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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

February 4, 2019  
Start: 1:29 p.m.  
Recess: 6:08 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: STEPHEN T. LEVIN  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
ANDRIENNE E. ADAMS  
DIANA AYALA  
VANESSA L. GIBSON  
MARK GJONAJ  
BARRY S. GRODENCHIK  
COREY JOHNSON  
BRAD S. LANDER  
ANTONIO REYNOSO  
RAFAEL SALAMANCA, JR.  
RITCHIE J. TORRES  
MARK TREYGER

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

Jazmine Headley  
Victim at an HRA Center in Brooklyn

Lisa Schreibersdorf  
Founder and Director of Brooklyn Defender  
Services, BDS

Anca Grigore  
Supervising Attorney of the Civil Justice  
Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services, BDS

Steven Banks  
Commissioner of the New York Department of Social  
Services, DSS

Grace Bonilla  
Administrator of Human Resources Administration  
At the New York City Department of Social  
Services, DSS

Brenda Riley  
Member of the Safety Net Activists at the Urban  
Justice Center

John Otrompke  
Representing Safety Net Activists at the Urban  
Justice Center

Ebony Anderson  
Representing Self and Faceless Masses, Member of  
The Safety Net Activists at the Urban Justice  
Center

Ralph Palladino  
Second Vice President of Clerical Administrative  
Employees Local 1549, District Council 37

Eddie Rodriguez  
President of Local 1549 Representing Eligibility  
Specialists

Anthony Wells  
President of the Social Services Employees Union  
Local 371, Vice President of District Council 37,  
International Vice President of AFSCME

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

Kenneth Clark  
Eligibility Specialist at TIPS 42

Yolette Green  
Employed at the SNAP Green Home Center

Wendy O'Shields  
New York City Welfare and Homeless Rights  
Advocate with the Urban Justice Center Safety Net  
Project Activists

Yolette Green  
Employed at the SNAP Green Home Center

Helen Strom  
Benefits Team Supervisor at the Safety Net  
Project, Safety Net Activist

Charisma White  
Client at HRA For Several Years

Jonathan Sunshine  
Member of Safety Net Activist Group at the Urban  
Justice Center

Scott Andrew Hutchins  
Member of Picture the Homeless

Raqibah Fatimah Basir  
Client of HRA, Resident of Shelter Program

Kelly Grace Price  
Member of Close Rosies

Towaki Komatsu  
Federal Lawsuit against the City of New York

Juliane Williams  
Member of Safety Net Activist Group

[gavel]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quite please.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good afternoon

everybody. I'm Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the City Council's Committee on General Welfare. Today we are holding an oversight hearing on the client experience at HRA Centers as well as 12 bills and one Resolution that aim to ensure that all HRA clients are treated with respect, compassion and professionalism and ensure that HRA employees have the resources that they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. I believe that all of us are familiar with the story of Jazmine Headley and she's joined us today and we thank her. Starting a December day attempting to reinstate her childcare subsidy and ending the day with her child ripped from arms and her placed in handcuffs. I think I speak for everyone up here when I say that we are grateful that Miss Headley is here with us today. I'm sure that reliving this incident is not easy and we appreciate her sharing her story so that we could learn from her extremely upsetting experience. Regrettably as Miss Headley herself has said unfortunate experiences at HRA Centers are not unique to her case, this is a

1 system wide issue and it reveals the criminalization  
2 of poverty that too many New Yorkers face. The Urban  
3 Justice Center's Safety Net Project has just  
4 published a report highlighting the challenges New  
5 Yorkers face while trying to obtain public assistance  
6 and SNAP benefits. Most of the HRA clients surveyed  
7 felt that they had been spoken to inappropriately,  
8 many reported having their paperwork lost by HRA and  
9 a large majority said that their calls were not  
10 answered. They also found average wait times of over  
11 three hours at job centers and two hours and 45  
12 minutes at SNAP centers. The survey results showed  
13 clear improvements compared to a similar study  
14 conducted in 2014. In the five years of Commissioner  
15 Bank's leadership HRA has undergone significant  
16 modernization and streamlining efforts by increasing  
17 self-service options, online applications and  
18 recertification, mobile document uploads and client-  
19 initiated scheduling for interviews on demand. We  
20 appreciate everything that has been done to make the  
21 system work better but clearly more needs to be done.  
22 Today I hope we can discuss how we can work together  
23 to expedite improvements and ensure cultural... culture  
24 of mutual respect. The Committee will hear 13 pieces  
25

1  
2 of legislation including Intro 1359, a bill that I'm  
3 sponsoring to require DSS to issue a public report on  
4 instances in which public assistance for a recipient  
5 was terminated and the recipient reapplied for such  
6 public assistance. I believe that transparency is key  
7 in identifying gaps and tracking progress at DSS. I  
8 look forward to hearing feedback on the legislative  
9 package we are hearing today and discussing how we  
10 can all work together to improve the system. I also  
11 look forward to hearing the firsthand accounts of  
12 clients who experienced the concrete implementation  
13 of city policies on the ground and ask that DSS  
14 summarize their testimony, Commissioner Banks stay  
15 after delivering his testimony to hear these powerful  
16 statements. At this time I'd like to acknowledge my  
17 colleagues who have joined us today; we are joined by  
18 Council Member Chaim Deutsch of Brooklyn, Council  
19 Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel of Brooklyn, Council  
20 Member Vanessa Gibson of the Bronx, Council Member  
21 Helen Rosenthal of Manhattan, of course our Speaker  
22 Cory Johnson, Council Member and Majority Leader  
23 Laurie Cumbo of Brooklyn, Council Member Barry  
24 Grodenchik of Queens, Council Member Adrienne Adams  
25 of Queens, Council Member Diana Ayala of the Bronx

1  
2 and Council Member Antonio Reynoso of Brooklyn. We  
3 expect to be joined by more colleagues as the hearing  
4 progresses. Lastly, I'd like to thank the staff of  
5 the General Welfare Committee Aminta Kilawan, Senior  
6 Counsel and Tonya Cyrus and Crystal Pond, Senior  
7 Policy Analyst and Julia Haramis, Finance Analyst for  
8 putting this hearing together. I'd also like to thank  
9 my Chief of Staff Jonathan Boucher and Legislative  
10 Director Elizabeth Adams. I'd now like to turn it  
11 over to our Speaker, Cory Johnson for his remarks.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Good afternoon  
13 everyone, thank you Chair Levin. I'm Council Member  
14 Cory Johnson, Speaker of the New York City Council  
15 and I want to thank everyone for coming out to this  
16 important hearing. I'd also like to thank again Chair  
17 Levin for his steady, steadfast dedication to this  
18 issue and the Committee on General Welfare for  
19 addressing it this afternoon. I want to thank  
20 Commissioner Steve Banks for being here today, I see  
21 him sitting in the audience, to continue the dialogue  
22 we started a few weeks ago and finally I want to  
23 thank each and every one of you who is here today to  
24 provide feedback on how we can improve the experience  
25 of clients at HRA Centers and I want to thank Anthony

