

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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June 22, 2016

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.  
16th Fl

B E F O R E: MARGARET S. CHIN  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Karen Koslowitz  
Deborah L. Rose  
Chaim M. Deutsch  
Mark Treyger  
Paul A. Vallone  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

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

Julia Walpert, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Housing Supervision  
Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Timothy Sheares, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Finance, Property Division

Samara Karasyk, Assistant Commissioner  
External Affairs  
Department of Finance

Terry Davis-Merchant  
NYC Housing Preservation and Development, HPD

Sarah Stefanski, Policy Analyst  
Housing Budget  
NYC Independent Budget Office

Tom Connor, Chairman  
Senior Advisory Board  
Greenwich House



2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Good afternoon.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [off mic] Good  
5 afternoon. My name is Margaret Chin and I'm the  
6 Chair of the Committee on Aging. I would like to  
7 thank my fellow committee members and Council staff  
8 for coming together to hold this hearing. Today's  
9 hearing will provide the committee with an  
10 opportunity to hearing Intro 582, sponsored by  
11 Council Member Paul Vallone, and Intro 1024,  
12 sponsored by Council Member Fernando Cabrera. The  
13 purpose of these two pieces of legislation is to  
14 provide New Yorkers, New York seniors and disabled  
15 citizens with increased access to critical program  
16 designed to alleviate the cost of housing in the  
17 city. The Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption  
18 and Disability Rent Increase Exemption programs,  
19 commonly known as SCRIE and DRIE, were created to  
20 protect aging and disabled New Yorkers from the  
21 burden of high rent and making housing relatively  
22 affordable for these at-risk populations. Both  
23 programs provide qualified applicants with an  
24 exemption from future rent increases, and ensure  
25 landlords receive property tax credit or abatements

2 to make up the difference. The benefits offered by  
3 the SCRIE and DRIE programs can provide life changing  
4 financial support for vulnerable populations that  
5 often dedicate a large percentage of their income to  
6 medical bills. SCRIE and DRIE are essential city  
7 programs that can offset the escalating cost of rent  
8 and growing income inequality across the city.  
9 Unfortunately, many eligible seniors and disabled  
10 citizens do not take advantage of these programs.  
11 According to a 2015 study conducted by the Department  
12 of Finance, it is estimated over 155,000 city  
13 households are eligible for either SCRIE or DRIE, but  
14 enrollment is limited to just above 61,000  
15 households. The Department of Finance study found  
16 that over 94,000 households, 61% of those eligible do  
17 not receive either SCRIE or DRIE benefits. One of  
18 the primary reasons for this low-level in enrollment  
19 is poor community of program benefits and eligibility  
20 requirements to the city's aging and disabled  
21 population. The bills before the committee today  
22 attempt to improve communications about SCRIE and  
23 DRIE by consolidating both programs under the  
24 authority of the Department of Finance and requiring  
25 several other city agencies to disseminate

2 applications for SCRIE in multiple languages  
3 alongside those agency's applications for other city  
4 programs. Participating agencies will be required to  
5 offer assistance to seniors in completing SCRIE  
6 applications as well as ensure completed applications  
7 are delivered in a timely manner to the Department of  
8 Finance. Each participating agency will also require  
9 to submit semi-annual progress reports to the Mayor's  
10 Office of Operations regarding the number of SCRIE  
11 applications distributed, the number of applications  
12 completed at an agency office, and the number of  
13 applications that each agency has transmitted to the  
14 Department of Finance.

15           The committee will also be hearing full  
16 resolutions on SCRIE and DRIE today. The first  
17 resolution, proposed Resolution 59-A, sponsored by  
18 Council Member Karen Koslowitz, would call upon the  
19 State to raise the threshold for SCRIE eligibility to  
20 coincide with associated changes in the Consumer  
21 Price Index.

22           The second resolution, proposed  
23 Resolution 114-A sponsored by Council Member Corey  
24 Johnson would call upon the State to exempt certain  
25

2 entitlement programs such as Social Security from  
3 determining eligibility for SCRIE or DRIE.

4           The third resolution, proposed Resolution  
5 173-A, sponsored by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer  
6 would call upon the State to extend the SCRIE program  
7 to the spouses of SCRIE recipients upon the death of  
8 the original SCRIE recipient spouse. I am the prime  
9 sponsor of the fourth and final resolution, proposed  
10 Resolution 406-A, which would call upon the State to  
11 expand SCRIE programs to include dwelling units  
12 subject to an agreement that bases its rent increases  
13 on those determined by the City's Rent Guidelines  
14 Board. One example of dwellings would be Battery  
15 Park City's Gateway project in my district, which  
16 includes approximately 850 units that are rent  
17 stabilized through a private contractual agreement  
18 with the Battery Park City Authority. The agreement  
19 limits rent increases to those permitted under Rent  
20 Stabilization though the apartments themselves are no  
21 longer formally rent stabilized. There are several  
22 other similar arrangements in housing complexes  
23 throughout the city and proposed Resolution 406-A  
24 would call upon the Senate--the State to extend SCRIE  
25 benefits to residents of those properties as well.

2 We help this hearing will provide the Council, the  
3 Administration and advocates with an opportunity to  
4 discuss ways to improve communication about SCRIE and  
5 DRIE programs and whether the changes proposed by the  
6 legislations before the committee today would serve  
7 as useful mechanisms to improve enrollment in both  
8 programs. With that said, I would like to turn the  
9 floor over to the prime sponsor of Intro 524, Council  
10 Member Paul Vallone to say a few words.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: As always, thank  
12 you to our amazing Chair Margaret Chin for Aging.  
13 Sometimes there's juicy bills, and sometimes there's  
14 bills that just kind of put things back from one  
15 agency to another. So in short, what 582 is--is  
16 really trying to do is put the administration of  
17 SCRIE and DRIE all back into one agency. There has  
18 been requests in the past to get this done. We're  
19 following through on those requests. However, now I  
20 understand the two agencies are--are not on the same  
21 page, and what I want to find out today is if a  
22 system is failing seniors with overwhelming amount of  
23 seniors still not taking advantage of SCRIE and DRIE,  
24 why I would keep it the way it is. The status quo is  
25 not working. I've been on the Council for three



2 years and I've been reading data open to more out--  
3 outreach. We're going to do more outreach. We're  
4 going to do more this, we're going to do more of  
5 that, and we're still at facts where our seniors are  
6 not taking advantage of these critical benefits  
7 within SCRIE and DRIE. So this bill would put  
8 everything with the Department of Finance instead of  
9 just letting HPD have a small segment. The part that  
10 deals with Mitchell-Lama and redevelopment company  
11 developments, Article 11 Co-Ops established under the  
12 Private Finance Housing Law and federally assisted  
13 co-ops. So that's in short why I am very curious as  
14 to the testimony on 582 on why we shouldn't go  
15 forward and minimize the insanity of finding out  
16 which agency is doing what when you're a senior  
17 trying to call in, and put it all under the  
18 Department of Finance. Thank you, Madam Chair.  
19 Thank you Margaret Chin.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, next I would  
21 like to ask the Council Member Cabrera, the prime  
22 sponsor of Intro 1024 to say a few words. Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Madam Chair, I  
24 just first want to thank you for being a champion  
25 for--in--in this Committee for the Aging, and you did

2 such a great job introducing it. I'm so glad to hear  
3 the Administration that I'm going to forego my time.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, save your--save  
5 your time for questions, right. Thank you. Okay, we  
6 have our first panel. So the Council will swear you  
7 in.

8 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right  
9 hands. Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the  
10 whole truth and nothing but the truth in your  
11 testimony today?

12 JULIE WALPERT: [off mic] Yes.

13 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT:

15 [background nose, pause] Good afternoon, Chair Chin  
16 and members of the Committee on Aging. My name is  
17 Julia Walpert and I am the Assistant Commissioner for  
18 the Division of Housing Supervision for the  
19 Department of Housing Preservation and Development.  
20 I oversee HPD's Mitchell-Lama Division, which  
21 includes our Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption  
22 or SCRIE program. I'm joined today by my colleague  
23 Terri Davis-Merchant, Our Senior Legislative Analyst  
24 in our Government Relations group. Thank you for the  
25 opportunity to speak with you today on Introduction

2 No. 582. Intro 582 seeks to transfer oversight from  
3 HPD, which oversees the SCRIE program for Mitchell-  
4 Lama developments in select types of subsidized  
5 housing to the Department of Finance. HPD believes  
6 retaining its oversight of the SCRIE will provide  
7 senior residents in these developments with efficient  
8 service due to its unique understanding of this  
9 housing program. As you know, the SCRIE was created  
10 to provide financial relief for low-income seniors  
11 who are rent burdened. To be eligible from SCRIE  
12 through HPD, seniors who are the head of household  
13 and at least 62 years of age must live in a Mitchell-  
14 Lama development that has implemented a rent  
15 increase, have a household income of less than  
16 \$50,000 and pay at least one-third of their income  
17 into rent. HPD has administered the SCRIE program  
18 for Mitchell-Lama developments since the program was  
19 first created in 1970. Over time, different agencies  
20 have had oversight over various aspects of the  
21 program. The Department for the Aging administered  
22 SCRIE for rent stabilized and rent controlled  
23 apartments prior to the Department of Finance  
24 assuming those duties in 2009. Despite these  
25 changes, HPD has always maintained its SCRIE program

