for children that are experiencing
2 that over a long period of time, that has a
3 significant impact on their physiology, their brain
4 development. Traumatic stress is, you know, inhibits
5 their ability to grow physically and mentally and
6 it's a--it's toxic to their development. Can you
7 explain a little bit about what we're doing to
8 provide psychological support, emotional support?
9 Where is their evidence-based models that we can
10 employ? Here at the Council we started an initiative
11 last year on trauma-informed care with a number of
12 family shelter providers, but that's not, you know,
13 that's not a huge program and it's only with a
14 handful of providers, and it's only dealing with
15 children, not with the entire families, but it's
16 around trauma-informed care and it's using evidence-
17 based models. Can you speak a little bit to that
18 issue?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, I think that
21 there's two ways in which this you're highlighting
22 can be addressed as we move forward. First, I want
23 to emphasize, this is a 90-day review about immediate
24 actions that can be taken in a reform process to move
25 forward with, so it would substantially change how we

would approach shelter. All issues are not included in it, because some of the other things that are so important will continue to evolve and emerge in the sort of implementation period in the same way as I said when we started with the HRA reforms. There was a set number we started with and we've obviously built on that number to make a more, even more comprehensive approaches. So, there's a focus on shelter move-out aftercare needing to be more enhanced. So, you know, critical time intervention and some of those evidence-models are there, and looking for ways to enhance that. In terms of services and shelters, one of the pieces that we did highlight was the importance of not assuming that the system is monolithic. You know, different families need different services, and that's what the point of that reform is to try to focus on those families that may need more intensive services versus those families that may not need that kind of intensity, and so I think you'll see emerging the kind of focus you want. We're going to be interested to see the outcomes and what is the outcome from that Council initiative, and to see what lessons we can learn from it in terms of moving forward.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, thank you very much. You've been here for three hours, and we greatly appreciate you taking the time to thoroughly explain this and to answer all of our questions thoroughly. We look forward to seeing you at the Executive Budget Hearing next month. We could talk some more about these issues.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Just a month from now.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But again--don't miss us [sic]. But, thank you again. Thank you to your team for this thorough review and for taking the reins on this system and bringing it forward into a more sustainable future, and we look forward to continue to work with you on this.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We're going to take a three minute break and then we'll have public testimony.

[break]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, everybody, we're going to start back up. Thank you very much for your patience. So we'll start up with a group of providers and the first panel, Raysa Rodriguez of

1 Win, Doug Apple, Samaritan Village, Muzzy Rosenblatt,
2 Bowery Residence Committee, and Alexander Horwitz,
3 the Doe Fund. Oh--[off mic] And Joan Montbach of
4 Homeless Services United. Whoever wants to begin?
5 Whoever wants to begin? Red light--red light needs
6 to be on.
7

8 JOAN MONTBACH: Okay, hi. I'm Joan
9 Montbach. I'm the interim Executive Director of
10 Homeless Services United, an organization that
11 represents 50 nonprofit agencies serving homeless and
12 at-risk adults in New York City. We wanted to
13 commend the City and HRA for the work that they've
14 done on this 90-day plan. We are in support of the
15 work. We have met, however, to discuss some of the
16 details of this plan and to try to have a better
17 understanding of it, and we have some issues that we
18 wanted to learn more about. Some of those issues
19 we've heard about today in the discussions and we
20 read about in some of the detailed comprehensive
21 plan. So, I won't go into all of them, but I did
22 want to mention thank you for the discussion today
23 about the HomeBase and prevention work and for your
24 discussion of the timeline issues. Some of the
25 discussions that were addressed today around budget

parody for homeless providers, some of the issues related to contracting to the funding and the work done on terms of facility maintenance. Some issues though were not really talked about in this plan and those are the ones that I will talk about very briefly, and those have to do with issues related to overhead for homeless service providers, which is one of the lowest overhead rates of all city agencies, 8.5 percent. Also, issues that we have--some concerns have been raised about the implementation of the COLA which was agreed to. It has not been uniformly applied to the agencies, and there has been some discussion about the way in which it should actually be calculated with respect to the overall budget. There are issues finally that we wanted to--in the budgeting area that we are concerned about regarding advances and how they'll be handled. We also have been discussing among ourselves communication issues with the City. I think you, particularly Chairperson Levin, raised the issue of the provider's role on the interagency council and we are really hopeful that there will be a place for us at the table during those discussions. We appreciate the fact that the City hasn't involved all

of us and listened carefully to our comments during this 90-day period, but we feel that this is a conversation that has to continue as we get down into the implementation and the details of rolling it out. Further issues that have been raised by our members that I just wanted to touch on today are issues regarding the interagency coordination and the importance of it. I think the City recognizes this and certainly has, you know, certainly in the co-location of HRA staff at the HomeBase shelters they understand the importance of having a--have a streamlined seamless access to interagency issues. We see this, the need for this with other agencies as well, ACS for example would be one that we certainly see a need for. We had some of our members raise questions, administrative issues related to IT systems, the Care system. We could use some technical support in that area. We also feel that data sharing of information from the Care system would be invaluable as we try to all of work together to have a better understanding of the issues that our clients are facing. Workforce issues are ones that with the both the City and State have been--have sought to, you know,-- we support certainly the work

1 that the City and State and their positions with
2 respect to minimum wage, and we know that there is
3 going to be a direct impact on the nonprofit
4 provider, and we don't want to have that loss, and
5 this conversation was not part of it. It was--the
6 comprehensive plan was really silent on this, and we
7 feel like this is something that's important for us.
8 Finally, one of the conversations that you had
9 towards the end was of today's presentation dealt
10 with the provision of services within shelters and
11 what actually is going to be provided. I think you
12 mentioned aftercare. Domestic violence is another
13 one that we have concerns about certainly the
14 services related to youth. So, I think that those
15 are conversations that we feel well equipped to have
16 with the City, well prepared for, we have thoughts
17 on. And so again, this issue of working with the
18 city is a very important one from our point of view.
19 So, I think just in closing I'll say that we hope to
20 work in close collaboration with the City, and we
21 hope that the City feels the same and will work
22 closely with us a coalition and with our membership.
23 Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to
24 this.
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon, Chair.