1 Wells for being here as well, his testimony today is  
2 important. As the largest social service agency in  
3 the entire country, HRA assists in providing New  
4 Yorkers with their most essential needs. HRA helps  
5 more than three million New Yorkers annually through  
6 the administration of more than 12 major public  
7 assistants' programs including food assistance also  
8 known as SNAP, cash assistance, public health  
9 insurance and child care. These programs make up our  
10 social safety net, keep people out of poverty and  
11 provide vulnerable New Yorkers with what they need to  
12 survive. We know that under the leadership of  
13 Commissioner Banks HRA is working towards making  
14 significant improvements to its systems and processes  
15 to ensure that their clients are best served. We are  
16 grateful for these efforts but last December we were  
17 horrifically reminded of how much more must be done.  
18 On December 7<sup>th</sup> New Yorkers were rightfully outraged  
19 by an incident that occurred at an HRA Center in  
20 Brooklyn, footage of a mother whose baby was pried  
21 from her arms before she was arrested at an HRA  
22 Center went viral. That mother was Jazmine Headley,  
23 is here with us today, Jazmine I want to thank you  
24 for being here. I recognize that this might not be  
25

1  
2 easy for you and I am deeply grateful you're your  
3 bravery and for your presence today. Watching the  
4 video of what happened to Jazmine was painful and  
5 heartbreaking. Unfortunately, we can't go back in  
6 time, but we can do our best to ensure these kinds of  
7 incidences do not happen to families in the future.  
8 As elected officials that's our responsibility, the  
9 system has to change. Today we're hearing a package  
10 of 13 bills intended to improve a client's experience  
11 when they visit an HRA Center. My bill, Introduction  
12 1332 would create an Office of Special Handler at the  
13 Department of Social Services, this office would  
14 establish the system to hear complaints about  
15 determination of benefits, review those decisions and  
16 ensure effective communication with clients when  
17 benefits are terminated. This is an important bill.  
18 If someone had caught that there was a bureaucratic  
19 error with Jazmine's benefits, she wouldn't have  
20 needed to waste her time coming into the center that  
21 day waiting hours to resolve her issue ultimately  
22 having to go through that traumatic and painful  
23 experience. I hope this hearing is the beginning of a  
24 robust conversation on how we can work together to  
25 ensure that what happened to Jazmine Headley never

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2 happens again. No family should experience the trauma  
3 that Jazmine and her baby had to face, we must do  
4 better. I want to thank all the sponsors of our bill  
5 package for their work on this important issue, I  
6 look forward to getting an update from the  
7 administration today on the actions that HRA  
8 announced they would take in response to what  
9 happened to Jazmine Headley and additionally, I hope  
10 that this hearing provides us with an opportunity to  
11 look broadly at a client's experience at HRA Centers  
12 and what we can do to ensure that every step along  
13 the way is efficient and humane. I also want to  
14 apologize, I want to say I'm sorry, I'm sorry on  
15 behalf of the city of New York, I'm sorry you ever  
16 had to go to that HRA Center, I'm sorry that you and  
17 your baby had to experience that trauma, I'm sorry  
18 that you were wrongfully kept on Rikers Island for  
19 multiple days away from your family, you deserve so  
20 much more than you received and I am deeply, deeply  
21 apologetic that you had to have this experience and I  
22 am similarly deeply, deeply grateful for your  
23 bravery, for you wanting to be here today, for you  
24 wanting to tell your story, for you wanting to ensure  
25 that this happen... doesn't have to happen to anyone

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2 else and I know there are some things that you aren't  
3 going to be able to talk about today and that is  
4 perfectly fine, we want you to feel comfortable, we  
5 want you to tell your story in whatever way makes you  
6 feel comfortable and we want to acknowledge the pain  
7 that you've gone through and hopefully your testimony  
8 here today will be a catalyst for change in the  
9 future. So, thank you Jazmine Headley, thank you and  
10 I turn it back over to our Chair, Steve Levin.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr.

12 Speaker. We'll now hear brief remarks from our bill  
13 sponsors and members if we can keep the remarks brief  
14 because we have so many pieces of legislation, we  
15 would appreciate that. Council Member Adams.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you so much

17 Mr. Chair and Miss Headley. I told you this in the  
18 past, I look at you and I see my daughter, I look at  
19 your baby and I see my grandson so I feel you and  
20 like the Speaker I too am so sorry for what you went  
21 through, days that you can't get back but just know  
22 that you have allies here at City Council who are  
23 working with you and for you on your behalf. So, over  
24 the past year we've received many accounts of poor  
25 treatments of people visiting HRA Centers in need of

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2 assistance and I think the world has seen the video  
3 of your child being pulled from your arms at a  
4 Brooklyn HRA Center and the arrest that you went  
5 through was completely unnecessary. So, after the  
6 unfortunate escalation in your case Jazmine and so  
7 many others we here at City Council must take steps  
8 to ensure that this doesn't happen again. What's  
9 happening inside of some HRA offices in the name of  
10 law and order must be reformed and we're to help to  
11 do that. Vulnerable New Yorkers shouldn't have to  
12 second guess how they will be treated in these  
13 offices so I'm very proud to join my colleagues in  
14 introducing a package of legislation to improve  
15 treatment of clients and quality of service at HRA  
16 Centers. My bill is Intro 1333 and that would require  
17 the Department of Social Services, Human Resources  
18 Administration to issue a quarterly report on use of  
19 force incidents that occur in a DSS/HRA office. The  
20 report would be submitted to the Council and  
21 published on the DSS/HRA website. This bill would  
22 also require the New York City Police Department to  
23 issue a quarterly report on use of force incidents  
24 that occur in DSS/HRA offices in which the NYPD  
25 responded. The report would be submitted to the

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2 Council and published on the NYPD website. I  
3 encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill,  
4 Intro 1333 like the other bills in this package is a  
5 necessary step to improve accountability and  
6 transparency. We must ensure that the agency improves  
7 their policies and protocols to prevent future trauma  
8 from families in need, we must ensure that this never  
9 happens again, we must ensure that there is never  
10 another Jazmine Headley incident. Thank you, Mr.  
11 Chair.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you  
13 Council Member Adams. I just want to let the folks  
14 know who are slated to give opening statements, we  
15 have Council Member Ampry-Samuel, Majority Leader  
16 Cumbo, Council Member Rosenthal and Council Member  
17 Deutsch, I really want to let Miss Headley testify as  
18 quickly as possible and not keep her here for an  
19 extended period of time so if it possible if you need  
20 to give an opening statement that's fine but please  
21 keep it to one minute so that we can hear from Miss  
22 Headley as soon as possible. I don't want her to sit  
23 here all day and, and listen to us, I want to be able  
24 to actually ask her questions. So, next up is Council  
25 Member Ampry-Samuel, then Majority Leader Cumbo, then

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2 Council Member Rosenthal, then Council Member  
3 Deutsch, Deutsch, if anyone wants to waive their time  
4 that would be great but if you do want to keep it  
5 please keep it to a minute.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you  
7 Speaker and thank you Chair Levin for the opportunity  
8 to speak on my bills and thank you for your  
9 leadership during this time. In December we watched a  
10 video of a mother carrying her one-year old son  
11 simply trying to correct an issue that was not her  
12 fault with her child care payments and this video had  
13 8.9 million views across the country. Jazmine Headley  
14 was subjected to inappropriate wait times at HRA and  
15 became the victim of aggressive use of force by HRA  
16 peace officers and members of the NYPD and just  
17 watching the video you can see where other workers  
18 didn't know what to do as the incident escalated by  
19 law enforcement. As members of the New York City  
20 Council and an amplified voice for the people we  
21 represent, we have to be responsive, we have to  
22 figure out ways to handle very difficult situations  
23 and make sure that the government and its  
24 bureaucracies are working on behalf of the people  
25 they are supposed to serve. The bills that we have