2 of the agency's expertise in the Mitchell-Lama  
3 program and its understanding of the various aspects  
4 of this and other subsidized housing. HPD has  
5 retained its program because of the connections that  
6 we have with the Mitchell-Lama buildings across the  
7 city and the individual residents living in our  
8 developments. We would like to retain this  
9 connection going forward. HPD's SCRIE team is  
10 responsible for ensuring that eligible seniors  
11 residing in Mitchell-Lama developments and other  
12 subsidized housing such as Article 5 Redevelopment  
13 Companies benefit from the SCRIE program. HPD's  
14 SCRIE assists approximately 6,000 households of low-  
15 income elderly residents by processing new  
16 applications, conducting periodic outreach to seniors  
17 in connection with managing agents, ensuring that  
18 seniors maintain their exemptions over time. HPD  
19 believes having its own SCRIE unit both assists  
20 seniors needing rent relief, and help--helps ensure  
21 the financial health of the Mitchell-Lama  
22 developments. HPD SCRIE's role is particularly  
23 important during an imminent rent increase for a  
24 Mitchell-Lama. We hold workshops for seniors who may  
25 need SCRIE when Mitchell-Lama developments implement

2 a rent increase in order to ensure that we're  
3 enrolling as many eligible seniors as possible who  
4 are living in those--in these developments. In the  
5 event of a rent increase, our team is available to  
6 answer any questions about how this increase may  
7 affect seniors applying to the program. In certain  
8 instances, HPD can expedite and prioritize  
9 applications in a par--particular development  
10 undergoing an increase to ensure that senior  
11 residents remain current on their rent payments,  
12 which results in the building's continued financial  
13 stability as this change is implement. HPD can also  
14 access income affidavits with each household that  
15 Mitchell-Lama completes annually, and can review  
16 information as needed. This allows for greater  
17 efficiency in contacting seniors and management if  
18 there is missing information on the application. HPD  
19 SCRIE benefits from its long relationship with the--  
20 the managing agents responsible for the Mitchell-Lama  
21 developments because we oversee these buildings  
22 income verification and admission processes as well  
23 as management and operations based on the Mitchell-  
24 Lama rules. For the SCRIE program, this means the  
25 managing agents can help troubleshoot issues with

2 applications and aid HPD in providing a smooth and  
3 quick application process. Managing agents aid with  
4 HPD SCRIE when we have trouble getting information  
5 from the SCRIE applicant or if we need any other help  
6 in contacting the SCRIE applicant or current SCRIE  
7 participant. This special relationship also allows  
8 us to address the needs of specific seniors as they  
9 arise when the seniors are applying or during their  
10 tenure in the program. While HPD primarily deals  
11 with Mitchell-Lama and other subsidized housing with  
12 respect to SCRIE, we have a close working  
13 relationship with the Department of Finance. Staff  
14 across the two agencies share information and use  
15 similar technology. By retaining our own SCRIE  
16 program, though, we can keep our personal  
17 relationship with the management and senior residents  
18 of the Mitchell-Lama developments that we serve. We  
19 have a smooth working relationship with the  
20 Department of Finance and believe this relationship  
21 is beneficial to seniors in the SCRIE program. Thank  
22 you for the opportunity to speak about Intro 582, and  
23 HPD's oversight of this the SCRIE program for  
24 Mitchell-Lama. We believe this program is an  
25 important benefit for low-income seniors, and we

2 welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure  
3 the vitality of this program. I would be happy to  
4 answer any questions you may have.

5 [pause]

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Do you want to  
7 continue your testimony, and then we'll ask  
8 questions. We also are joined by Council Member  
9 Salamanca from the Bronx.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: Good  
11 afternoon, Chairwoman Chin, and members of the  
12 Committee on Aging. I am Timothy Sheares, Deputy  
13 Commissioner for the Department of Finance Property  
14 Division. I'm joined today by my colleague Samara  
15 Karasyk, Assistant Commissioner for External Affairs.  
16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify and provide  
17 background on the New York City Rent Freeze Program  
18 also known Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption,  
19 SCRIE and Disability Rent Increase Exemption, DRIE  
20 programs. For the past year the Department of  
21 Finance has partnered with elected officials,  
22 community boards and community based organizations to  
23 raise awareness about these programs so that more  
24 people may enroll. We have targeted specific  
25 neighborhoods throughout New York City with the

2 highest number of eligible residents, but the lowest  
3 enrollment in the programs. While there is always  
4 more to do, we feel that a coordinated strategy for  
5 targeted outreach will yield and increase in  
6 enrollment numbers for these vita programs.

7 According to the 2014 Department of Finance Report,  
8 there are roughly 69,500 seniors who potentially  
9 qualify for SCRIE. From July 1st 2014 to date, the  
10 department has--has received 24,522 SCRIE  
11 applications resulting in 13,336 new participants.

12 This indicates we are successfully penetrating 19% of  
13 the potentially eligible population and have reduced  
14 the number potential SCRIE participants to roughly  
15 56,220. Currently, 51,715 New Yorkers are enrolled  
16 in the SCRIE program. However, the growth of new  
17 applicants is offset by the natural attrition of  
18 current participants. Every month on average 164  
19 participants fail to renew, 101 fail to meet  
20 eligibility requirements, and 31 fail to submit  
21 documents to prove eligibility representing a loss of  
22 about 296 participants a month. In Fiscal Year 2015,  
23 the Department of Finance received 764 new  
24 applications a month on average. In Fiscal Year  
25 2016, the trend suggests we are receiving 404



2 applications per month on average, a decrease from  
3 764 to 404 per month is attributed to the 46% drop in  
4 new applications received between fiscal year 2015  
5 and fiscal year 2016. But it should be noted that at  
6 the beginning of fiscal year 2015, the income  
7 eligibility requirement for SCRIE increased from  
8 \$29,000 to \$50,000. So we saw a huge spike in the  
9 volume of new applicants because more people could  
10 qualify due this change. In addition to greater--  
11 greater enrollment efforts, publicity and a target  
12 mailing to prior applicants whose income exceeded the  
13 previous income requirement, fiscal year 15-16, the  
14 number of new applications has more or less returned  
15 to what we had seen in the past with approximately  
16 107 new recipients per month. In terms of the  
17 Disability Rent Increase Exemption program, 13,762  
18 New Yorkers are currently enrolled. In December  
19 2014, the Department of Finance issued a report  
20 citing enrollment numbers for both the Senior  
21 Citizens Rent Increase program and the Disability  
22 Rent Increase Exemption programs, and concluding that  
23 there were potentially 94,000 households that qualify  
24 for rent freeze benefits, and are not currently  
25 enrolled. To increase participation in both

2 programs, the agency developed a comprehensive  
3 outreach strategy targeting ten unique communities  
4 with high eligibility and low participation rate.  
5 The top ten under--under-enrolled city neighborhoods  
6 are--and are the highest to lowest Stuyvesant Town  
7 Turtle Bay, Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Kings--  
8 Kingsbridge Heights and Marshall in Bronx, Upper West  
9 Side, Upper East Side, High Bridge, Flushing, Boggs  
10 Neck (sic), Riverdale and Kew Gardens. In 2015, we  
11 created new outreach materials. We branded SCRIE and  
12 DRIE as the New York City Rent Freeze Program, and  
13 using the "Freeze Your Rent" slogan and hashtag on  
14 social medial. We also made sure our materials were  
15 multi-lingual to reach the diverse communities within  
16 the neighborhoods we wanted to target. Languages  
17 included are Bengali, Chinese, French Haitian-Creole,  
18 Korean, Spanish and Russian. We've piloted this--  
19 this new approached in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn last  
20 summer. We developed partnerships with community  
21 organizations and senior centers creating a local  
22 presence, conducted multi-lingual outreach materials,  
23 engaged ethnic media an developed and used a detailed  
24 map showing where eligible seniors live and which  
25 community centers and local organizations were

2 located nearby. In addition to our work in Brighton  
3 Beach, the Department of Finance launched a  
4 successful enrollment initiative in Chinatown through  
5 partnership with the Chinese-American Benevolent  
6 Association. We formally launched the effort with  
7 standing room only event in 2015. The DOF outreach  
8 team helped train the trainer events afterward for  
9 staff of the CABA. In addition, the Department of  
10 Finance had a dedicated staff person check in monthly  
11 in person with the Chinese-American Benevolent  
12 Association. The CABA tracked all applications and  
13 the office submitted--that our office submitted for  
14 applicants starting in July. In the next six months  
15 from July to December, 64 applications were  
16 submitted. The work with CABA taught us that in all  
17 of our enrollment efforts, it is key that our partner  
18 organizations have the capacity to help applicants  
19 complete their paperwork and collected completed  
20 applications on their behalf. So some seniors need  
21 assistance filling out their rent freeze  
22 applications, and working with trusted community  
23 organizations is helpful for them--for them to  
24 successfully enroll in the program. So building upon  
25 the model we developed with the Chinese American

2 Benevolent Association we partnered this spring with  
3 the office of Council Member Peter Koo and local  
4 senior centers on Flushing Senior Housing Month, a  
5 series of SCRIE outreach events in May that resulted  
6 in 24 new applications for the program, and we began  
7 Flushing Senior Housing Month with a press event.  
8 And along with our team from the Department of  
9 Finance, Council Member Koo and his staff were  
10 instrumental in getting publicity for this  
11 initiative, which was covered by New York One and the  
12 Queens Tribune. The press event announced the  
13 sessions we would be holding in the coming weeks at  
14 the senior centers in Flushing that are committed to  
15 sponsoring enrollment events and sponsoring  
16 applicants before and during the enrollment process.  
17 The senior center had interpreters on hand for all  
18 the events, can work with the council member's office  
19 to make sure that people pre-registered for  
20 enrollment events and brought all necessary  
21 documentation with them. This summer we will pilot a  
22 new marketing outreach approach to increase  
23 participation by raising awareness of SCRIE enrolling  
24 more people through the community partnerships and  
25 our mobile enrollment team. And better integrating