Good afternoon to the Council Members. My name is Raysa Rodriguez. I'm serve as the Vice President of Policy and Planning at Win. Win is the largest provider of both family shelter and family supportive housing in New York City. What I often like to start with is the recognition that 60 percent of our clients are actually kids under the age of 18, and it really speaks to volumes of the growing need for us to address the homelessness crisis. We commend the City for taking this on. We think that all of the changes that are coming through this 90-day review are long overdue. We can attest to the City's continued commitment to improve conditions in shelter, in particularly the repair squads have already made incredible improvements in many of our sites in our family shelters, and the increased enhancements around security is something that we also think is incredibly valuable. In terms of a little bit of scale in terms of who we are, each night we serve over 4,000 individuals. As I mentioned, about 2,600 of them are actually kids. And so we're always looking for ways to not only

1 improve those life outcomes, but to improve shelter
2 conditions while they're with us. We commend the
3 City, if you will, for its multipronged strategies to
4 improve and reform the current system. We think that
5 the consolidated management structure will actually
6 lead to more efficiencies that can lead to greater
7 prevention better meeting the needs of families while
8 they're in care, and ultimately increased housing
9 stability once they're out. I also would like to
10 thank the Administration for including the nonprofit
11 voice, if you will, in this very important process.
12 Win, along with other providers, have been, you know,
13 day in and day out seeing the conditions of the
14 families in the system and cannot only attest to what
15 those needs are, but to what the reforms that are
16 necessary to make improved outcomes, and so we thank
17 the City for incorporating our voices. We also
18 acknowledge that there a number of steps that not
19 only have been announced in the 90-day review, but
20 have already started to be implemented, and so we
21 also support those. The commitment to move towards a
22 system that better meets the needs of homeless
23 families is something that we support strongly. You
24 know, I don't have to tell the committee that 80

percent of those who are in the system are actually families, right? And about 60 percent of them are staying in tier two shelters, which we know allows for the full range of services. And so the commitment, the City's commitment to move away from hotels and clusters is something that we also support. We also commend the city for their commitment to implement 15,000 new units of supportive housing. As I mentioned, their awareness of a need for enhancements in security and their repair score card that allows for better tracking of violations and conditions overall in our shelters. We look forward to working with the City in its reform efforts and in implementing these very important changes that as I mentioned are long overdue. We also see the need for continued work to build upon this. I would reiterate the Chair's smart recommendations around service enhancements. We see day in and day out that many families need an increased attention on clinical services, for instance, and so we would wish the City to do that as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

MUZZY ROSENBLATT: Good afternoon, Chairman, members of the Committee. My name is Muzzy Rosenblatt and I'm the Executive at BRC, the Bowery Residence Committee, one of our City's largest and most effective nonprofits serving the needs of homeless individuals. Through a broad continuum of 27 programs, we provide men and women in crisis the opportunity to transform their lives and achieve their potential. BRC provides outreach to the unsheltered homeless in the subways, operates over 250 safe haven beds for the unsheltered homeless and stabilization beds, and has over 700 shelter beds and manages over 500 units of supportive housing. In fiscal year 2015 our outreach teams made over 3,500 placements of individuals from the subways and the streets and over a thousand individuals left our transitional housing programs for more independent living. As a results-driven organization we look at data to evaluate what works and we use the funds we receive wisely, efficiently and effectively to get results for the people we serve and those that fund us to do so. It is with this commitment to effectively serving our clients, our work and our city that I appear today to applaud Mayor de Blasio

for taking decisive action to address the needs of homeless New Yorkers. The reforms proposed by Commissioner Banks and Deputy Mayor Shorris and adopted by the Mayor are significant and will bring needed reforms and enhancements to the shelter system. They recognize both the need for additional resources and the need for better management of how these resource and existing resources are deployed. Notably, this plan invests in models that have proven effective. It expands HomeBase prevention services to keep people out of shelter, increases safe haven capacity in innovative and successful model to serve the unsheltered homeless that BRC created in 2006 provides more professional staff for shelters and will create 15,000 units of permanent supportive housing. It also has a clear and needed focus on accountability. This strategy acknowledges that not all shelters and shelter providers are the same. There are great shelters run by great providers who are getting great results and shelters that are not great and not getting the job done. This plan demands that quality of care, the safety of the environment and the ability to perform be factors in determining whether or not someone be funded.

1 Finally, it acknowledges the need to make the
2 administrative systems that are critical to the
3 success of these efforts more responsive,
4 streamlining processes such as how clients apply for
5 housing as well as making the procurement and
6 budgeting process more rational and efficient. Of
7 course, a plan of action is only as great as the
8 general and whose charge it is placed, and I further
9 applaud the Mayor and his decision to place
10 responsibility for the success of this effort in the
11 hands of Steve Banks. Both he and I have spent over
12 25 years working to improve the City's services to
13 homeless New Yorkers. First as legal adversaries
14 when he was with Legal Aid and I was with the City
15 and more recently as partners in service to our
16 city's most vulnerable. I know that Steve Banks
17 brings the necessary experience, wisdom, insight, and
18 tenacity to see this effort through to success. For
19 these reasons I'm confident that this comprehensive
20 and integrated strategy will improve outcomes for the
21 people and the city we serve. Thank you for your
22 time, your attention and concern.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
25 Mr. Rosenblatt. Mr. Apple?