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2 introduced.. that I've introduced along with Majority  
3 Leader Cumbo and Chair Levin will help create a  
4 respectful and supportive environment for families  
5 who visit HRA Centers. We already heard which bills,  
6 I've introduced 1335, 1337 and 1336 and I really hope  
7 that all of these bills will be able to really  
8 address the level of disrespect, demoralizing and  
9 demeaning treatment felt by New Yorkers within our  
10 centers. As a city of the nation we have got to do  
11 better. Thank you so much.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, I just  
13 wanted to open up by just saying and echoing the  
14 sentiments of Speaker Cory Johnson in terms of how  
15 proud we are that you are here. As a mom myself and  
16 my son is 18 months old, I couldn't help but to see  
17 the video and see myself in you and so today is  
18 really a coming full circle in terms of the ability  
19 to see you and the courage that you still have here  
20 in the chamber and the City Hall. I am proud to put  
21 forward legislation 1347 which is an innovative  
22 approach to provide clients an opportunity to have  
23 the ability to schedule appointments online and over  
24 the phone because you shouldn't have even had to of  
25 been there in the first place. These are issues that

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2 could be rectified over the phone or online and we  
3 want to make sure that working moms can continue to  
4 be working moms and to do their work and to get back  
5 to work as quickly as possible. Also our HRA Centers  
6 must have full time social workers on staff noted in  
7 Intro 1335, sponsored in partnership with Council  
8 Member Ampry-Samuel, there must be people on staff  
9 who are understanding, who are compassionate and  
10 understand these critical issues and I will in the  
11 interest of time turn it back to my colleague to also  
12 do their intro and thank you so much for being here.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member

14 Gibson.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you Chair

16 Levin, thank you to our Speaker. Good afternoon  
17 everyone, thank you for being here. I am Council  
18 Member Vanessa Gibson of District 16 in the Bronx and  
19 my particular bill in this package that we're hearing  
20 today is Intro 1350, which would require the  
21 Commissioner of Social Services to address complaints  
22 based on the findings of an audit on DSS and HRA job  
23 centers and this bill would allow the Commissioner to  
24 make every effort to ensure that recommended  
25 standards of reasonableness are met at every job and

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2 SNAP center. A report will be posted on HRA's website  
3 and submitted to the City Council by April 1<sup>st</sup> of  
4 2020 and certainly given all that we have heard in  
5 this city and certainly thank you Jazmine for being  
6 here. We must make sure we hold everyone to a higher  
7 level of standard and make sure that we do not  
8 criminalize going to HRA and job centers. I  
9 appreciate all of the incredible advocacy of the  
10 Women's Caucus, Progressive Caucus, the Black Latino  
11 and Asian Caucus and I want to thank you all for  
12 being here.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member

14 Rosenthal.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Everyone must

16 be treated with dignity and respect. With gratitude  
17 for our Speaker Cory Johnson for skillfully guiding  
18 the process to get us to this point. The point of  
19 this hearing is to move city government so that  
20 everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Thank  
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much

23 Council Member Rosenthal and Council Member Deutsch.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Chair.

25 I'm going to be brief. Today I'm introducing a bill

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2 that aims to collect data so that we can better  
3 understand how dire the situation is of our city's  
4 most vulnerable. My bill would require a yearly  
5 report from DSS and HRA about how many resolved and  
6 unresolved complaints were received from clients.  
7 Furthermore, this report would include the methods  
8 that DSS/HRA will undertake to better resolve  
9 complaints and its progress in resolving complaints.  
10 The report would be required to be sent to the  
11 Speaker's office and to be posted annually on the  
12 DSS/HRA website to offer transparency to the people  
13 of this city. We as a Council must shine a light in  
14 the dark corners of the city to expose the serious  
15 problems that our fellow New Yorkers face. The  
16 decisive action that we are taking led by our Speaker  
17 Cory Johnson and my colleagues will fight to ensure  
18 that nobody ever again experiences what Jazmine did.  
19 I thank all my colleagues for their important bills  
20 to address the issues relating to DSS/HRA and I thank  
21 Chair Levin for his leadership on these 13 bills,  
22 thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council  
24 Member Deutsch, lastly Council Member Williams.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you and  
3 I'll be brief. I thank you Chairman and the Speaker.  
4 I'm proud to sponsor Intro 1389, a Local Law that  
5 would require the Department of Social Services and  
6 the HRA to report on termination of public assistance  
7 as well as co-sponsoring Intro 1336 which I'm sure  
8 was spoken about. I'm proud to be a part of this  
9 Council of raising these issues, thank you for being  
10 here and representing so many people who are not. I'm  
11 also... just want to lift up mothers from ACS whose  
12 babies are being taken from them for the crime of  
13 being poor and not from neglect. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
15 Council Member Williams. Okay, well we want to thank  
16 all of our sponsors and we want to thank Miss Headley  
17 for being here and we look forward to hearing her  
18 remarks.

19 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: First of all, I  
20 want to thank the Speaker for making my client cry  
21 before she has to speak, just a joke...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I'm sorry.

23 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: No, it is... it is... I  
24 just wanted to thank the City Council for the support  
25 that you gave me and have consistently give Brooklyn

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2 Defender Services so that we can help people like  
3 Jazmine Headley and others who are in these same  
4 similar circumstances but I particularly wanted to  
5 thank Chair Levin as well as the Speaker, I also  
6 wanted to thank Borough President Eric Adams and I  
7 thank also Letitia James who really came forward  
8 early and was very, very, very helpful and I wanted  
9 you all to know that the, the, the support that you  
10 gave Miss Headley during this incident and today and  
11 since then has really meant a lot to her. I wanted to  
12 say that on her behalf so she can speak for herself  
13 on the rest. Thank you.