2 all city tools while working with other agencies to  
3 amplify these goals. We have--we will have an  
4 enrollment team on staff from our Rent Freeze  
5 Processing Unit that travels to events and collects  
6 applications, and again processing them on site. The  
7 flushing events were the first time this mobile unit  
8 played a crucial role in our enrollment events, and  
9 we will continue to enroll and rely upon this unit.  
10 Now that Flushing Senior Housing Month has concluded,  
11 we will continue to support our partners in Flushing  
12 to make sure that enrollments continue, and that they  
13 have the tools they need to successfully assist  
14 community members with their applications. This new  
15 enrollment model will be our baseline going forward  
16 starting with building local relationships with key  
17 partners in all our target enrollment areas where we  
18 believe there is a high volume of un-enrollment of  
19 eligible seniors. On June 9th along with the Mayor's  
20 Community Assistant Unit, we held a press event in  
21 Harlem with borough President Gale Brewer and the  
22 Community--Community Service Society at Hamilton  
23 Green Senior Center in Harlem. The Inner Vision and  
24 D-DNA Info both covered this event. We handed out  
25 3,000 flyers about the program to people that

2 targeted bus stop locations, and they are well un-  
3 enrolled eligible seniors reside. We went back to  
4 this senior center--center on June 10th to train the  
5 senior center staff on Rent Freeze Program  
6 requirements, handling pre-registration calls for the  
7 enrollment event on June 21st and to field questions  
8 and collect applications on the Rent Freeze program.  
9 Additionally, on June 14th and June 15th, DOF engaged  
10 direct outreach by visiting the rent regulated  
11 buildings in West Anderson to Harlem to post flyers,  
12 talk to residents and to meet with tenant  
13 representatives. We visited more than 30 buildings  
14 and distributed an additional 1,500 flyers. The  
15 flyers in English and Spanish provided information  
16 about the Rent Freeze Program and encouraged people  
17 to attend the June 21st event at the Hamilton Grange  
18 Library with our partner, the Community Service  
19 Society. Next, we will return to the Bronx for a  
20 Rent Freeze outreach and enrollment events. We held  
21 a Rent Freeze Day of Action there in November in  
22 partnership with the University Neighborhood Housing  
23 Program, one of the community partners in the  
24 Fordham-Bedford area. At the end of this month,  
25 we'll be holding a follow-up enrollment with that

2 group, and we will also be doing targeted outreach in  
3 Kings Bridge, Kings Bridge Heights, Fordham, Bedford  
4 Park and Norwood. The Fordham Bedford neighborhood  
5 in the Bronx is one of the top ten--top ten  
6 neighborhoods that we are targeting for enrollment.  
7 We will be rolling out this new enrollment approach  
8 throughout the City in the coming year, and look  
9 forward to working with elect--local elected  
10 officials on these efforts. To increase enrollment  
11 we are also working with new--on new partnerships  
12 with community centers, houses of worship, medical  
13 facilities, the MTA through its Access-A-Ride  
14 program, the Visiting Nurses Association, AARP and  
15 the Patient Advocates and social workers. We are  
16 partnering with--with the Department of Aging and on  
17 social media with HRA to conduct outreach to their  
18 clients who may qualify for SCRIE. We will continue  
19 to partner with our sister agencies to reach ever  
20 eligible household for the Rent Freeze Program  
21 through outreach events, social media and cross-  
22 agency communications. As we have worked externally  
23 to enroll more people in the programs, we have also  
24 embarked on several internal improvement projects to  
25 better serve our customers. It was found that our

2 applications were confusing, and posed difficulty for  
3 applicants to understand and complete correctly. We  
4 engaged with community advocates as well as internal  
5 staff to obtain feedback and found that a small font  
6 size, limited space to fill in requested answers and  
7 confusion in income documentation requirements all  
8 prove to be burdensome from would-be enrollees. To  
9 address these issues, we have engaged with a vendor  
10 to redesign the SCRIE and DRIE applications to make  
11 them easier to understand and completed. We've  
12 provided pre-qualifying questions, an income  
13 worksheet and clearer instructions. We also  
14 increased the font size to make the applications  
15 easier to read, and provided more space for  
16 responses. In addition, we are working with the  
17 Social Security Administration to obtain Social  
18 Security income amounts to reduce the burden on  
19 applicants to provide this information. So we are  
20 also launching an new online tool, the Landlord  
21 Express Access Portal, which allows landlords to  
22 upload leases and file documents electronically,  
23 provide the information that ultimately reduces the  
24 burden on SCRIE and DRIE enrollees to provide leases  
25 and other rental documents. To enhance the customer



2 experience at the 66 John Street SCRIE and DRIE Walk-  
3 In Center, we are renovating the entire space to  
4 provide a more efficient and comfortable environment.  
5 These enhancements include the installation of  
6 technology to improve customer service, and provide  
7 additional service windows in order to reduce wait  
8 times. We want what many want. I'll say that again.  
9 We want what many want, to enroll as many eligible  
10 New Yorkers as possible in SCRIE and DRIE. We think  
11 our comprehensive enrollment approach is working, but  
12 as with any outreach effort it takes time. This is  
13 why we are pleased that this summer, we will be  
14 bringing on two additional outreach staff members and  
15 four processing staffers, who will travel with our  
16 mobile unit. In addition to our efforts in the city,  
17 the Department of Finance has worked with the New  
18 York State Legislature and has introduced many bills  
19 to increase enrollment in the SCRIE and DRIE--DRIE  
20 programs. Just last week, the State Legislature  
21 passed SC 6214 and Assembly 8228-A. This new  
22 legislation will allow SCRIE and DRIE participants to  
23 return to their previous frozen rent if they reapply  
24 after a non-recurrent item of income such as pension  
25 causes them to be ineligible for SCRIE and DRIE for a

2 year. The Legislature also passed S8063 and A6702-A,  
3 a bill that would provide that any head of household  
4 who has been a SCRIE or DRIE beneficiary for five  
5 consecutive benefit periods would be eligible to file  
6 a short form application certifying that they  
7 continue to be eligible for the tax abatement. This  
8 legis--legislation would ensure easier and less  
9 frequent applications. The State has some--also  
10 supported the SCRIE and DRIE programs by passing  
11 legislation introduced by the Department of Finance  
12 to approve the efficacy of the programs.

13 Specifically in 2015, the State enacted Chapter 553  
14 of the Law 215, sponsored by Senator Savino and  
15 Assembly Member Silbowitz. Allowing current rent  
16 freeze program recipients to be grandfathered in for  
17 renewal applications, and evaluating according to the  
18 same criteria as in previous years. New SCRIE and  
19 DRIE who began receiving benefits on or after July  
20 1st, 2015 will have their rent compared to one-third  
21 of their household income as required by state law.  
22 Additionally, the State enacted Chapter 580 of the  
23 laws of 2015, sponsored by Senator Lanza and Assembly  
24 Member Simotas, which allows household members to

2 take over the benefit of a deceased tenant or tenant  
3 who currently leads the household.

4 I would now like to address the  
5 proposed legislation Intro 1024. The Department of  
6 Finance understands and agrees with the intention of  
7 the legislation to disseminate information about the  
8 SCRIE program as widely as possible. However, we  
9 have concerns with the implementation of--of  
10 dissemination and enrollment at other agencies. In  
11 particular, we are concerned that--that the other  
12 agencies and community boards mentioned in the  
13 proposed legislation will not have the bandwidth or  
14 adequate resources complete--to complete the SCRIE  
15 and DRIE applications and to comply with the  
16 legislation. In summary, the Department of Finance  
17 is currently engaged in aggressive outreach strategy  
18 to target communities to increase SCRIE and DRIE  
19 enrollment. We know that there is more work to do,  
20 and we are pleased to be partnering with so many  
21 advocates for seniors and people with disabilities to  
22 increase enrollment and retention in these two vital  
23 programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
24 to day, and we are happy to answer questions the  
25 committee may have. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. We're going to have Council Member  
4 Vallone ask a couple of questions, and we're also  
5 joined by Council Member Deutsch.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Madam  
7 Chair. Is there anyone else that wanted to testify  
8 before we just jump into some questions? Yes, it  
9 would just be a very smart back-up for them onto the  
10 sidelines. You guys are very lucky. All right. So  
11 thank you for this testimony, and I--I think clearly  
12 for Deputy Commissioner Sheares thank you, and the  
13 data there I think is almost proof in the pudding on  
14 the amount of work that Finance is trying to do here,  
15 but you didn't wrap up the conclusion, though. I  
16 mean you went from the Intro 582 into the other  
17 resolutions. What is Finance's ultimate stance with  
18 regard to combining under 582 or the responsibilities  
19 with Finance as opposed to the current status where  
20 it is now, where the arm is with HPD?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: Our concern  
22 is disruption of services with the senior and  
23 disabled community. What we have learned, and as I  
24 said, we have done some introspection ourselves.  
25 We've gone through process readings in there and