MUZZY ROSENBLATT: You're welcome.

DOUGLAS APPLE: Good afternoon. I'm

Douglas Apple, Executive Vice President of Samaritan Village. Samaritan Village is a large human service and housing provider here in New York City. We have over 25,000 clients in our programs last year. We run approximately 2,000 shelter beds and transitional housing programs for families, and we also provide comprehensive treatment services as well. I also am here to commend the Administration for their efforts in this regard and in this program. I also want to first thank the council, you Councilman Levin, and also your colleagues for their efforts to shine a light on this issue. Without the hearings that you've held over the last several years, we may not be here today. In terms of specific elements of the program, I just want to highlight a couple, some that have been and some that haven't been. I think the discussion around security is paramount, and I applaud Commissioner Banks for being open, transparent and forthright about how he approaches this issue. I do think that the fact that as he talked about having a three types of security is challenging, and that thinking about a unified

security system across all shelters is something well worth considering. I do think that it's something that is important and something that we've been doing more and more within our shelters as well. The other issue I want to talk about is the fact that as Commissioner Banks talked about is we really are running in some cases a defacto mental health system. There are many clients, and I know--for example, I know Councilman Johnson was asking earlier about street homelessness. I think we all would say maybe with varying degrees that very much the result of street homelessness is the failure of other systems to properly discharge plan and properly place clients as they leave, whether it's the mental health systems, whether it's Rikers, whether it's--and whether it's other systems. So, we think that having mental health programs really more focused in the shelters is critical, not just in the 27 mental health shelters, but really thinking about mental health for families, mental health issues in all of our programs, and we're excited by the fact that there seems to be a commitment and understanding of the need to do that. And the final point I want to make is I want to really commend the Administration

for their openness and transparency, their willingness to engage with both elected officials, but also with providers, and the willingness to problem solve with us. Too often we struggle under the dual burdens of the regulations of the city, the state and of other entities. We as nonprofit providers have limited resources as Joan says. Our administrative fees after having spent 27 years in city government, I can say that I wish I had the same city government bureaucracy in a nonprofit in terms of back office and support. We don't have that, so therefore we really need the city to create more streamline processes while still holding us accountable and still creating rules that are transparent and understandable, and my final point about the actual plan that's been put forth. We really applaud the approach of having one unified voice in Commissioner Banks, and as Muzzy said, I think I've known him as long as Muzzy has. He has been both a worthy adversary and a great ally, but I also would say that I would be very careful and cautious about the consolidation of functions. The back offices, though the kind of things that are easy to reduce, and we all have done that, are also

critical to assuring contracts get done on a timely basis, to assuring that the metrics that we need to have are available, to assuring that the data systems that are important to the work we do are there and are functioning. Too much too fast in terms of the back office consolidation I worry could result in unintended consequences and potential risk. So, with that I'll pause. I know it's late, and I know you have much to do today. So thank you very much for having us.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. And we're going to continue to keep an eye on that and would love to continue to hear from your community where there are issues. I mean, if there are unintended consequences, you are likely the ones to notice them, and I'd ask that you bring those to our attention when you see them. Certainly that's been something that HSU [sic]--

DOUGLAS APPLE: [interposing] Yeah, I don't do it do in the context--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] been very helpful.

DOUGLAS APPLE: of complaining. I just do it in the context of having gone through large-scale

1 governmental mergers, and even though I know that
2 this is not technically a merger, in many ways
3 defacto will be. There sometimes is the fact that
4 you end up getting focused on those internal issues
5 at the risk of impacts in other ways that you don't
6 expect.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It always helps to be
9 looking at everything with a critical eye. And then,
10 Mr. Horwitz, do you want to testify as well? Makes
11 sense as part of this panel. Thanks, Doug.

12 ALEXANDER HORWITZ: Thank you very much.
13 I'm Alexander Horwitz. I'm the Chief of Staff at the
14 Doe Fund, and thanks to the Council for these
15 hearings, and particularly Committee Chair Levin and
16 for all the members for allowing me to testify on
17 behalf of the organization. I hope to express my
18 gratitude by being brief. The Doe Fund fully
19 endorses the City's 90-day review effort, the
20 restructure of the HRA and DHS under Commissioner
21 Banks, and we believe that many of the 46 points will
22 help improve the way we serve New Yorkers in need,
23 but instead of getting into the minutia of where we
24 agree or disagree on each of these reforms, I'd like
25 to talk a little bit about what a change means--what

a change like this means in a larger context from a provider's perspective. For 25 years, as long as DHS has existed as a separate city agencies, the Doe Fund has served men with long histories of homelessness and incarceration and we have conveyed tens of thousands of men back from the streets and from prison cells back to their communities to their families and to productive whole and working lives. Any provider will tell you that's no small feat, and we've accomplished it through a unique combination of services starting with paid work and economic opportunity but also with a balance of holistic social services and education. In order to make the promise that the organization has made for almost 30 years, the promise that if you come to us for help you can go to work today. You can earn money today. We've had to work around and through some very high and very thick walls built around our city's services, our city's agencies and administrative bodies. This review and restructure is the first time that those walls and those silos have come down even an inch, and we believe that this key change is a first step in transforming the landscape of services for New Yorkers in need and a move toward

what we know works, an integrated, holistic continuum of care, one that doesn't just get people into housing but restores their lives, their self-sufficiency and drives down homelessness, poverty and recidivism along the way. Homelessness is not a disease with a single cure. It's an outcome with diverse and complex causes, and providing simply a roof over a person's head doesn't address the roots of the problem any more than SNAP benefits address the roots of food insecurity. Are these important and essential emergency interventions? Of course they are, but can a single agency or a single benefit for that matter truly uplift life and solve these problems fundamentally? No, they can't. We serve lives in transition and lives in transition are difficult. They can be messy. They can be complicated. Most of all, they're painful, and a holistic approach is the only way forward, and I can assure everyone that the administrative barriers between services mean very little to those on the receiving end of the help that we are compelled and morally bound as New Yorkers to provide, and they are only barriers. Before I finish, I'd just like to share one example of how these separations have