14 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Good afternoon

15 everyone. My name is Jazmine Headley. I just want to  
16 thank everyone for allowing me to have this time to  
17 speak and tell my truth. I'm 24 years old, I have a  
18 one-year old son named Damone. I live in Brooklyn  
19 where I've lived for most of my life, every day I  
20 work hard to make a brighter future for my son just  
21 like my amazing mother did for me. The events that  
22 took place on December 7<sup>th</sup> changed my life but also  
23 brought attention to issues that effected people  
24 every day especially from... well especially those from  
25 my community. I'm here today because I want to make

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2 sure that what happened to me never happens to anyone  
3 else. I speak today to shine a light on a problem  
4 that impacts many. I want to thank the City Council  
5 again for giving me this opportunity to speak today.  
6 We need to change the ways HRA provides services to  
7 people when they are most in need. I also want to  
8 share a little bit about what happened to me that  
9 day. On December 7<sup>th</sup> I went to HRA in Brooklyn to  
10 find out why HRA had cut off my son's child care, I  
11 never received a notice, I also wanted to check on my  
12 public assistance case. Like many working single  
13 mothers I needed child care so I could continue  
14 working. To go to HRA I had to call out of work on  
15 that Friday, I had to miss a day of work and not get  
16 paid to fix the problem with my child care voucher. I  
17 took the whole day off work because I knew I would  
18 have to wait and wait for a long time. Because my son  
19 no longer received child care he could not go to day  
20 care that day, I had to take him with me to the HRA  
21 Office. Knowing we would be there for a while I came  
22 prepared. The night before I packed a bag for my son;  
23 his bottle, his diapers, his favorite toy, it's a  
24 little paw patrol figurine that he lost and other  
25 items. Though it's kind of hard to know you're going

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2 to have to spend almost all day getting just one or  
3 two services I knew it was worth it for Damone, my  
4 son. I got there around 9:50 a.m. that day, my son  
5 was not permitted to go to the play area at the HRA  
6 office because he's not fully potty trained yet. So,  
7 we stuck together. I am a new mom, I'm a single  
8 parent, I needed child care so I can be able to work  
9 and build on our future. I want to go back to school  
10 eventually, I also want to give my son the best life  
11 possible within the state of New York. So, after  
12 taking off work then waiting for many hours making no  
13 progress with my public assistance case, I was  
14 exhausted. I sat on the floor with my son in the  
15 stroller, I was just going to wait it out. As  
16 everyone knows from watching the video, a simple  
17 desire to rest ended up in me getting arrested.  
18 During the process my son was violently removed from  
19 me and nobody will ever know the love we have for our  
20 children, no one can take that from you. Unless you  
21 are a parent... unless you're a parent...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Take your time.

23 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Unless you are a parent  
24 who has a child taken from you, you will never know  
25

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2 or be able to relate to the pain that I felt that  
3 day. Excuse me guys, I'm sorry.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Take your time..

5 [cross-talk]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: No, no, take..  
7 please take your time.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: You got this.

9 JAZMINE HEADLEY: After I was arrested, I  
10 was... I was taken to central booking... thank you, I was  
11 taken to central booking, I had to stay in terrible  
12 conditions for hours, many hours, I don't know how  
13 long but finally I was brought to court where I met  
14 my defense attorney from Brooklyn Defender Services,  
15 and he was like an angel to me. The first person  
16 trying to help me. During this ordeal I was separated  
17 from my son for the first time in his life, I had my  
18 son in Charlotte, North Carolina, I did not have him  
19 in New York City so the medical field there operates  
20 different when you give birth to your child which I  
21 had a natural birth, you are not separated you're  
22 your child like the New York system where you're, you  
23 know getting testing and all that stuff but... I'm  
24 sorry, I just had to share that with you. While the  
25 video of my arrest was seen by millions of people

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2 around the world to think it all started from me just  
3 trying to provide for my son and yes, I may need help  
4 from time to time or have to get help from time to  
5 time but getting help doesn't mean I'm not a person,  
6 it doesn't mean I can't be... that I can be treated in  
7 any way. Honestly what happened to me felt like a  
8 slap in the face. I've given my life to this city, I  
9 was born here, raised here, I pay taxes, I went to  
10 school here, keep and kept good jobs, I'm a part of a  
11 community, I've done what I was supposed to do, I've  
12 done what I had to do. It felt like no one cared  
13 about me or what I had to say, nothing mattered. I  
14 was just a number, a ticket, a problem and I know  
15 each day so many people had the same experience. It's  
16 not just the fact that I was arrested, it's the harsh  
17 way that I was treated by people who are supposed to  
18 help me but the way the arrest happened, the whole  
19 situation is hard to imagine and to live with.

20 Alright now I'm doing what I can to move forward, I  
21 don't really have a choice, I have to survive and  
22 take care of my son but just because I'm trying to  
23 move on doesn't mean I'm not still troubled and  
24 haunted by the traumatic events that happened. Excuse  
25 me. Certain things and situations still give me

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2 anxiety and make me worried. I keep a lot inside  
3 because I have responsibilities but really it was a  
4 painful experience and I still have pain inside of  
5 me. I know I'm not the first person that this  
6 happened to that's why I'm taking this opportunity to  
7 speak my truth to the story that has been told by  
8 many already. I do believe that HRA Centers need some  
9 changes so we can stop violent responses to people in  
10 need. My first point is, HRA has different  
11 caseworkers for different services, I should have  
12 been addressed all of my... I should have been able to  
13 address all of my needs with one person who knows me  
14 and understands me. We live in the state of New York,  
15 there is absolutely no reason that every person could  
16 have a case worker to address all of the needs who  
17 knows and understands them. Staff should be trained  
18 about the psychological experience of what a person  
19 has to endure, it often feels like there is a  
20 constant contradiction, a game of cat and mouse with  
21 HRA staff where they try to find a reason to deny you  
22 and support you or support your needs. HRA offices  
23 don't have enough workers, workers are often saying  
24 people are out of the office, they should have enough  
25 staff to fill in for people so that nobody has to

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2 wait hours just to be seen. Social workers not  
3 security officers, social workers not security  
4 officers should be available, police should never be  
5 called in, in these situations. In my case I was just  
6 sitting, a peaceful act, really it comes down to  
7 treating all people including working people,  
8 mothers, poor people, young people with dignity and  
9 respect. Thank you all for giving me this opportunity  
10 to speak and I'm very grateful for being here today  
11 and I just want all you guys to know... [cross-talk]

12 [applause]

13 JAZMINE HEADLEY: I just need you guys to  
14 know that.

15 [applause]

16 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: Brooklyn Defender  
17 Services has testimony prepared for these specific  
18 bills but of course if you have anything you would  
19 like to ask Miss Headley...

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Sure, I think a,  
21 a few of us will ask questions of Miss Headley and  
22 then we'd be happy to hear from, from the  
23 organization about testimony on the bills and on the  
24 incident. I don't really have any questions for you  
25 because I think you said it perfectly. I am

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2 incredibly amazed and impressed by your composure, by  
3 your bravery, I wish I had that level of courage at  
4 24 years old to be here today and to sit up here and  
5 to talk about something so painful. So, I, I just  
6 want to again say thank you and to let you know that  
7 whatever support is needed from the City Council to  
8 the wonderful lawyers who are representing you we've  
9 been there since the beginning and we want to make  
10 sure that there's justice for you Jazmine and for  
11 your family and so I'm going to turn it over,  
12 Chairman Levin are you okay if I turn it to Majority  
13 Leader Cumbo who I think had a few remarks she wanted  
14 to make and then we'll turn it back to Chair Levin so  
15 thank you Jazmine.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Again thank you  
17 Jazmine so much for the courage, you have really  
18 become unwillingly but a spokeswoman for so many  
19 women, particularly black women all across the city  
20 of New York and I just want to briefly read something  
21 that I read outside but it is Sojourner Truth, Ain't  
22 I a Woman speech and she says there, she says that  
23 man over there, says that women need to be helped  
24 into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have  
25 the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into