2 looking how we--how the quality of our applications  
3 and how we serve this community so our concern is  
4 that any transition no matter how well we lay out the  
5 plans may cause a disruption, and we're concerned  
6 about that type of disruption to this particular  
7 community.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But I would--I  
9 would offer that as the very advocates and the groups  
10 that you're reaching out, and the success that you  
11 had with the Chinese community in Flushing in part of  
12 my district, and the very groups that are asking to  
13 streamline, and to eliminate the confusion as to  
14 where they have to go. With the data that you  
15 provided, with the percentage increase such as the 4%  
16 versus the half of percent where you saw the targeted  
17 mobile outreach in Flushing. Is that data for all  
18 SCRIE and DRIE applications, or is that just the ones  
19 that are administered through Finance and does HPD  
20 have separate data for their applications  
21 administered before it goes-- In the HPD testimony  
22 there is no data.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: I  
24 represented data from the Department of Finance.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So then is there  
3 anything here today from HPD that we could look at as  
4 to increases, decreases, applications just as the  
5 finance provider today because it's not in here. It  
6 just says that you handled 6,000 applications.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: Yes so  
8 we actually did a lot of--when Finance conducted  
9 their outreach, HPD attended for--where there were  
10 Mitchell-Lama developments and--and other seniors  
11 where there was a rent increase. So we would, you  
12 know, in terms of what we administer. So we attended  
13 a--a number of the workshops along with Finance, and  
14 we--we've processed--I think our increase--I'm sorry,  
15 just one second. We did--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And while you're  
17 looking for that, I'll go back to the Deputy  
18 Commissioner. So is the outreach in the programs and  
19 other work that you're increasing, which we wanted to  
20 see and that's why Margaret Chin and I we're happy to  
21 see the steps coming with the mobile units. Is none  
22 of that targeted for the seniors who have to apply  
23 through Mitchell-Lama for SCRIE and DRIE for--that  
24 goes through--?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: No, we  
3 don't administer that program.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So right off the  
5 bat, that--that does not make us happy campers that  
6 there's such a split. The idea--the goal is to  
7 benefit the seniors. It's not make it easier for  
8 departments. So if all of the work that's being done  
9 by Finance is not helping any of seniors that are  
10 stuck on the other side of the application process,  
11 why would we want that to continue? I mean just  
12 being at the table and being at the mobile units is  
13 one thing, but that means all of that outreach, all  
14 of that media, all of that mail, all of that is not  
15 going to seniors that are applying for Mitchell-Lama  
16 and the other seniors that are with HPD. How can you  
17 line up completely? (

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: So I--I  
19 just want to sort of add to what you were talking  
20 about. I'm Samara Karasyk with the Department of  
21 Finance for the record. When we are doing outreach,  
22 we actually have these really cool maps, interactive  
23 maps that the Mayor's Office has worked with us to  
24 look at the data of where the under-enrolled  
25 populations are living. And so what we do is our

2 outreach team works with HPD's outreach team. In  
3 Brighton Beach, the days the days that we were going  
4 to be in areas where we're near a lot of the  
5 Mitchell-Lama, we'd say hey, you guys, we need you to  
6 come to come with us to make sure that we--we're  
7 hitting the Mitchell-Lamas as well. So when we're in  
8 areas where we know we're going to be talking to a  
9 lot of Mitchell-Lamas, HPD is there with us to make  
10 sure that we can enroll those folks. And also our  
11 outreach team will take if somebody has a inquiry,  
12 they're forward it onto HPD, and we have close  
13 working relationship with them. So, I think all of  
14 the agencies are on board for making sure that no one  
15 falls through the cracks. And so we work closely  
16 together on that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I'm--

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK:

19 [interposing] And just one other--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --I don't want to  
21 make you think--I don't you to think that you're not  
22 doing as good a job as the Department of Finance. I  
23 just think that the division itself is creating--and  
24 I--and based on your testimony, your--your main  
25 argument is right on the second paragraph, "With the



2 service due to a unique--unique understanding of the  
3 housing program by HPD." It--it's--that's what  
4 you're asking us to keep because you have a better  
5 unique understanding of the applicants versus any  
6 other agency. Just because we know you do.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: Well, we  
8 have actually a very close relationship with the  
9 managing agent. So when we put program to increase,  
10 then we can go right to the managing agent and--and  
11 go through. We actually have the income data on, and  
12 the income and ages of people who are living in our  
13 developments. So we can target the people who are  
14 living there, and we can say, you know, we're going  
15 to come up there. You know, you know, as--to end and  
16 enroll people and--and put the flyers under the doors  
17 of people who are--who we think are eligible by what  
18 their income affidavits submit. So, you know we  
19 have--we have more of a direct relationship with our  
20 clients. So that we can, you know, it's not just by  
21 census data. We actually have their actual incomes,  
22 and we--we--we, you know, slip flyers under people's  
23 doors an application or having managing agents knock  
24 on doors and when we're up there and say look, you

2 know, we have HPD here test--we're doing workshops.  
3 Come down and apply.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So then Finance  
5 has give us their data as to how their outreach has  
6 resulted in an increase in percentage. What is HPD  
7 doing over the year or two years since we've asked  
8 for additional seniors to be--especially when  
9 increases have gone up--to be part of this program?  
10 What data do you--?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: Well, so  
12 the only data that I've brought with me today I'm  
13 sorry is the number of workshops that we have  
14 attended and the increase in the number workshops.  
15 But I can get back to you on the number if, you know,  
16 that resulted in increases in actual applicants  
17 entering the program. The other part about the  
18 Mitchell-Lama population is that, you know, people  
19 get subsidies other than SCRIE, and if they're--and  
20 so, you now, on the census data it may look like  
21 they're under-enrolled because they're not in SCRIE,  
22 but they might be getting Section 8 or some other  
23 federal subsidy, you know, in lieu of SCRIE.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You, and then we  
25 could--

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT:

3 [interposing] And again, we---we keep

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --have a whole

5 college and a law school class on the--the

6 differences between SCRIE, DRIE and Mitchell-Lama and

7 I'm trying to avoid that aspect. My sole aspect is

8 to try to make this a streamlined process that could

9 benefit more seniors, and the best way that I can do

10 it, you know, if it ruffles agencies, it's not really

11 my concern. It's just the best way to do it in--in

12 getting more of our seniors, and--and Chair Chin has

13 been adamant about that since taking over Aging.

14 This bill was a result of requests from numerous

15 advocates and even agencies themselves to try to if

16 one agency is doing 95% of the work, then they should

17 do the 100% of the work. And if--unless you can show

18 to me differently today or subsequently data as to

19 why we should keep this with HPD, I--I am not moved

20 with today's testimony and the presentation as to why

21 HPD is doing such an amazing job that we should keep

22 this the way it is. I'm--I'm very impressed by the

23 data and the information brought by Finance, but just

24 because of relationship status is not enough for me

25

2 to keep it. So, I'll--I'll turn it over to my fellow  
3 council members at this point. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. We've  
5 also been joined by Council Member Treyger. Before I  
6 turn it over to Council Member Cabrera, I just want  
7 to get one thing cleared up. For the DRIE program  
8 for residents with Disabilities Law on DRIE that  
9 lives in Mitchell-Lama. Do they go through HPD right  
10 now or do they go to the Department of Finance.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yeah,  
12 they go through the Department of Finance.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, so why is  
14 that--I mean they also live in Mitchell-Lama Right.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Right.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: But why are they not  
17 under the HPD program?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: I think  
19 that was just when it was first created it was--it  
20 was put under the Department of Finance. There's a  
21 very small percentage of the Mitchell-Lama tenants  
22 who are eligible for DRIE or who are on DRIE. So,  
23 and rather than disrupt the--the status quo it--it's--  
24 -it's a population that is a vulnerable population

2 and, you know, we don't see any reason to change, you  
3 know, the way it's being administered.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: So you don't think  
5 that it would be helpful just like you were  
6 explaining to us about with the seniors and you know  
7 the management that can help facilitate that, it  
8 doesn't make sense. That--I mean that's one of the  
9 questions is why it's like one group of tenants that  
10 lives in Mitchell-Lama is in the Department of  
11 Finance and an--and another group is in HPD. It's,  
12 you know. So that's why I think that was one of the--  
13 the reasons about why don't we combine it all into  
14 one agency, and really focus the resources and to  
15 make sure that everyone know about the SCRIE program.  
16 No matter where you live you might be able to  
17 qualify. Instead, oh you live in Mitchell-Lama. You  
18 live in this kind of program, and we also are trying  
19 to expand the--the SCRIE and DRIE program to people  
20 who--one of the resolutions that we're going to be  
21 talking about is for people who live in programs that  
22 goes by the way guidelines in increased and to be  
23 able to expand the--the program to more residents in  
24 the City.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: Well, we  
3 share your--your concern about ensuring that as many  
4 seniors as--as possible are on SCRIE and, you know,  
5 we think that this works and that, you know, and we  
6 again, you know, are happy to--to expand that  
7 outreach. But again the Mitchell-Lama program is a  
8 little bit different because they're not annual  
9 increases. They're budget based increases that could  
10 happen at any time over a number of years. So, you  
11 know, as we're--part of the budget-based rent  
12 increase process in the hearing, we know when there's  
13 a rent increase, and we can make sure that we're  
14 there, and that, you know, that sort of helps ensure  
15 that the seniors are on when they're on. And to go  
16 out for an enrollment when they're not a rent  
17 increase and they aren't eligible at the time is a  
18 little bit more confusing. So, you know, we really  
19 try to--to make this a very straightforward program.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, so I guess  
21 the--the question goes back to because of the--the  
22 special relationship and--and the special situation  
23 to really think about taking back--I mean like the--  
24 the residents who are on the DRIE program. I mean  
25 can they also benefit from that relationship and--and