1 fueled a crisis instead of solving it and why we're
2 so hopeful about these reforms and this integration.
3 The City has had success in addressing family
4 homelessness this year as the Mayor mentioned in his
5 press conference. In fact, those numbers have
6 leveled, thank goodness, but the single adult
7 population continues to rise. Both are homeless, of
8 course, that's where the similarities end. One
9 important driver for single adult homelessness, which
10 we haven't discussed at great length, is
11 incarceration. In fact, we know that the same kind
12 of lifelong economic deprivation that traditionally
13 lead to the streets when this crisis began now is
14 just as likely to lead to a prison cell for single
15 adults and thousands and thousands of poor New
16 Yorkers. In fact, the State of New York estimates
17 that some 2,000 men a year are paroled from Upstate
18 correctional facilities into homelessness, the vast
19 majority in New York City which means that we're not
20 working together. They can't be served through
21 mediation with landlords. They can't be warehoused
22 into self-sufficiency, and this pipeline that has
23 been created, one that takes young New Yorkers out of
24 their neighborhoods and isolates them in a traumatic
25

1 criminal justice system and then spits them into the
2 streets must be addressed if we wish to stem this
3 crisis not just for the generation of New Yorkers
4 today who need our help, but for their children and
5 the generations that proceed. That will only be
6 possible if we continue to lower the walls between
7 our city's services, agencies and providers, and the
8 State, and this restructure for us is the first step
9 towards exactly that. So if we truly wish to end
10 this crisis, and certainly we all do, once and for
11 all and stop the generational cycles of poverty and
12 homelessness and incarceration and most importantly
13 deprivation, our success depends entirely on how
14 closely we're willing to work together, government
15 and citizen, representative and constituent, but also
16 fundamentally agency and agency. Thank you very
17 much.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And city and state.

20 DOUGLAS APPLE: And city and state.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you all very
22 much for your testimony, also for the work that you
23 do day in and day out because, you know, you are the
24 ones on--and your staff are the ones that are out
25 there providing these services and it's doing good

work. It's doing decent work in helping individuals in need and families in need, and we continue to appreciate that. Thank you. Next panel is Giselle Routhier and Josh Goldfein, Coalition for the Homeless and Legal Aid, Stephanie Gendell from the Citizens Committee for Children. Whoever wants to begin?

GISELLE ROUTHIER: Thanks so much for the opportunity to testify. My name is Giselle Routhier. I'm the Policy Director at the Coalition for the Homeless. We and Legal Aid have submitted joint testimony, so I'm just going to quickly cover a few points from that testimony. So, the Mayor's recent announcement of system wide changes to be made following the 90-day review of homeless services acknowledges that problems have plagued the shelter system for many years, and in large part affirms this Administration's commitment to proven effective solutions. So we want to highlight a few things relating to that, specifically regarding the structural changes. We believe that integrating the management systems for DHS and HRA will work to improve communication and streamline services delivery for homeless individuals and families who

access benefits and services from both agencies.

Additionally, the proposed interagency Homelessness Accountability Council will bring in representatives from other key agencies particularly NYCHA and HPD who play a vital role in providing permanent housing resources for homeless families and individuals.

Regarding programmatic changes of which there are many, we'll mention just a few. We support aligning the eligibility procedures for adult families with those who are families with children. This will remove excessive bureaucratic barriers that have been in place for many years for adult families and many of whom have disabilities. The City also proposed joint taskforces with the state to help address concerns regarding discharges from prisons and jails to shelter as well as improving mental health service delivery. We believe these efforts will prove critical to address major systemic problems that have plagued the single adult shelter system for literally decades, and they're really crucial as well regarding safety and security, and so it's really important, and we urge the State to work cooperatively with the City in those efforts. Nevertheless, despite historic and wide-ranging reforms there are still

actions the City can take to improve upon the work it has begun, particularly doubling down on the housing based solutions. So building on recent success that the Commissioner mentioned, leveling off the family shelter census, and we thank you for mentioning this, Chair, as well. It's imperative that the Administration increased the NYCHA public housing allotment directed towards homeless families from 1,500 to 2,500 units. It's absolutely critical because we know it works, and in addition, made 2,500 placements utilizing section eight and HPD units in the coming fiscal year. And specifically to address homelessness among single adults which we know has been continuing to increase. We need urgency in new supportive housing from both the City and the State. I know the City has committed to bringing on new units of scatter sites units this year and this fiscal year, particularly from the Governor and the State Legislature who still need to sign an MOU to get funds for supportive housing out the door following the recent passage of the state budget. It's really critical, and we thank your support with those efforts. So, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'll turn it over to Josh.