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2 carriages or over mud puddles or gives me any best  
3 place and ain't I a woman? Look at me, look at my  
4 arm, I have ploughed and planted and gathered into  
5 barns and no man could head me and ain't I a woman? I  
6 could work as much and eat as much as a man if I  
7 could get it and bear the lash as well and ain't I a  
8 woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen most  
9 all sold off into slavery and when I cried out with a  
10 mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me and ain't I a  
11 woman? And I, I believe that speech Ain't I a Woman  
12 that was read in 1851 we're still asking and  
13 commanding that question today. As a black woman in  
14 New York City, Ain't I a woman begs to ask the  
15 question of I deserve the respect, I deserve the same  
16 treatment, I deserve the dignity, the care and the  
17 compassion as any woman here in New York City and so  
18 I really express to you, I... when I saw the video I  
19 saw me in so many ways, I know what it's like of  
20 course to be black, to be a woman, to be a mother and  
21 to be a single woman in New York City and I saw from  
22 the videos just how much and how strongly you would  
23 do anything to protect your child and I would do the  
24 same exact thing for my son to protect him in the  
25 same way and I know as a single black woman, mother

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2 in New York City, you have to carry yourself at all  
3 times with a don't even think about messing with me  
4 because I am the toughest woman in the entire world  
5 and sometimes all that strength gets misunderstood  
6 where people think you don't need help, you don't  
7 need support, you don't need a chair, you don't need  
8 the compassion, you don't need anyone to help you up  
9 the stairs in the train and so we're really here  
10 today to really show our level of support for you and  
11 the only question that I really had was that we're  
12 trying to understand the services that are happening  
13 at HRA and you said in your speech today that you  
14 took a day off from work, you packed a full bag and I  
15 know what packing that full bag is.. [cross-talk]

16 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Yep... [cross-talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: ...and the toys and  
18 the clothes and the extra change of clothes and the  
19 extra everything, why did you go through so much  
20 preparation just to go to the office before, what  
21 experiences had you had before that let you know I  
22 have to do all of this, I have to take a day off from  
23 work, it's not going to be I can take a half day or I  
24 can go late or any of those particular experiences?

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2 What experiences had you had previously before this  
3 day?

4 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Just daily outings, you  
5 can't go anywhere without the extra bag of things for  
6 your child.

7 [off mic dialogue]

8 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Based off of my  
9 childhood, yeah, my mother had a case before and I  
10 know in that situation it always takes a long time,  
11 you're already pre-warned, my own mother told me, you  
12 know Jaz we have to go take care of some business,  
13 it's going to be a while, you know we always brung  
14 food or we were able to eat beforehand because there  
15 is a wait time guaranteed.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And was this your  
17 first time coming to an HRA Office as a... as an adult,  
18 as a woman?

19 JAZMINE HEADLEY: It may have been my  
20 second time.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And is your son  
22 back in daycare?

23 JAZMINE HEADLEY: My son is back in  
24 daycare.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Yes.

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2 [applause]

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And my son will be  
4 celebrating his birthday soon and we're going to be  
5 going to see Sesame Place at Madison Square Gardens,  
6 we'd love if you could come.

7 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Nice, I would gladly  
8 appreciate that, yeah, thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you and  
10 those are the types of conversations we really should  
11 be having..

12 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, I thank you  
14 for that, those are the memories that our children  
15 should have and those are the types of normal  
16 conversations that two black mothers should be having  
17 and so I hope that we can have more of those moving  
18 forward and you're stuck with me.

19 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Cool.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Jazmine I want to  
21 thank you for your testimony, and I want to  
22 acknowledge that your strength and, and your bravery  
23 for coming up here and speaking your truth is  
24 extraordinary and you know sometimes for whatever  
25 reason we're placed into.. [cross-talk]

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2 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Yep... [cross-talk]

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...situations and  
4 circumstances that demand extraordinary responses  
5 from us and what you have demonstrated and how you  
6 have spoken to so many people has... you have risen to  
7 that challenge, you have risen to that challenge and  
8 we are all in admiration... [cross-talk]

9 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...of you being here  
11 today and we thank you and we look forward to hearing  
12 more from you and we look forward to working with you  
13 and getting to know you and as Laurie said you're  
14 stuck with all of us actually so... and, and we just  
15 want to express our appreciation.

16 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you for being  
18 here today. Thank you.

19 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Lisa do you want to  
21 deliver remarks on behalf of Brooklyn Defenders?

22 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: Thank you.  
23 actually, I want to pass it to Anca Grigore who is a  
24 Supervising Attorney in our Civil Action Practice.

25

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2 ANCA GRIGORE: Hi, my name is Anca

3 Grigore and as Lisa just said, a Supervising Attorney

4 where one of the things that my unit specifically

5 specializes in is assisting our clients with their

6 benefits issues. We thank the City Council Committee

7 on General Welfare and Chair Steven Levin for this

8 opportunity to testify today and bring to light even

9 more client experiences at HRA Centers because as has

10 been repeated several times today unfortunately

11 Jazmine's experience in, in the way that she was

12 treated at HRA, the frustrations and the wait times

13 are not unique... [clears throat] excuse me.. to

14 Jazmine. I want to tell the story of a couple other

15 of our clients to supplement Jazmine's story with the

16 Council's understanding that these stories have

17 become par for course at HRA Centers. The first

18 example is of Miss J, a single mother as well to

19 three severely special needs children. On top of that

20 Miss J suffers from her own disability so she is

21 homebound as well. Her children require around the

22 clock special care and so she's reliant on Medicaid

23 for that care. When it came time to her

24 recertification, she received a homebound appointment

25 as was supposed to be the case for her to be able to

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2 recertify. Unfortunately, those case workers left her  
3 without any receipt, no evidence of this visit, none  
4 of their contact information. Her case later closed  
5 due to failure to recertify. She was desperate, she  
6 had never let her case close before, she's very  
7 diligent knowing how much her children rely on these  
8 Medicaid benefits. Her entire case was turned off  
9 including her Medicaid. She... we tried to get her  
10 another home bound appointment but the wait was too  
11 long so Miss J dragged herself into a center and made  
12 sure to bring all the necessary documentation, she  
13 knew how to recertify, she knew what documents they  
14 would need so that she wouldn't have to keep going  
15 back over and over and over again. Unfortunately, her  
16 case worker was rude and was demanding documents from  
17 her that are not required under HRA rules and  
18 regulations. I called the HRA case worker, I called  
19 supervisors, I called every single day, multiple  
20 times a day for two weeks straight to try to get some  
21 attention to this matter. I was told I don't  
22 understand why you're helping her, I was told I don't  
23 understand why you care so much and rejected over and  
24 over and over again. Eventually they stopped  
25 answering my phone calls, I called from my personal

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2 cell phone and they answered, it was clear that they  
3 were disappointed that I had been able to reach them  
4 on the phone. They said to me that they were going to  
5 do this on their own timeline, and they were not  
6 concerned about our client's emergency needs. I kept  
7 calling up the chain of command until eventually the  
8 client's benefits were turned back on but after far  
9 too much delay. We have another client, Miss A who  
10 similarly after a merely verbal altercation at an HRA  
11 Center NYPD was called, she was arrested, and a full  
12 order of protection was placed between her and her  
13 case worker. She was due for recertification that's  
14 why she was there that day, she couldn't recertify  
15 her case and it closed. She was desperate for these  
16 benefits, she was not allowed to go back into the  
17 center to recertify because of the full order of  
18 protection. She tried calling around but as most  
19 people know it's impossible to get anybody from HRA  
20 on the phone. She eventually came to our office and  
21 came to me where I was able to call the director  
22 directly of another center and get her an appointment  
23 there to recertify. She had already missed on so many  
24 necessary benefits and if it wasn't for me having  
25 access to these HRA director's phone numbers she