2 how do we make sure that they get the attention  
3 because they're not--you know, they're not--they're  
4 not on a yearly increase that they would with the  
5 SCRIE. So I think that's something that we should  
6 really look into, and see how and make sure that they  
7 also get the same benefit and attention. I'm turning  
8 it over to Council Member Cabrera. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
10 much, Madam Chair. First, I want to express my  
11 appreciation to the current Finance. As stated on  
12 your testimony, you stand and agrees on the intention  
13 of the legislation to disseminate information about  
14 the SCRIE program. But I'm a little baffled as to the  
15 rationale why there might be a problem with this  
16 legislation. So help me understand which agencies--  
17 because you mentioned there are--there are agencies  
18 and community boards in the proposed legislation that  
19 do not have the bandwidth or adequate resources.  
20 What are those agencies that you're specifically  
21 referring to?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: I--I can't  
23 speak specifically for those agencies, but the--the  
24 issue is what we've been going through the past  
25 couple of years with this--with these programs. And

2 what we have noticed on our own is that 40% of the  
3 applications that we received are just sitting in  
4 limbo pending. I mean we--it takes a long time to  
5 make a decision. We, the Department of Finance, with  
6 that expertise are having a problem. So to  
7 disseminate these applications or others without that  
8 expertise, we just feel that we're just going to get  
9 more pending applications. What we want to do is  
10 expedite the process. When we receive a complete  
11 application we can--it's--it's resolved in five days.  
12 When we receive a pending application, it takes more  
13 than 90 days to resolve.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA:

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES:

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA:

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES:

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But--but again  
19 what--first, you mentioned that you think it's  
20 important to disseminate it, to get the information  
21 out. I think it just makes sense to get as many  
22 agencies as possible. And getting back to the whole  
23 bandwidth, I used to chair the Technology Committee.  
24 All right, I'm having a real hard trouble  
25 understanding there will be a problem with DOITT or



2 any other agency that will make them possible to get  
3 this information in, and if they don't have those  
4 resources, they should be there. I mean this  
5 information should be going out and--and a lot, in  
6 fact, in my district--as you mentioned Kings Bridge  
7 is the number three, and I've seen the map, which by  
8 the way, it's a very good map. I compliment you, and  
9 it's very colorful and very insightful. I wish we  
10 had apartment numbers so we know exactly who to  
11 reach. We only the building numbers because we  
12 literally wanted to do door-to-door outreach. But  
13 even with all that, I think that--that the net could  
14 become wider. The--the output of information could  
15 be wider, and I think we are really limiting  
16 ourselves, and there should be a reason why getting  
17 information out should be a problem in light of the  
18 fact that--that we're doing that for many other  
19 things. I know it's more work, and initially that  
20 comes down to--

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: No, I--  
22 I--I totally--I totally understand where you're  
23 coming from. I know that we--we met with your office  
24 recently and we're really excited to be doing  
25 outreach with you. I mean I think I think I'll just

2 add to what Deputy Commission Sheares said, which is  
3 in terms of outreach and distributing applications,  
4 of course, we want everybody to distribute them, and  
5 some of the agencies that are on that list we've  
6 already engaged with because this is part of what  
7 they do. So we work the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
8 Affairs. We work very closely with Department for the  
9 Aging. You know, they--they're here today, and we do  
10 outreach with them, and they give out applications,  
11 and we did a whole Facebook social media campaign  
12 with them last year. So, we are already working with  
13 all of our sister agencies, and it falls under them.  
14 But I think the concern if you think about it from a  
15 digital perspective, right, so you look at DOITT,  
16 they can get the application out there, but who do  
17 they have that can sit down with seniors and make  
18 sure that they're getting the right documentation.  
19 So we're concerned on the--from the back end. We  
20 want to get completed applications with all the  
21 documentation we need so we can get them into the  
22 program. We have found that it's not--it's not the  
23 situation any of us want to be in. When we get a  
24 partial application and someone doesn't understand  
25 what's going. So for example the Access NYC Portal,

2 which we do for our SCRIE applications. You know,  
3 like a lot of the programs that's great to get it out  
4 there but the people still have to send the  
5 documentation to us separately. So they're not  
6 really done. I mean they think that they're done,  
7 but this is what we've heard from people when they're  
8 in the field. So we totally support the idea of  
9 other agencies giving out the information. We're  
10 just concerned that they may not have like Deputy  
11 Commissioner Sheares said that expertise in-house to  
12 sit down with people to make sure they're getting the  
13 documentation that they understand. It's a  
14 complicated program. They want their income-to-rent  
15 ratio, right. People might meet the \$50,000 income  
16 but then their rent income ratio isn't quite right.  
17 So it's very confusing for people, and that's why  
18 we're trying to make our materials better. But we  
19 also--we are trying to be more involved in the  
20 process to make sure we get the right application.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I mean, we're  
22 only talking about three variables for people to  
23 understand. I--I have full confidence in the other  
24 agencies to be able to handle this application and to  
25 be honest with you. The biggest problem that I seen

2 with a lot of our seniors they just don't even know  
3 the program exists. And so to just even get that  
4 application, just to get the dialogue conversation  
5 going, that to me would just be a huge plus. Because  
6 I mean we--we do have still a tremendous gap of  
7 people who have not even applied. I mean we're  
8 talking about a lot of--and a lot of people who don't  
9 know about it, and I could tell that I myself go  
10 door-to-door. And when I talk about it, they're--  
11 they're just--they give me that dear, you know,  
12 [laughs] look, like a car in the night look. Like I--  
13 -I didn't know this program existed. So, I--you  
14 know, I'm just--I'm going to stop because I think I  
15 made my point. I would love have continued  
16 discussions if there's a way to massage this in a  
17 way, and accommodate it in a way that is, you know,  
18 workable from your point of view, and from our point  
19 of view. Thank you so much. Thank you for the great  
20 work that you guys are doing.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Council  
22 Member Treyger has questions.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair  
24 Chin, and as well as my colleague Council Member  
25 Vallone. I just on, I have a point of clarification

2 question. I think I've raised this at a--a previous  
3 hearing as well, but I just wanted to just to get  
4 further clarity. When you had mentioned before about  
5 the under-enrolled in Brighton Beach or in Southern  
6 Brooklyn with regards to SCRIE or DRIE, doesn't that  
7 have to do with the fact that if someone is on  
8 Section 8, they can't enroll in those programs as  
9 well?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: I--I  
11 think that's part of it is people are--they think  
12 they may qualify. They don't qualify. Section 8 was  
13 in Brighton Beach. That definitely was something  
14 that came up where we were talking to people and  
15 handing out flyers in the street, and they would say  
16 I have Section 8. We'd say oh, you know, you can't  
17 get this. So that could be some of it. I mean I  
18 think as Assistant Commissioner Walpert alluded to  
19 the fact that our census data is imperfect, right.  
20 So the number of under-enrolled people we don't know  
21 the reason that they're not enrolled. We just  
22 believe based on what we saw in the census tracked  
23 data that they may qualify. We did exclude for  
24 Section 8 those numbers that you see there, but we  
25 don't know, for example, what the household income

2 really. We just know what they're saying it is. It  
3 was based on a sample size. So they're having a  
4 vacancy survey. So it may not be totally  
5 representative, but it's the best data that we have.  
6 So, we're--you know, that's where we're going to be  
7 targeting.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Well, because  
9 that was my question whether or not you're--when you  
10 compile the list of people who are not enrolled in  
11 these programs are you excluding the people who are  
12 already receiving Section 8?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yes, we  
14 did, and the data that we did in our 2014 report we  
15 did exclude for Section 8.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But you're still  
17 seeing cases where people are still being that--

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK:  
19 [interposing] So the--the--the report from 2014 was  
20 just data. We didn't--we don't have identifying  
21 information in there. Separately, though, we are  
22 working with HRA to see how we can tap into some of  
23 their folks that might be eligible, and we're--we're  
24 also doing that. When we have like specific  
25 information about households, we're getting down to

2 that level of detail as much as possible because we--  
3 we don't want to be doing outreach to people that  
4 don't qualify. But it--it has--it's hard to isolate  
5 for that, you know, when you're out in the  
6 neighborhood. If people come to an event, we try and  
7 tell them like if you're Section 8 don't come. We  
8 did a lot of outreach with the Russian media to try  
9 and explain that to people, In Spanish speaking  
10 neighborhoods, like we--we had a big piece of News  
11 Scione last week, and they talked about that. It can  
12 have Section 8, and the other big thing that we've  
13 been trying to get out there is you don't have to be  
14 a citizen. You can apply with an NYC ID, and we've  
15 been working with an NYC ID group on that as well.  
16 So there are obstacles that people have. Section 8  
17 anecdotally to us has been less of an issue when  
18 we're in the field. Preferential rent has been more  
19 confusing to people.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Yes.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: And we're  
22 also starting to survey people at our events at the  
23 beginning of events to see how they found out about  
24 the event, and why they haven't applied before, and  
25 if they have applied before why they didn't qualify.

2 So we're trying to learn what these obstacles might,  
3 and whether our numbers are accurate or not. They're  
4 the best project we have at this time.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And when you do  
6 outreach, I mean it's my understand that based on  
7 different geographic regions of the city, there's  
8 different like case managers, you know, social  
9 service agencies that oversee senior case--senior  
10 case managements in areas. Do you contact them? Do  
11 you speak to them about it, because why are seniors  
12 kind of left to fend for themselves in dealing with  
13 bureaucracy when there are people who are supposed to  
14 be doing this kind of work for them, advocating for  
15 them. So, what role are we engaging in the non-  
16 profit world to help us reach the seniors and fill  
17 out forms for them?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yeah, I  
19 mean one of the main things as we talked about in our  
20 testimony is exactly that. That we feel it's very  
21 important to be engaging with community organizations  
22 that people trust, because people don't love the New  
23 York Department of Finance [laughs] you know.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: You're not the  
25 most popular.