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: Again, we appreciate your questioning on a number of points where the City could take additional action. In particular, a simple one that we've been focused on is them relieving children of the obligation to go to Path and disrupting kids' education. It will be very easy for the City to not require children to attend appointments at the Path office in particular, and we appreciated your questioning and also the Commissioner's most clear statement that the City would like to move in that direction as well. And as Giselle mentioned and as you were questioning the Commissioner about, HPD could also do quite a bit more. He talked about a process to enable families to access HPD units with less bureaucracy, but not how many units might be available through that process, and it is very important to look at the work that Commissioner Banks is doing in the context of what the City as a whole is doing. In particular, there are other Deputy Mayors and other commissioners who could be providing greater resources to the Department of Homeless Services to solve the problems that the Department of Homeless Services is charged with. We also have, of course, tremendous need for

the State to step and address the amount of rent subsidies that are available, both in terms of the level of the subsidies and the number of the subsidies that are available, and the eligibility criteria for those subsidies. You know, these are all in the control of the state, and the City can't solve these problems without the state's assistance. You also brought up the--you and Council Member Johnson were talking to the Commissioner about the services for kids in the 18 to 24-year-old category, and the City could provide additional services there. They would make available a greater range--shelters, smaller shelters for that population in particular, which would better serve those individuals and would also be consistent with the City's legal obligations in those areas. And we continue to focus, of course, on the ways that the shelter census being so high impacts on our clients in that the--given that there are so many people in shelter and the vacancy rate in the shelter system is so low. There are many people who are not able to be served in the ways that their city is obligated to serve them. For instance, it's very difficult for the city to place families with children, with school-aged children, in the school

1 district where their child goes to school, and that's
2 because the capacity is--the shelter capacity is at
3 an all-time high, and you know, the city would like
4 to reduce the shelter capacity by getting out of the
5 cluster sites and we commend that, and we want to
6 work with them to ensure that those cluster sites are
7 returned to be rent regulated affordable housing for
8 shelter clients as permanent housing as the city does
9 but as long as the shelter population remains so
10 high, it's very difficult for the City to place kids
11 in near the schools. It's very difficult for them to
12 accommodate people's disabilities and medical needs
13 in shelter, and as a result, we continue to people
14 who are suffering because the city can't meet their
15 needs just because the shelter population is so high.
16 In order to solve all those problems, the City and
17 the Commissioner of Social Services is going to need
18 the assistance of HPD, of the Housing Authority and
19 the ways that we talked about in particularly from
20 the State. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Excuse me. Just one
23 thing, Josh, that--you know, obviously you and
24 Coalition and Legal Aid have been saying this for a
25 long time, and I think that it's--I'm glad to see

that the Administration is moving towards that model of increasing interagency coordination. I know, you know, I would have to have seen it four years ago or five years ago or three years ago, but I'm glad that it's happening.

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: We're very glad to see the reforms as they're set forth on paper, and we look forward to them being implemented, and but we want to make sure that we don't lose the focus that the Commissioner of Social Services and the administrators of the Department of Homeless Services and HRA can't do these things on their own.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: They need assistance from other city agencies and they need assistance from the State.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep. Thank you.

STEPHANIE GENDELL: Good afternoon. I'm Stephanie Gendell. I'm the Associate Executive Director for Policy and Government Relations at Citizens Committee for Children. We too were pleased to see the Administration's 90-day review and the 46 recommendations, and we look forward to learning more about the implementation plans and seeing them, more

of the details of how they'll go into effect, and in many areas we'll probably want to see some of them expedited in their implementation. As has been stated, a lot of this is long overdue. I just wanted to highlight a couple of areas that we were extremely pleased with and then add in a couple of recommendations. As has been stated, we too are very pleased to see a movement towards not having children at Path anymore, as well as expanding rental assistance programs for runaway and homeless youth, and we too hope to see additional programs and services helping the young people 18 to 24. We also are pleased to hear about the elimination of the cluster sites and the three-year plan to do so. Again, hope to see that actually expedited. We do not think that's the best place for families in shelter. And we're pleased to see the targeting of outreach to the children who are living doubled-up as they see them at DOE. Just to make a couple of other recommendations. We are still looking for the City to fully support Assembly Member Havasee's [sp?] bill A7756A, which would not only increase the amount of the travel for housing subsidy, but increase the age from 21 to 24 which would keep young people aging out

of foster care and families out of the DHS system, which would be better for the City and better for the young people and their families. There is new federal rule that makes childcare for families in shelter, for children in shelter they're now a priority just like families on public assistance, and we look forward to seeing the City expeditiously come up with a plan so that children in shelter can be enrolled in childcare programs. The City has a plan or plans about how to do this, because they did it for four year olds who now go to pre-k and were living in shelters. So they should be able to use the same plan for zero to three year olds that they use for four year olds. And like you discussed earlier, we are still looking for additional programs to help address the trauma for children in particular who are in shelter and also for families when they leave shelter who may have had their housing issue resolved, but still face a number of other obstacles and traumas, and we want to ensure that they're able to keep their families together and that the children receive the services they need. And I'll end where everyone else has been, which is we too want to work with the State and ensure that the State plays the

role that they are supposed to play in helping homeless families, and we will be advocating with the Council and our partners and the City to do so. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Ms. Gendell. I really appreciate your thoughtful testimony and obviously we always look to Citizens Committee for Children's guidance on a lot of these issues. Thank you very much to this panel. I really appreciate your time. Thank you. Next panel, Wendy O'Shields, Safety Net Activists, Deborah Dickerson, Safety Net Activists, and Michelle Jackson from the Human Services Council. Whoever wants to begin?