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2 would have had absolutely no recourse in this  
3 situation. And one more client, Miss P who's a  
4 Spanish speaker, she went to a center with one of our  
5 case workers at our office who does HRA advocacy for  
6 our unit to assist her in just filling out a form  
7 that she needed for her benefits. The form was only  
8 given to her in English, they requested it in  
9 Spanish, they were refused. Our case worker started  
10 filling out the form for her because she speaks both  
11 English and Spanish, but our client could not  
12 understand the form. The case worker started telling  
13 her that she was committing fraud, you're not allowed  
14 to fill out a form for one of your clients, I'm  
15 dismiss... I'm closing this entire case and sending it  
16 up to our fraud investigation unit. Our case worker  
17 tried to explain to her she can't understand the  
18 form, I'm just helping her fill it out, I'm asking  
19 her the questions and filling them in. She refused to  
20 hear it, she physically shoved the papers back in our  
21 case worker's face and sent them out of the office.  
22 Eventually with some advocacy, again calling up to  
23 directors we were able to just submit this simple  
24 form on behalf of our client. So, once again and  
25 there are more stories in our written testimony, this

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2 is just to show more examples of how this has become  
3 par for the course for treatment at HRA Centers. So,  
4 we do want to comment on some of the bills being  
5 introduced today and mostly want to say that, you  
6 know we support all of the bills being introduced and  
7 we also support all of the recommendations that  
8 Jazmine herself just stated. To briefly comment on  
9 each bill; first with Intro 1332 we support an office  
10 being created, the office of a special handler. We do  
11 want to comment and say an office exists called the  
12 office of constituent services that has clearly so  
13 far been inadequate. We hope that an office of the  
14 special handler will look at the ways that the office  
15 of constituent services has been inadequate and try  
16 to address some of those inadequacies. One way we can  
17 do that is that the office of the special handler  
18 should be available at every center, it should be  
19 available, it should be accessible, and it should be  
20 known about by regular clients at HRA Centers.  
21 Secondly to address all of the data collection and  
22 reporting bills together we support greater  
23 transparency in terms of the HRA Centers. We do want  
24 to specifically address Intro 1333 regarding the NYPD  
25 reporting.

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2 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: I'll speak to that  
3 one but before I talk about that there is one bill  
4 that adds access to a social worker which we very  
5 much appreciate and think will be very powerful but  
6 we have some concerns that the more things that... the  
7 more obstacles or lines that somebody have to work  
8 on, the more people that they have to get through to  
9 get help sometimes creates more of a barrier than an  
10 assistance. So, I think it's really important that we  
11 be very careful about what the role of the social  
12 worker might be because I can envision a situation  
13 where a case worker says I won't talk to you until  
14 you see the social worker and there's a line up  
15 there. So, I just want us to be very mindful of not  
16 creating more of a problem because with the  
17 bureaucracy the way that HRA is now you run into, you  
18 know a risk of that kind of obstacle. I did want to  
19 say that the, the problem with... of course we  
20 appreciate more reporting about the use of force at  
21 any centers and we believe that it's very important  
22 to start to understand what's happening, when police  
23 are called. I think one of the issues that needs to  
24 be looked at a lot more carefully is what the  
25 solution is if the workers don't feel that they can

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2 handle a situation, when they call the police, why  
3 they call the police. But I would like to go back to  
4 an issue that was pointed out by Council Member  
5 Williams before he left which is that police are  
6 regularly involved in removals of children when they  
7 are being removed by ACS and my office is the primary  
8 provider for parents, mostly women who are involved  
9 in ACS proceedings often times for issues that are  
10 mostly related to poverty and are often not very,  
11 very serious where the children are in danger. So,  
12 police are often brought with ACS workers and the  
13 outcome of those interactions might look a lot more  
14 like what you saw on the video than most people  
15 probably realize, and I agree with him and I just  
16 call upon the Council at some point to really dig a  
17 little deeper into that issue. I think one of the  
18 reasons that the officers in this circumstance were  
19 so adamant about the way that they were removing the  
20 child is related to the fact that they do it quiet  
21 often, much more than I think most people understand.  
22 With that I would like to conclude our testimony and  
23 thank the Council very much and I think we all owe  
24 Miss Headley an incredible thanks and support for

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2 coming forward, it was very.. she was very.. it was a  
3 very brave thing to do. Thank you.

4 [applause]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, yes.

6 [applause]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Lisa I want to  
8 thank you all for being here, Jazmine I want to thank  
9 you for being here, we really, really appreciate it  
10 and we look forward to continuing to support you as  
11 you move forward and anything you need as Lisa knows  
12 please do not hesitate to call upon us so thank you  
13 so much and now we're going to call up Commissioner  
14 Banks from HRA and whoever else is testifying him to  
15 come up. Thank you very much.

16 LISA SCHREIBERSDORF: Thank you.

17 JAZMINE HEADLEY: Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you Steve,  
19 thank you Commissioner Banks for being here, I'm  
20 going to ask the Committee Counsel to please swear  
21 you in.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Commissioner do you  
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
24 but the truth in your testimony before this committee  
25 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: I do.

3 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you, you may  
4 begin.

5 STEVEN BANKS: If you could also swear in  
6 Administrator Bonilla please, thank you.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: Commissioner do you  
8 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
9 but the truth in your testimony before the committee  
10 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

11 GRACE BONILLA: I do.

12 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great, thank  
14 you. Steve you may begin.

15 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you. I'm going to  
16 summarize my testimony but I... but first I, I want to  
17 both say thank you both Mr. Speaker and Mr. Chair for  
18 your kind words about what we've done but I think  
19 that the power of Jazmine Headley's testimony is how  
20 much more remains for us to do and, you know  
21 notwithstanding the significant reform efforts that  
22 have been implemented over the last five years as  
23 painfully illustrated by Miss Headley's testimony and  
24 conversations that I've personally had with  
25 individual clients on any given day a client may

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2 experience challenges at any one of our offices that  
3 don't reflect the major policy changes we've made,  
4 our values or the dedication of the vast majority of  
5 our staff who come to work at DSS to help people in  
6 need. In the testimony before you begin with the  
7 questions I want to highlight the immediate actions  
8 that we have taken hearing the kinds of pain that  
9 have reflected in both Miss Headley's testimony and  
10 in the recent report from the Safety Net Activist so  
11 I just want to make sure that those are clear on the  
12 record what... the immediate actions we've taken but I  
13 also want to highlight some of the overall common  
14 sense changes that we are making and... as I think it's  
15 relevant to how they interact with the, the various  
16 bills that are before the committee. As you know at  
17 two council hearings in December and immediately  
18 after the matter came to light, I spoke about the  
19 actions that we took following this horrible incident  
20 and I'd like to again apologize to Miss Headley and  
21 her one-year old son and to the people of the city of  
22 New York for what happened. It was utterly  
23 unacceptable in one of our offices and I think as a  
24 public official it's important to acknowledge that  
25 this was utterly unacceptable and to apologize to

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2 someone who was so painfully effected by what  
3 happened and I have to say on a personal level and  
4 Speaker I've known you and I've known you Chair and,  
5 and many others in this Committee for a long time,  
6 you know what happened to Miss Headley when she  
7 turned to us for help has caused me to look in the  
8 mirror to see what more I can do to deepen the  
9 reforms we've implemented so that nothing like that  
10 ever happens again. We've already enacted a series of  
11 immediate reforms to address this horrible incident  
12 and we're taking additional steps that I'm describing  
13 today because I think the power of Miss Headley's  
14 testimony is beyond her own experience but how she  
15 reflected on the experience as have others.