2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: We're  
3 not the most popular, and we understand that. That's  
4 fine. We don't--we just want to make sure that  
5 people will engage with us, and so we have new  
6 partnerships, and we're forming new partnerships all  
7 the time. We have advocacy groups and also community  
8 centers, senior centers. I think senior centers--  
9 people that go to senior centers are--are usually  
10 aware of their benefits. So we're trying to sort of  
11 get around that. We mentioned working with AARP.  
12 We're trying to get with Access-A-Ride to see if we  
13 can do some ads through them maybe or they will  
14 partner with us on different things. Visiting nurse  
15 services like how can we get to people through  
16 organizations they trust, houses of worship. Like  
17 these are all areas where we're--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]

19 Or,

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: --trying  
21 to purse.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: --I'll give you  
23 another suggestion. When Meals on Wheels deliver--  
24 delivers the meal they give them, the menu for the  
25 week.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yes,  
3 we've done that twice.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]  
5 That's put a piece in there.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Maybe a  
7 we're due for another one of those mailings. We work  
8 with the Department for the Aging right now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Maybe work with  
10 them on putting some information in addition to the  
11 menu for the week.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But I think  
14 that, you know, I--I do think that we need to  
15 continue obviously with the outreach, but I think  
16 just we need to make sure that our lists--our--data--  
17 data lists are up to date and--and accurate. And  
18 because then what happens is that, which has happened  
19 in my district office, when your outreach efforts did  
20 engage people about this, people began to come into  
21 my office and other offices asking about well should  
22 I give up Section 8 for this and this? And then said  
23 I don't know if you want to do that right now. So  
24 that's why it will be very helpful to--to connect and  
25 engage with community-based organizations who the

2 seniors know and trust very much at--at the  
3 grassroots level to help them navigate bureaucracy  
4 and--and to connect them to the resources to which  
5 they are entitled to and deserve. And I thank the  
6 Chair for her time.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. We're  
8 joined by Council Member Rose, and Council Member  
9 Salamanca has questions.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you,  
11 Madam Chair. I have a question. Just going back to  
12 some points that Council Member Cabrera was bringing  
13 up. In terms of your concern with other agencies and  
14 community board, prior to me being a Council Member,  
15 I was District Manager for Community Board. So, you  
16 know, to--to hear the statements that, you know, I--I  
17 felt in my community board is very competent to be  
18 able to assist my seniors in terms of with these  
19 variables. So why does the Department of Finance not  
20 offer trainings in terms of how--how to apply for  
21 these three variables? I mean community boards are  
22 the first level of government in our communities. So  
23 I don't understand why the Department of Finance  
24 cannot provide that service to help the first level  
25 of government help their seniors.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: So to--  
3 to be clear, we agree with you that community boards  
4 can play a crucial role in this. My outreach team  
5 does go out to community board meetings. We go to  
6 all of the borough meetings of the District services  
7 cabinet meetings to make sure that we're there as a  
8 resource, and we have done presentations on this  
9 program to all the district managers. We did a whole  
10 series of them last year. Maybe it's time to do them  
11 again, and then we have been invited by community  
12 boards to meet with them to train them in this  
13 program, and we're very happy to do that. I think  
14 maybe what we're trying to get a little bit more is  
15 the community board is different. They have  
16 different resources available to them in terms of the  
17 board's time and the people on the board that--that  
18 will be willing to sort of sit down and help people  
19 fill them out. So, we are more than happy to work  
20 with community boards to train them in whatever they  
21 need, and we've done so, and we would love to  
22 continue doing that. I--I think we are nervous about  
23 sort of requiring them to do it. We prefer that they  
24 are--it's a board that wants to do it. It's active  
25 and--and is able to help with applications. But in

2 terms of information, yes, we--we want everybody to  
3 be able to give it out.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So I remember  
5 at my dad and my--and my--one of my last District  
6 Service cabinet meetings with the Department of  
7 Finance came and presented at the Bronx Borough Board  
8 or District Service, and--and I think if--if--if the  
9 Department of Finance makes a campaign, make more of  
10 an effort to actually reach out to those community  
11 boards specifically, I think you'll --you will get--  
12 they will be very receptive to sitting down and  
13 getting training. Because ultimately this will  
14 benefit their community.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Okay.

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Great. I'm glad to  
17 hear that you want to work on that--that aspect.  
18 Council Member Deutsch has questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, thank you,  
20 Chair. Good afternoon. First of all, I want to--I  
21 want to thank you. We've had many outreaches in my  
22 district. We went to the libraries with HPD, with  
23 the Department of Finance. We walked the streets.  
24 We had a barbecue last summer. You joined us at the  
25 barbecue, and I believe we were pretty successful. I

2 just want to mention for the record that we keep on  
3 mention--mentioning SCRIE and DRIE for Mitchell-Lama,  
4 but correct me if I'm wrong, it's also if people live  
5 in rent controlled or rent stabilized buildings. I  
6 just want everyone for the record to understand that--  
7 -that you only--only have to target people residing  
8 in Mitchell-Lama buildings. So I also had in my  
9 office what's called entitlement where people come in  
10 and they--they-if they have a difficult time making  
11 ends meet. So I have caseworkers who work with them  
12 and go through their finances to see if they're  
13 eligible for any city services, and those services  
14 include SCRIE and DRIE. We should have some very  
15 successful through my entitlement program in my  
16 office to sign people up for those that quality. So  
17 this way it's less work for you. What we do in our  
18 office, we--we check to make sure they're qualified  
19 for these programs. So my question is how many  
20 different--first of all, how many different languages  
21 do you have the application in?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: Seven.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: In seven  
24 different languages. Okay, that's great. I  
25 represent Brighton Beach, and I have actually a very

2 diverse district just like everyone else. But I have  
3 a very large Russian population, as you know because  
4 you have been out there.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: Russian is  
6 one of the languages.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yes, I--I thank  
8 you for that. So I just want to basically say thank  
9 and I think there is a lot more we need to do like my  
10 Alex Beach Community Pavilion maybe over the summer  
11 people are hanging outside enjoying the weather. So  
12 it's a good time for us to do outreach just to let  
13 people know that there are these programs available  
14 for them when they're there, rent controlled  
15 buildings, rent stabilized, or the reside in  
16 Mitchell-Lama thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Council  
18 Member Rose, do you have questions?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you, Chair  
20 Chin, and I want to apologize for my tardiness. We  
21 were learning how to not harass people. So I will  
22 take that into consideration with my question today,  
23 and I apologize. You might have answered this, but I  
24 know in 2013 the outreach team was comprised of four  
25 outreach workers. Has that changed?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yes, we  
3 are up to six, and we are going to hire two more this  
4 summer. That will be folks on Rent Freeze Program.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Great and I don't  
6 know, but if you know, but as a whole Staten Island  
7 accounts a 1% of those enrolled in SCRIE and DRIE.  
8 Can you tell me why that--that is?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: I don't.  
10 I'm not sure if it's 1% exactly but I--I--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: [interposing] It's  
12 less than 1%.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: --think  
14 it's--it's fairly low and I--I believe that's because  
15 there are not that many regulated buildings as  
16 percentage of the city overall. So if you look at a  
17 map of where people are receiving the Rent Freeze  
18 Program, it's really concentrated around areas where  
19 there are a lot of rent regulated buildings.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: That leads me to my  
21 next question. We have a lot of buildings that  
22 should rent regulated. However, they are not, and so  
23 the tenants that are living there, though, are  
24 eligible. Are there any outreach efforts or will  
25 there be any outreach efforts made to--to those



2 tenants? Because we have very rent regulated  
3 buildings although they are eligible, you know,  
4 financially. Is there going to be an effort to reach  
5 out to them or can there be efforts to--to reach out?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Well,  
7 right--right now, you know, the law requires that  
8 they live in a rent regulated--rent stabilized, rent  
9 control or Mitchell-Lama to quality, but there are  
10 other programs, which they might qualify. I mean I  
11 know HRA is doing a lot of outreach to get more  
12 people enrolled. In SNAP there may be other services  
13 available for them. You know, the Department for the  
14 Aging works very closely with everyone that they can,  
15 seniors to get them enrolled in--in different  
16 programs. I'm sure you guys have all seen the Senior  
17 Guide. So there are a lot other programs that are  
18 available to people apart from the Rent Freeze  
19 Program.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: So, is--is it at  
21 all possible to have these buildings rent regulated  
22 and would--who would--who would sort of try to do  
23 that, HPD? It's--it's an oversight. It's--it's not  
24 that, you know, they shouldn't be, but it's just an  
25 over sight.

2                   TERRI DAVIS-MERCHANT: Hi, this is Terri-  
3 Davis-Merchant from HPD. I think Council Member  
4 Rose, I think that's a--there's--that's a great  
5 question and we would love to see more buildings  
6 particularly those that are market, rate and to  
7 rental regulatories with HPD asking them and  
8 requiring them to keep rents at specific levels. In  
9 terms of rent stabilization, the can be done through  
10 a variety of different means. That, however is  
11 overseen by DHCR. So those owners would need to  
12 register their units with them, and they have a  
13 separate system. But we would love--we're--we're  
14 trying to preserve thousands upon thousands of units  
15 as affordable housing, but that requires the owners  
16 to enter into a regulatory agreement with us. And  
17 that could be done through a variety of ways either  
18 accepting a tax exemption from us, accepting a loan  
19 from us. So there are a variety of means, and we  
20 welcome working with you to--to identify buildings  
21 that you think might be interested in working with us  
22 to preserve more affordable housing in Staten Island.