WENDY O'SHIELDS: I'll begin. My name's Wendy O'Shields, and I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony today. I am a member of the Safety Net Activists. As a DHS resident, I have witnessed DHS and their nonprofit vendor staffs break the Callahan Consent Decree and disregard the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance's homeless policies. I've also been subjected to ill-prepared directors, caseworkers and support staff members. While we support many of the reforms in the 90-day review, we believe that

accountability with DHS officials and shelter staff is crucial. We propose the following measure to ensure accountability and proper implementation. One, DHS should report to the City Council on a monthly basis regarding its progress with implementing its plan for reform. This will provide benchmarks of progress as DHS is revamped. Two, DHS and their DHS nonprofit vendor shelters are in great need of higher quality staff. Directors and caseworkers should have a Masters of Social Work with a New York State license. Support staff should have a Bachelor's Degree or comparable work experience in social services. Existing staff should receive additional education and training to comply with these new standards. Number three, the Department of Homeless Services currently has no meaningful or transparent compliance with monitoring to ensure that they follow the law. The Comptroller's Office should partner with outside groups to monitor DHS's compliance with the Callahan Consent Decree and OTDA regulations. Four, the new Interagency Homeless Accountability Council should include community-based organizations that work with the homeless and current and former DHS residents. We ask that these measures

be implemented by January 2017 at the latest. I thank you greatly for listening to my suggestions for a better DHS.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Those are wonderful suggestions. We look forward to seeing them implemented and we look forward to working with you to ensure that they are implemented.

WENDY O'SHIELDS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

DEBORAH DICKERSON: Good afternoon. My name is Deborah Dickerson and I am a member of the Safety Net Activists. I would like to first thank you for this opportunity for testifying regarding housing issues within the DHS. I have experienced various problems in getting housing. Low income should be a priority of DHS, going towards permanent housing and not referring individuals to permanent supportive housing. This is necessary to combat homelessness in New York City. We applaud the Commissioner's recommendation to convert the cluster units back to rent stabilized apartments. We also encourage him to implement the other part of gaining ground project recommended by Picture the Homeless which will create affordable housing using vacant buildings. Housing

specialists at the shelter should be trained to assess the proper housing options. I have personally seen situations where people were placed in inappropriate housing just for placement. Coming back to the shelter is the result for many people in the past. Upon leaving the shelter they should be notified that HomeBase can assist as preventive measures in any problems should that occur in their new housing. Many have been in the streets, have been in the shelters, and chose to live in the streets for various reasons. These--their homes are in the streets. DHS has an outreach and people must be seen several times at the same place in order to obtain housing. However, when asked by the police, they must leave the location. As a result, they have to start this procedure all over. In other states there is an issue of a certificate or a paper stating for the police not to move them because they are trying to obtain housing. Unfortunately, DHS reputation has been not good and any association with DHS is not capable [sic], but however, we are looking forward to making these changes in transition. I also like to say that housing is a human right and we are looking forward towards working with the Council

and the new Commissioner and we also thank him for his being so transparent, and I was there with some of the focal groups, and I'm glad that Mayor de Blasio put him in office. So, thank you for this time.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Ms. Dickerson. That's a very moving testimony and very effective testimony. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues as we move forward. Thank you very much for your patience, too for this long hearing.

DEBORAH DICKERSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

MICHELLE JACKSON: Good afternoon, Chairman Levin. My name is Michelle Jackson. I'm the Associate Director for the Human Services Council. I know I'm at the end of a very long day, so I will keep it brief. I know you're familiar with our organization. We represent about 170 human service providers in New York City, and we're here--I wanted to testify to kind of tie some of the issues from the 90-day review into the larger social services network with a focus on providers, and obviously the, you know, through testimony today we've learned there's a

lot around client's providers, for profits, nonprofits, land own--you know, owners, those kinds of things. So, I first wanted to say that we really commend the City and the City Council for their work on this issue. I think commissioner Banks, he did a great road show. He reached out a ton of providers and service providers on the ground and got a lot of input, which we think is very important. A lot of his recommendations are in line with what we see not just in DHS and HRA but across the sector when it comes to kind of right-sizing rates, the need to invest in infrastructure, those kinds of issues. So we were very happy to see him reaching out to everyone all over the various stakeholders and getting input and are impressed with the recommendations. Particularly, recommendation 22 around the right-sizing of rates and contracts and rationalization, and then also while it's not necessarily a recommendation, their investment in infrastructure for providers. They upped the amount of infrastructure. As we heard, you know, I think a lot today around kind of leaky roofs and rats, kind of, there needs to be an investment in infrastructure for providers, nonprofit providers who are providing

these services. So I wanted to talk about the health of providers who deliver these services. We recently did a report that stem from the closure of FECS [sic], but really has recommendations for the full sector. It's also coupled with the C-change [sic] report that shows that 18 percent of human services providers are insolvent. Those are the providers that you're talking about today and those are the people that we're, the City, is relying on to deliver services to communities and provide bridges to opportunity. We find that contracts do not contain cost-escalation clauses. They don't pay the appropriate in-direct rate. DHS, for example, pays on average an 8.5 percent rate, which is very low, and that's standard on their contracts. In for-profit world, you look at a 30 to 50 percent overheard rate, and experts in our field say it should be between 15 and 25 for nonprofits. So you're already putting people at a loss. That's why you need to do an investment in infrastructure, because nonprofit providers can't make these repairs. Our commission examined a number of different things that I think are illustrative and found in the 90-day review. The things that we're asking for: First, is

1 we're asking the Council this year to fund a 2.5
2 percent operational increase on human service
3 contracts, basically, the OTPS line of all human
4 service contracts. In an effort to kind of get at
5 some of this, the lack of investment and indirect a
6 way to give cash infusion to nonprofits is short term
7 solution. We're asking for an undertake, a thorough
8 review of the reimbursement rates to develop an
9 adequate funding structure. While we appreciate
10 recommendation 22 in the 90-day review about
11 rationalizing rates, there's already an RFP out for
12 career pathways and youth pathways that caps fringe
13 at 25 percent, and while we're hearing that providers
14 can ask for a higher fringe rate in their contracts
15 and it has no relation to scoring, well then why put
16 that in there, when fringe rate at the City is above
17 50 percent, and in most places it's clearly above 25.
18 So there's already something that's like a little bit
19 different form--it's just kind of one of those things
20 where it just makes for providers responding to that
21 RFP, they don't understand that, and is that
22 something we're going to see now across contracts?
23 So that's a particularly problematic--something
24 that's coming out even after the 90-day--or kind of
25