16 Immediately following the incident, I placed the two  
17 HRA peace officers on modified duty with no client  
18 contact. Consistent with the collective bargaining  
19 agreement I suspended the... these two officers without  
20 pay for the maximum period of time. Following these  
21 suspensions one officer has resigned from the agency  
22 and one has been assigned to administrative duties  
23 pending disciplinary charges that have been filed  
24 which could result in termination. Listening to what  
25 happened to Miss Headley going forward unless there

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2 is an immediate safety threat, I have directed that  
3 HRA peace officers shall not request the intervention  
4 of the NYPD without first contacting the Center  
5 Director or Deputy Director or her or his designee to  
6 attempt to diffuse any situation by addressing a  
7 client need as opposed to what happened in Miss  
8 Headley's case. As part of this new procedure we will  
9 be implementing a social worker pilot at one job  
10 center in each of the five boroughs to support the  
11 Center Directors in diffusing such situations by  
12 addressing a client's need for immediate help. The  
13 pilot will enable us to test the effectiveness of  
14 this new approach at these five centers, one in each  
15 borough. Last month DSS reinforced guidelines for  
16 staff to treat clients with courtesy and respect. DSS  
17 immediately began conducting retraining sessions for  
18 all HRA peace officers with an emphasis on techniques  
19 for deescalating disputes in HRA Centers, 87 out of  
20 the 97 current peace officers have received this  
21 enhanced training, the remaining ten are on leave and  
22 will receive the retraining when they return to work  
23 and within that ten is, is a new hire too. This will  
24 be a mandatory annual requirement for each officer. I  
25 have personally attended each of these retraining

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2 sessions to speak to the HRA peace officers regarding  
3 the importance of deescalating disputes...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I want to thank  
5 you for doing that Commissioner.

6 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you. Going forward  
7 we will be providing all HRA peace officers with body  
8 worn cameras which I think reflects the very  
9 productive conversations that we had with you Speaker  
10 and you Majority Leader and you Chair and, and other  
11 leaders here, Council Member Alicka Samuel and  
12 Council Member Donovan. DSS is directed, the city  
13 contracted security services vendor to provide  
14 retraining sessions for all security guards assigned  
15 to HRA Centers who are not peace officers with an  
16 emphasis on techniques for deescalating disputes in  
17 HRA Centers, thereafter this training will be a  
18 mandatory annual requirement for any contracted  
19 security officer assigned to an HRA Office. All but  
20 15 of the contracted security staff have been trained  
21 and the rest will be trained tonight. In addition to  
22 existing DSS customer service staff training, DSS  
23 will begin implementing implicit bias training for  
24 all 17,000 DSS staff members including both HRA and  
25 DSS to promote diversity in the work place and

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2 dignity centered client services. Last month I  
3 appointed Lawanna Kimbro who's here today to be DSSs'  
4 first Chief Diversity and Equity Officer. In this new  
5 position she will develop agency initiatives that  
6 address staff engagement, recruitment and advancement  
7 and build capacity of staff at all levels to respond  
8 effectively to structural racism and individual bias.  
9 Further, she will promote culturally competent  
10 programs and inform policies, training, hiring  
11 practices and service delivery to ensure continuity  
12 and sustainability in promoting equitable outcomes  
13 for clients and staff. As part of her immediate  
14 responsibilities, she will be focusing on the  
15 development of the implicit bias training. With  
16 support from the Open Society Foundations, DSS will  
17 host a summit that will engage our leadership staff,  
18 advocates, clients and other city agencies to develop  
19 systemic solutions to racial disparities across our  
20 programs. DSS has begun to implement comprehensive  
21 intersectional anti oppression training curriculum.  
22 Starting today, all new hires will receive a weeklong  
23 series of trainings covering topics such as the  
24 drivers of poverty and homelessness, including  
25 racism, income inequality, gender, sexual

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2 orientation, disability, as well as the history of  
3 social services. The curriculum also includes best  
4 practices for addressing the needs of diverse and  
5 marginalized populations, including intimate partner  
6 violence information, LGBTQI best practices, serving  
7 people with disabilities, mental health first aid and  
8 equal employment opportunity. Previously, some of  
9 these trainings were optional or offered only  
10 periodically. Transitioning to a compressed week-long  
11 curriculum sets the tone for our agency's culture at  
12 onboarding and allows all new hires to reflect on the  
13 intersectionality of the client experience. The  
14 agency is also developing training on trauma informed  
15 service delivery for all clients as is reflected in  
16 some of the pieces of legislation. Together with the  
17 NYPD Commissioner, we're taking the following  
18 actions; DSS has developed a protocol for determining  
19 appropriate instances in which the HRA peace officers  
20 or HRA Centers should seek the assistance of the  
21 NYPD. The NYPD has developed a protocol to deploy an  
22 NYPD supervisor to be a part of the NYPD response  
23 team for HRA assistance request. Control of an  
24 incident will be transferred to the NYPD when the  
25 NYPD arrives at an HRA Center. I welcome your further

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2 comments and recommendations at this hearing as well  
3 as in the negotiations regarding all of the various  
4 legislative proposals so that we can further improve  
5 both our ongoing policy reforms and our new  
6 initiatives. There are many common sense ideas in  
7 these pieces of legislation, the reforms that we have  
8 been implementing over the last, last five years are  
9 common sense ideas, the experience of Miss Headley  
10 tells us we must bring to bear more common sense but  
11 I wanted to make sure as we proceed that all of this  
12 is dealt with rather than as separate initiatives but  
13 one comprehensive approach. Finally, for context, I  
14 think it's also important to consider where we began  
15 in 2014 and the changes we have already made in the  
16 role of the unions and our workforce in making those  
17 changes. Given the major reforms that we made five  
18 years ago, it's sometimes easy to forget the major  
19 impact on the client experience that each reform has  
20 had at the same as reflecting on the experience of  
21 Miss Headley indicating and painfully illustrating  
22 how much further we have to go. Consider for example  
23 these policies that we changed to benefit clients.  
24 Clients used to have to work off their benefits in  
25 the Work Experience Program at city and non-for-

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2 profit agencies, we eliminated the WEP program and  
3 replaced it with education and training programs to  
4 help clients move forward on a career pathway.