23                   COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Great. I'm glad to  
24 hear that. I was going to wonder who should be the  
25 initiator of the--of that--that effort. And then I--

2 I just want if you put any effort in educating the  
3 eligible residents that they can designate a  
4 representative to help them with the administrative  
5 processes of SCRIE and DRIE?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Yeah,  
7 absolutely. On our applications we have a field for  
8 a tenant representative, and we exercise that all the  
9 time because we don't want people fall through the  
10 cracks when they need--we need more information for  
11 them, or they need to renew or missing something. So  
12 we always encourage that, and when we do trainings  
13 that's definitely something we talk about a lot.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you. Thank  
15 you all. Thank you very much, Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Can I just add  
18 one quick thing before we--?

19 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Sure, uh-huh.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know, it--my  
21 life prior to being in the Council is--is dealing  
22 with seniors and the elder world and--and providing  
23 critical information to all of them. It's not easy,  
24 and often that burden falls to the family members.  
25 Especially now. I think the point is that some

2 percentage of our seniors can't handle this  
3 application if they know about it, but those who will  
4 be able to help them do this application, don't know  
5 about it. So, I would also suggest an outreach like-  
6 -like the UPK Program that the city is notified, that  
7 seniors are entitled to this not just the seniors who  
8 are entitled to this so that the family members and  
9 healthcare providers and the--those who are providing  
10 the services for the senior-it might be the daughter,  
11 the son, the spouse, grandson, grandchild--can say  
12 hey mom, dad, are you getting this? Getting what? I  
13 don't know. I don't know either. I just heard about  
14 the SCRIE program. It sounds like you might be able-  
15 -entitled to it. I think we need to broaden our  
16 reach as to understanding. This is not even everyone  
17 in this room still doesn't the--the benefits of this,  
18 and I think that's where the Department of Finance it  
19 falls to you to teach everyone, and it's not an easy  
20 task to do whether it's HPD or DOF. And I think it  
21 we can get the word out on the next round of attempts  
22 to advertising to not just target seniors, target  
23 everyone. Because seniors are at very different  
24 levels whether they're 62, 72, 82, 92, 102. And I  
25 really think if we take a global approach like the

2 success of UPK, we would see numbers rise from that  
3 equation. Because now you have family members  
4 assisting seniors to get this. Not just for  
5 temporary on the seniors. So is there anything on  
6 that that may be coming up in the future or.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: No, we  
8 agree with you that it's important that we target  
9 caregivers. So, you know, I had mentioned Visiting  
10 Nurses of New York for example. I think one of the  
11 things that we are working on is targeting caregivers  
12 and--and adult children that, you know, are working  
13 with their parents who might be able to help them  
14 sign up or a cousin of, you know, whatever.  
15 Certainly, that's something that--that we're trying  
16 to figure out the best way to--to target that  
17 population.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: You know,  
19 also we have SCRIE and DRIE on bus precincts that  
20 work with the Department of Finance and--and they  
21 work very closely with the advocates. So whenever  
22 there's an application that are pending they reach  
23 out to advocates to see if they can make appointment  
24 or reach out to these individuals.

2                   TERRI-DAVIS MERCHANT: And also, you  
3 know, in terms of the Majano (sic) portfolio, that's  
4 why the managing agents play such an important role  
5 because they know who their seniors are, but we also  
6 have Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities  
7 within the Mitchell-Lama developments, and there's--  
8 there's people on board the, you know, who are hired  
9 with social services on board there to ensure that  
10 the seniors are--are properly enrolled in the right  
11 services. So, you know, we have that direct link  
12 there.

13                   COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I know about the  
14 link. I'm thinking to expand the link. That's all.  
15 I think if--if--especially with the NORCS as they--as  
16 we grow them, I think that's the next vision for the  
17 Council and our next target that Margaret and I have  
18 talked about is to really the changing aspect of our  
19 senior community. They're no longer just all sitting  
20 there waiting to bloom. Very different capacities,  
21 and they want to live very autonomous lives at home  
22 so that the challenge to reaching to these seniors  
23 now is much greater. Because they're not just coming  
24 to a senior center. So, it's--it's--it's easier to  
25 put the applications as you go into the senior

2 center, but that's only because of they can make it  
3 to a senior center. So I agree. So I think this  
4 might be something we can explore going forward.

5 Thank you Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. I think a  
7 lot of the advocates organizations especially items  
8 that brought you here today. Live On New York, she's  
9 always talking about advertising campaigns or, you  
10 know, the--the children or caregiver can see an ad  
11 and say, hey, wouldn't you like to help your--your  
12 parents or your mom freeze her rent? So I think  
13 that's something that urge the Department of Finance  
14 to really look at to do some of the advertising, you  
15 know, on, you know, bus stops and subways. Just like  
16 the Department for the Aging right now is doing the--  
17 the Elder Abuse Act, which is very effective. So  
18 that kind of will help us, you know, get the word out  
19 more widely. And Deputy Commission Sheares, it was  
20 really great to hear that the Department of Finance  
21 is working with our state elected officials to pass  
22 laws that can help more seniors get the SCRIE  
23 benefits. So one of the resolutions that--that I  
24 have introduced is really trying to expand the  
25 program. You know, what I mean, what Council Member

2 Rose is talking about. We have these buildings that  
3 are formerly Mitchell-Lama, right. I have one in my  
4 district Independence Plaza. They were in the  
5 Mitchell-Lama, but they didn't--when they went  
6 private, they didn't get to be rent stabilized. And  
7 they worked out something, you know, with the  
8 landlord for a subsidy, but they are going by the  
9 Rent Guideline Increase. So that's why we're trying  
10 to see if we can expand that program to cover the  
11 seniors who are now living in these former, you know,  
12 Mitchell-Lama programs to make sure that they also  
13 have some help with the rent increases. Because  
14 they're, I mean they're--they're getting older, and  
15 they just have problems paying their rent. So I think  
16 some of the programs if we can really help, you know,  
17 expand that would be really helpful.

18 TERRI-DAVIS MERCHANT: You know, the  
19 legislative season is over now, but we're actually--  
20 we're happy to work with you on that, you know,  
21 coming forward,

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [off mic] It's  
23 never over. [laughs]

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: You  
25 know, something that--something I just mentioned



2 Council Member is that we met with Senator Squadron  
3 this summer, and we're trying to discuss this bill,  
4 and I agree with you that it's a great decision to  
5 make it happen. I think one of the things that the  
6 city would need to see to be comfortable with it is  
7 actual legal agreements like binding agreements--

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: [interposing] Uh-huh.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: --with  
10 the entire unit not just like lease by lease  
11 agreements because they could just change that in the  
12 next lease. So if they had a formal agreement with  
13 Housing Preservation and Development or DHCR, that's  
14 something that we would like to see in order to  
15 extend it if we wanted to sort of add those to the  
16 repertoire. We're open to it, it's just a matter of  
17 figuring out how there could be an agreement there  
18 that's not changeable, you know, the next year.  
19 Something like that, and when we talk to the Senator  
20 about it and then we--we did talk to HPD a little  
21 bit, it didn't seem like Gateway and some of these  
22 other ones have form agreements with the City in any  
23 sort of way. SO that's the concern there.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But that's something  
25 that we can, you know, advocate on and get, you know,

2 get that agreement because they did it with the  
3 state, and also, you know, buildings like former  
4 Mitchell-Lama buildings they--they're still like  
5 getting vouchers. So there's some working  
6 relationship with HPD because I think these are kinds  
7 of programs that can help us preserve the affordable  
8 housing in our city. It's--we can't build enough.  
9 So we got to make sure we take care the one that we  
10 have. So if there are other creative ways of tax  
11 abatements or incentive programs that can bring these  
12 landlords in so that we can take care of our seniors.  
13 Because the senior population is growing. It's going  
14 to be one--one in five by 2030? That's not too far  
15 away. So we got to be prepared. So the other  
16 question I have and maybe it's to really look at  
17 right now in the SCRIE and DRIE program like just  
18 from the Department of Finance and HPD how much--it's  
19 the city paying--paying out in terms of, you know,  
20 the--the tax credit that we give back to the  
21 landlord. What--what is the total amount right now?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER SCHINDLER: I  
23 don't know, but I'll get that number for you.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, that would be  
25 interesting for us to see the amount of investment

2 the city is making to make sure that our seniors and  
3 New Yorkers with disability are, you know, getting  
4 some help with their rent.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: And for  
6 the HPD part, we probably expect to have a million  
7 dollars annually.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. Debbie.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: I hope this an  
10 appropriate question, but with the--the Mayor's move  
11 to build more affordable housing, and--and the  
12 rezonings that are--are going on, are you working  
13 closely with them to ensure that--that the  
14 appropriate units that are--are being set aside for  
15 seniors that SCRIE and DRIE will be, you know,  
16 available or the structure will be such that, you  
17 know, the seniors in these--this--the affordable  
18 housing that's coming online will be able to access  
19 these program?

20 TERRI-DAVIS MERCHANT: And so if the  
21 units are rent stabilized then the seniors would be  
22 eligible, but a number of our programs have Section 8  
23 as part of the finance--as, you know, those seniors  
24 would get--are better off with the Section 8 then so-

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Just to follow up on  
3 that question, is that also we have seniors right now  
4 who are severely rent burdened. Even they go on the  
5 DRIE program, they're paying more than 50% of their  
6 income for the rent. So, we're looking at to see if  
7 there's a way to roll it back so that they could all-  
8 -they only have to pay one-third. Can the Department  
9 of Finance look at--do you have statistics that you  
10 could draw upon for seniors who might be severely  
11 rent burdened, and how much it would cost the city if  
12 we sort of help roll that back?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK:

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: We do have  
15 statistics. I--if we--if you send us a--a letter if  
16 we can look into those numbers and come up with  
17 something for you.