1 in conjunction with the 90-day review. So we, you
2 know, we applaud the 90-day review and we think that
3 there's a great opportunity for program
4 collaboration. We're already seeing that in some of
5 the RFP's and what Commissioner Banks testified
6 today. We'd like to see more program collaboration
7 across agencies, not just between these two but
8 others as well. There needs to be investment in
9 infrastructure. I think the shelter kind of--it's the
10 most obvious, and because of the press that's been
11 around it, but there's been a real divestment in the
12 sector across agencies, and it's apparent in shelter
13 but there needs to be an investment indirect and
14 infrastructure and the right-sizing of rates, and I
15 think it's great that there's attention brought to
16 it, but we hope that that carries forward and we see
17 it in the actual programs that are being developed
18 and that we see it beyond these two agencies.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
21 and I--you know, all of these things cost money--

22 MICHELLE JACKSON: [interposing] Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and inflation always
24 goes up, and you know, the cost associated with
25 having personnel and OTPS over the, you know, over

the years will always continue to go up, and if we are funding organizations as if it's 1999 and we're actually at 2016, you know, it puts all these organizations at an extreme disadvantage, which then goes to the clients and puts the clients at an extreme disadvantage because the resources are not there. I've never been a big believer in that you can do more with less.

MICHELLE JACKSON: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't think you can do more with less, actually. I think that you can do more with more. So--

MICHELLE JACKSON: [interposing] Right, yeah. I think that's what the sector's seeing. I think it's most evident here, and thankfully with Commissioner Banks kind of going through this process, but you know, when you see underfunded contracts right from the jump that they're trying to pull in private resources and then you see a lack of cost escalation causes and then contracts are not re-RFP'd on time, so you people with rates that they've had 10 years ago, particularly in DHS where it's rent. I mean, we all know rent in New York. It doesn't stay stagnant for 10 years.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, absolutely. And I mean, I see it in our Committee. We oversee the childcare system, and you know, that system is actually on the brink of disintegrating. I mean, our reputable providers that are pulling out of contracts.

MICHELLE JACKSON: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And they can't continue to provide those services, and we can't afford as a city to lose our fabric of not-for-profit providers. Often times, provision of services can be better, as you've highlighted in your testimony, but at the same time, we need to make sure that those that are good are able to continue--and that have been in the community for many decades, be able to continue to provide the services and not forced literally to close down or, you know, careen towards bankruptcy.

MICHELLE JACKSON: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much to this panel. We look forward to working with you further. Last panel, James Butler, Life Experiences and Faith Sharing, Catherine Trapani, New Destiny Housing, and Terry Grace from St. James Madison

Avenue Shelter. Thank you very much for your patience. Whoever wants to begin?

CATHERINE TRAPANI: Thanks very much. I'm going to be really brief. My name is Catherine. I'm from New Destiny Housing. We've covered a lot of ground today. So, I just thank you for all of your work and your patience and attention to this really important issue. I do just want to flag a little bit of an issue that I see from New Destiny's perspective as a provider that's focused on the needs of victims of domestic violence. We've talked about domestic violence today in the context of a security issue or a service issue, but we haven't talked about it as something that's integrated into the entire plan. So when we're looking at, for example, the expansion of HomeBase and how they're going to prevent homelessness, I haven't heard very much about integrating the needs of survivors of domestic violence into that plan. So for example, there's a rent subsidy called City FEPS that is supposed to be available to people that are fleeing abuse. That's in the policy directive for City FEPS, but currently you can only access City FEPS if you are either a resident of a HRA domestic violence shelter or have

gone through the Path center and been certified as NOVA [sic] eligible for fleeing domestic violence, and that's something that for a lot of victims of abuse who are very reluctant to use the shelter system for various reasons, it's an unsurmountable hurdle. So, basically, the impact is we're telling victims that unless you leave the way we tell you to leave, you can't leave your abuser. So, it's extremely important to us as an agency to see that as we develop programs at HomeBase that the domestic violence service providers as well agencies like the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violent are really integrated into this plan so that a person fleeing abuse can go to HomeBase to get assessed properly by somebody who's qualified to asses for domestic violence and offer preventive subsidies when they might be appropriate. So, literally the only thing I wanted to say today is just to flag it that we can't talk about DV justice just as a security issue, but it needs to be interwoven into the entire comprehensive plan to address homelessness. So, thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely, and we'll continue to work with you and advocate for that, and you know, bring that back to HRA for sure.

CATHERINE TRAPANI: Thank you very much.

TERRY GRACE: Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity to say something here. I'm Terry Grace. I'm an overnight host at the St. James Episcopal Madison Avenue Presbyterian Shelter. We're part of the interfaith emergency shelter network which I think has 47 churches and synagogues that are giving free overnight beds to homeless adults, single adults every night. What I wanted to suggest--I've heard that there are going to be more drop-in centers, and the communities I think don't know where they're going to be, and we have heard from the Opening Doors Program that street outreach people might be bringing guests to churches and synagogues. These are volunteer staffed. There's a screening necessity there for substance abuse and mental health. In order for volunteers to staff the shelters, that's the only requirement really, and in order to secure the screening these guests, they're done now with the drop-in centers, but it could be done by street outreach, need to be securely brought to each house

of worship. Now it's done by bus or van. I wanted to encourage considering all the discussion we've had today about money and certifications and this and that, this has been going on for 35 years that these churches and synagogues have offered their space. Originally, the suggestion of the Mayor at that time, to give an overnight, sometimes a meal. They're safe. Nobody gets hurt at these shelters. I've never had a problem in serving for 13 years. I think that we need to use them more. These beds are only being used now at 60 percent. The drop-in centers are not filling the free beds. Now, there are working homeless people. There are people who are not having substance abuse or mental health problems. We need to somehow get the intake systems into to refer people to the drop-in centers or somehow get them to these beds, but to have the beds go wasting when the ones in the city shelters with the professional overnight social service people where-- the people who really need that help can't get in there, because there's not enough room, and then these beds are going wasting. I just wanted to raise that topic. The second, very quickly. Our guests are not able to--and it's been brought up already.

1 Our guests are not able to get apartments, and they
2 wait and wait and wait for months in our shelters
3 because the landlords will not accept Link and
4 Section 8. So, but I heard that brought up before,
5 so I just wanted to reiterate that that's happening
6 with people who are very housing-ready, ready to go,
7 packed, and the landlord are say--you spend two
8 hours, three hours filling out an application. All
9 of a sudden, oh, gee, we can't--you don't qualify.
10 So, I want to raise that. Thank you so much, and I'm
11 delighted that Steve Banks is talking about combining
12 the services, collaborating taskforces. Listening to
13 everybody it's fabulous. I wish you all the best of
14 luck and we want to be part of it any way we can.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I just want
17 to say that the house of worship that provides a
18 respite program in my neighborhood where I live in
19 Greenpoint has saved lives, because if it wasn't
20 there individuals would be sleeping out in the cold
21 and putting themselves at grave risk. And so--

22 TERRY GRACE: [interposing] Yeah, Camba
23 [sic] does a great job, too.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm very appreciative
25 of the volunteers and the--that are throughout New

York City that--and the houses of worship themselves and the leadership, [inaudible] leadership of the house of worship for doing--for following their religious mission in providing these services because it's absolutely a backbone of the system as you said for now decades, and it saves lives every single year.

TERRY GRACE: Thank you. Let us know how we can help you with everything you're doing here on this Council.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.
Okay, sir?

JAMES BUTLER: How you doing?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good, how are you?

JAMES BUTLER: I'm James Butler, and I'm--
-

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Press
the--is it on?

JAMES BUTLER: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There you go.

JAMES BUTLER: Yes, I'm James Butler and I'm a Housing Coordinator and Team Member for Sisters of Charity, Life Experience and Faith Sharing Ministry, and our ministry, we go out to several

shelters throughout the City and we provide spiritual gatherings. So, and one of the shelters you mentioned that had an incident in the East Harlem, yes, there have been tremendous positive changes with the security, the atmosphere, and you know, to calm your nerves and let you know yes, they are doing their job. But my last experience with the shelter system was 2010, and it was a dead-end solution towards getting housing. I ended up living on the streets once again, sleeping on the streets of Midtown Manhattan, and I was riding on the train for about two years. It was only by the grace of God and the people I met, and what they let me do was double-up, what they call double-up. You can't get in the shelter, go double up with a friend. You got a job? Double up with a friend. You make too much money, you late, you know, they don't make enough money, so you in between. So, but here I am six years later, and I know what I would do if my--I wouldn't know what I'd do if my living situation changed. I really don't. And this is the same situation that so many of the Life Experience and Faith Sharing community members are going through. I go through it every day too. When I first came to New York in 1991, I landed

1 in the New York shelter system, and the state--and a
2 case manager told me if you don't have a lease with
3 your name on it, you are homeless. The statement
4 made good sense to me. Today, everybody has
5 forgotten it. Without a lease in your name and
6 you're staying with a friend or family member, you're
7 always in a position to be abused and taken advantage
8 of. That's why so many people are coming back to the
9 streets. New York City and State are not allowing
10 those on fixed income, minimum wage jobs, and some
11 with bad credit history to meet the financial
12 criteria of the housing market in New York. It has
13 come to the point of the housing conversation about
14 affordable housing is affordable housing for who?
15 The lesser community is comprised of those who are
16 street homeless, those who are in the shelter system
17 and those that are staying with family and friends.
18 Where is the justice in fair market practices for
19 those who are in the shelter system today? It is a
20 sad that a person has to wait a long period of time
21 in the shelter system to get a place they can call
22 home with their name on their own lease. We know
23 individuals who have Section 8 and Link vouchers and
24 cannot find a realtor to accept them. We're talking
25

about individuals in one shelter or another in New York City today and at this moment. This is a very stressful process, and left [sic] hears about the stories and goes through the application and rejection process of some of these organizations and realtors who profess that we have affordable housing, the LEFTA [sic] community wants to know what are you going to do? What will one of the Council Members do if they found themselves in the shelter system or moving with family members or friends to be abused mentally or financially? The funny thing is that it's not funny about living with family or friends when you're being contest--when you contest them about something that becomes a liability to you or if they cannot get you to do something for them that is above and beyond with indirect threats of telling you they may have to move or leave or get more money for you, from you. They will wait for a moment of vulnerability to tell you you have to leave right now. You're never at peace. The Life Experience and Faith Sharing community wants to know what are some options that the City Council are prepared to implement to address the needs of New York City homeless community, and we just thank you, and those

are some of the voices and statements that I hear from community on a day-to-day basis. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much for your testimony. I think it's a--your testimony is a good note to end on in that we all have a responsibility, both the City has a responsibility, this Council has a responsibility. You as providers and those out there working with the homeless community, we all have a collective responsibility to ensure that services are being--are getting to the people that need them, and that everybody's dignity is respected and everybody's human rights are respected, and that we can always strive to do better here in New York City. We really appreciate your testimony and we appreciate your patience.

JAMES BUTLER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. Okay, at 1:59 p.m., this hearing is adjourned. Thank you all very much for being here today.

[gavel]

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

198

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 20, 2016