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, let's--can the  
19 Department of Finance do the rollback, or do you need  
20 state authorization?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEARES: We would  
22 need legislation.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. All right.

24 Thank you. So I wanted to really thank the panel for  
25 being here today to testify, and I look forward to

2 working with you to make sure that every senior and--  
3 and every person who has a disability that needs rent  
4 subsidy find out about the SCRIE and DRIE program.  
5 The Rent Freeze Program of New York City. Thank you.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WALPERT: Thank  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Next, we wanted to--if  
9 anybody else want to testify, please fill out a form.  
10 Otherwise, we're going to call up Sarah Stefanski  
11 from the New York City Independent Budget Office, and  
12 also Tom Connor from the Greenwich House Senior  
13 Center. [pause] You may begin.

14 SARAH STEFANSKI: Good afternoon,  
15 Chairwoman Chin and members of the City Council  
16 Committee on Aging. My name is Sarah Stefanski, and  
17 I am the Housing Budget and Policy Analyst at the New  
18 York City Independent Budget Office. For many years  
19 the SCRIE program has been plagued by low  
20 participation rates among eligible seniors. In  
21 testimony delivered before this committee in 2002,  
22 when the threshold for annual income was capped at  
23 \$20,000, IBO reported that about one-third of seniors  
24 eligible for SCRIE were participating in the program.  
25 More recently and in 2014 City Council Finance

2 Committee hearing IBO testified that an estimated 43%  
3 of eligible households benefitted from the SCRIE  
4 program. These estimates compared data on housing  
5 and income for seniors using the New York City  
6 Housing and Vacancy Survey, which is administered by  
7 the U.S. Census Bureau and published every three  
8 years. For this hearing, we have updated our  
9 previous work using the 2014 Housing and Vacancy  
10 Survey, which was published in 2015. IBO estimates  
11 that there are 130,000 households in the city  
12 eligible for SCRIE under the current rules.

13 According to the Department of Finance, the number of  
14 households enrolled in SCRIE has been on the rise. A  
15 total of 59,524 households are participating in the  
16 SCRIE program in 2016, and this is up from 57,325  
17 households the year before. Based on our analysis of  
18 the Housing and Vacancy Survey, we estimate that  
19 approximately 46% of eligible households are enrolled  
20 in the SCRIE program in 2016. Now, given the nature  
21 of this survey data, it is difficult to make direct  
22 comparisons over time. Nevertheless, our estimates  
23 suggest an improvement in the participation rate  
24 since we last testified in 2014 even as the number of  
25 SCRIE eligible households has grown. Despite the

2 improvement, however, our analysis suggests that less  
3 than half of eligible seniors are currently  
4 benefitting from SCRIE. The Council is considering  
5 several resolutions today that would support safe  
6 legislation seeking to broaden the eligibility for  
7 SCRIE by changing the way that the income eligibility  
8 is determined. Resos 59 and 114 call on the State to  
9 enact legislation that would either exclude some  
10 types of income or deduct some kinds of expenditures  
11 when determining SCRIE eligibility. There is broad  
12 support for the goal in increasing SCRIE enrollment  
13 in preventing current recipients from being dropped  
14 when automatic cost of living adjustments boost  
15 seniors' income. The administrative burden both for  
16 seniors and for the city that would likely be  
17 necessary to implement such changes to the income  
18 definition, however, may limit the effectiveness of  
19 these changes in boosting SCRIE enrollment. For  
20 example, seniors would need to keep careful track of  
21 which medical costs were not fully reimbursed and  
22 then submit receipts to the Department of Finance for  
23 verification. A simpler less costly approach to keep  
24 the basic eligibility threshold rising in sync with  
25 their cost of living is suggested by another section

2 of Reso 59. This calls for enactment of State  
3 legislation to automatically index the eligibility  
4 threshold using the local Consumer Price Index. As  
5 the Council considers which resolutions to advance,  
6 we urge you to consider the administrative burdens  
7 and ease of compliance in your deliberations. Thank  
8 you for the invitation to testify, and I am happy to  
9 answer any questions.

10 JOHN CONNOR: Hi, my name is John Connor.  
11 I'm Chairman--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]  
13 Tom, just check the button on the--there you go.  
14 Thanks.

15 TOM CONNOR: I'll start again. [coughs]  
16 My name is John Connor. I'm Chairman of the Senior  
17 Advisory Board of the Greenwich House, which is an  
18 agency in Manhattan. I am also a member of Community  
19 Board 2, and I'm active in the community, and I'm 85  
20 years old. Now, I am one of the people that is  
21 primarily affected, and I'm speaking for many people,  
22 by the rent control situation that is different from  
23 rent stabilization. We rent controlled people got a  
24 9% increase year. So what is happening is older  
25 people my age and up we retired many years ago. Our



2 pensions were given to us 20 years ago. Social  
3 Security 20 years ago. Twenty years ago that was  
4 adequate. Now, the rents have gone so high that  
5 there are so many people that are paying 50% or more  
6 of their income. So I would like--I know that it has  
7 to be a state change in legislation, but for example,  
8 when they say your income can't be higher than  
9 \$50,000 well, \$50,000 really is not so much nowadays.  
10 The Council knows. They just got a big increase to  
11 \$100 and--what is it, \$67,000? Something like that,  
12 but we are stuck, and it's--what happening is that  
13 the older, older are being evicted. They cannot pay  
14 the rent any more. That's with all of the benefits  
15 that you are providing they cannot pay the rent, and  
16 they're going to be on the street. Now, the  
17 disposable income--I'm going to get into disposable  
18 income. Say your income is \$50,000 or a little bit  
19 less, of that you're paying taxes. You're paying  
20 \$100 a month for Medicare. If you get a  
21 supplementary, it's \$259 a month, and then if you're  
22 getting the drug coverage, that's \$22 or \$23. So you  
23 can figure it out for yourself. This is not really  
24 helping many people. Now, I want to just change  
25 topics for a moment. When I sat and listened to

2 people saying that the seniors don't know about the  
3 program, most seniors--in my experience--most seniors  
4 do. Most seniors learn from other seniors. Seniors  
5 have an active community life. So I'm--I'm surprised  
6 that they don't know, but I must say I--in all the  
7 years I've never seen the Department of Aging do one  
8 thing about outreach for SCRIE. You call and they  
9 don't even answer their telephone, the Department for  
10 the Aging. So you might as well forget about them  
11 helping people and to enlist in SCRIE. The other  
12 things is it was two years ago or so that they  
13 switched the SCRIE program from Finance to Aging, and  
14 now evidently you're flipping it. So I don't quite  
15 understand that, and I think of all of the money that  
16 is invested in switch--in doing this. I don't know  
17 if it's good or bad, but the bottom line--the bottom  
18 line is seniors really need your help. It's not  
19 enough. No, we're not getting enough help, and with  
20 the--the--seniors--seniors who are over 85, my age,  
21 perhaps they should get some other benefit. You  
22 start the program at the age 60. So you've already  
23 taken age into account. A wild idea: People over  
24 the age of 85 who probably only have another five  
25 years or so to live, if their--if their rent is more

2 than 50% of their income, freeze it. Let them live  
3 the last few years in the homes that they've lived  
4 in, in the neighborhoods. There's no places to move.  
5 I would love to get an apartment that would--would be  
6 cheap, but I can't. So I'm counting on the seniors  
7 to help and to the Council, and I want to thank  
8 Debbie from Staten Island. She's always been an  
9 advocate, and Margaret who is our wonderful champion,  
10 and Mr. Vallone and Corey who is not here  
11 unfortunately, Corey Johnson. But we appreciate what  
12 you're doing, and don't let us down. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Tom. Thank  
14 you for being a strong advocate. I know you--you  
15 fight for the--the senior centers and all these  
16 issues. That's why we are looking at seniors who are  
17 paying more than 50% of their income for rent to see  
18 if we could do a rent rollback. We also are looking  
19 at to whether, you know, we could think about  
20 creating some kind of rent subsidy program for  
21 seniors that are over 80 or a certain age. Let's--  
22 let's really take a look at that to see what else we  
23 can do because we do want our seniors to live longer,  
24 but we want them to live with dignity and health--

2 healthy and--and strong. So we--we wanted to--we  
3 definitely would love for you to--on that.

4 TOM CONNOR: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Tom.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You have some  
8 great ideas there and Sarah, thanks for your data,  
9 but it's--it's a sad thing as Tom is explaining that  
10 most seniors understand it, and yet there's 50% not  
11 in it.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, here we are  
14 as council members trying to figure out that  
15 scenario, and it's just not making sense to me. So  
16 I'm not--we will continue to call on the  
17 Administration to put more funds into outreach to  
18 make this affordable approach and not just pick and  
19 choose certain things because it's just 50%, and  
20 that's just not the right number to be--

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK:  
22 [interposing] there's a lot more eligible--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] It  
24 should be 99.9%.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER KARASYK: --out  
3 there.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think we know that,  
6 and we want to thank everyone who attended the  
7 meeting, and anyone who is watching from home, let us  
8 know your ideas and suggestions. How do we let  
9 people--all people know about the New York City Rent  
10 Freeze Program, the SCRIE and DRIE programs so that  
11 we can help more New Yorkers to stay in their homes.  
12 So thank you all for being here, and the hearing  
13 adjourned. [gavel

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 27, 2016