5 [applause]

6 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you Safety Net  
7 Activists and others. Participation in four-year  
8 college was not permissible employment activity for  
9 our clients, we successfully advocated for a change  
10 in state law to permit clients to obtain college  
11 degrees that greatly enhance their ability to earn a  
12 living wage. Clients were subjected to punitive  
13 sanctions for missing WEP assignments and they  
14 received appointments at something called the  
15 Intensive Services Center number 71 and if they  
16 missed those appointments the entire family would be  
17 denied assistance, we closed Center 71. Clients used  
18 to be subjected to durational sanctions for cash  
19 assistance if they were charged with violating a  
20 program rule, we successfully advocated for a change  
21 in state law as applied to New York City only to give  
22 clients the chance to cure a violation and avert a  
23 state durational sanction. At the same time, we also  
24 advocated and successfully reduced the state sanction  
25 period for SNAP/food stamps. Clients used to be

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2 subjected to churning due to unnecessary case  
3 closings which required clients to request state fair  
4 hearings to reopen their case, we put in place new  
5 protocols to prevent unnecessary case closings, and  
6 state hearing challenges by clients have decreased by  
7 more than 47 percent over the last five years. Again,  
8 that's client, client complaints resulting in fair  
9 hearings have decreased by 47 percent. Clients used  
10 to be forced to apply for cash assistance.. excuse me,  
11 used to reapply for cash assistance if they failed to  
12 return mail questionnaires or submit requested  
13 documentation, we now make it easier for clients to  
14 continue their assistance if they submit what is  
15 needed within 30 days of a case closing. All homeless  
16 clients used to have to travel to a single HRA job  
17 center in Queens, we stopped that practice and  
18 homeless clients can now seek assistance at a job  
19 center in their home borough. All seniors, all  
20 seniors used to have to travel to a single HRA job  
21 center in Manhattan, we changed that and now seniors  
22 can receive services at a job center in their home  
23 borough. Previously, clients only received a center  
24 ticket that did not list the purpose of their visit.  
25 In 2017, we implemented the universal receipt, the

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2 "confirmation of contact with your center" form was  
3 created to provide an individual who completes a job  
4 center visit or SNAP Center visit with a document  
5 that indicates the nature and date of the visit and  
6 contact. A copy of that is also available on access  
7 to HRA to clients who establish an online account.

8 This receipt is now codified in Local Law as a result  
9 of legislation sponsored by the Speaker. Clients with  
10 HIV used to have to wait until they are diagnosed  
11 with AIDS to receive HASA assistance, working with  
12 Speaker Johnson when he was a Council Member and  
13 Housing Works, we ended that counterproductive  
14 policy. Clients classified as able bodied adults  
15 without dependents were limited to SNAP/food stamps  
16 benefits for only three out of every 36 months if  
17 they could not find work for at least 80 hours a  
18 month because New York City refused to accept a  
19 federal waiver of this rule that every other county  
20 in New York State and most other states accepted, we  
21 reversed this policy and accepted the waiver that now  
22 covers most areas of the city. Rental assistance  
23 checks used to be processed at each individual HRA  
24 job center, in 2014, we streamlined the system by  
25 instituting a centralized rent arrears processing

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2 unit to ensure payments are made by the required due  
3 date. New York City Housing Authority rent payments  
4 used to be issued in paper checks, now we've  
5 streamlined the system for making these rent payments  
6 electronically and we're developing a similar payment  
7 system for private landlords. Using ACOMMITTEE  
8 CLERKES HRA, clients could confirm that the rent was  
9 paid to their landlords pursuant to a reform now  
10 codified in state law. In 2016, 90, 90 HRA clients  
11 per year received reasonable accommodations because  
12 of disabilities. In settling the 2005 Lovely H. class  
13 action lawsuit, we began working with an expert  
14 consultant to develop tools to assess whether clients  
15 need reasonable accommodations as a result of  
16 physical or mental health disabilities, now 46,000  
17 clients annually receive reasonable accommodations.  
18 These significant reforms have been made possible by  
19 our staff who chose to work at HRA to help New  
20 Yorkers in need, many dedicating their entire careers  
21 to public service, with an average tenure of almost  
22 14 years. HRA's workforce is diverse as indicated by  
23 this EEO information; 59 percent of African American,  
24 18 percent Hispanic, 15 percent white, eight percent  
25 Asian; 70 percent of the workforce is made up with

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2 women. And HRA workers are represented by DC37 union  
3 locals; 1549, 371, 2627, 1407, and 924 as well as  
4 many other unions, including CWA Local 1180,  
5 Teamsters Local 237, the Civil Services Bar  
6 Association of Local 237, the Organization of Staff  
7 Analysts, the New York State Nurses Association,  
8 United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, IBE  
9 Local three and Local 30 of the International Union  
10 of Operating Engineers. Our partnership with labor  
11 has been a key factor in what we have accomplished so  
12 far and will be essential to the success of the  
13 further reforms to improve the client experience that  
14 I described today. clearly, we have much more to do  
15 to improve the client experience, but these changes  
16 in social services policies that I described above  
17 show how much progress can be made by working with  
18 our staff to address client needs.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Steve is it  
20 possible to... [cross-talk]

21 STEVEN BANKS: I'm, I'm ending it right  
22 here with one plea.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

24 STEVEN BANKS: We've talked a lot at  
25 prior hearings about benefits reengineering and right

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2 now 87 percent of food stamp only cases transact  
3 business online only, that means you can apply, you  
4 can recertify, and you never have to come to a center  
5 because you can establish an on-demand telephone  
6 appointment. We had to ask for federal and state  
7 approval to set up that system for SNAP only  
8 recipients. For cash assistance recipients we're  
9 clearly not there yet and we're beginning the process  
10 next month of a campaign to enable clients or, or  
11 inform clients of their ability now to open a cash  
12 assistance account through ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA,  
13 you can do it from a smart phone and you can begin to  
14 submit recertification applications and you can begin  
15 to check the status of your benefits online without  
16 the need to come to an office. We're working with the  
17 state on a pilot program to begin to move the same  
18 kinds of systemic reforms for food stamps to cash so  
19 that someone like Miss Headley could avoid having to  
20 come to our office to begin with. We ask for your  
21 help however with respect to one issue, in the state  
22 budget there is proposed cut of 120 million dollars  
23 in our funding for public benefits, that would put a  
24 tremendous, tremendously imperil... that would  
25 tremendously imperil the reforms that we've already

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2 made and the kinds of reforms that I described today  
3 and the more reforms that I know we need to make with  
4 your support, appreciate the opportunity to highlight  
5 what we're doing to address the utterly unacceptable  
6 situation that Miss Headley experienced and the kinds  
7 of experience that I have heard from other clients  
8 but I also want to highlight the work that we're  
9 doing with our unions to try to address this  
10 situation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Steve I want to  
12 thank you as always, you are someone who gets it, you  
13 instinctively get it and it's great to be able to  
14 work with someone who gets it, you are so different  
15 than previous HRA commissioners and folks that did  
16 this type of work so I am tremendously grateful that  
17 you're here today, I'm grateful for our partnership,  
18 I'm grateful how you don't hesitate to acknowledge  
19 when there have been misses and when things need to  
20 improve so I just really want to start off by  
21 thanking you. There are many members here who have  
22 many questions so I'm not going to ask much. I'm glad  
23 you highlighted the really devastating proposed cut  
24 in the state budget, 125 million dollars on temporary  
25 assistance for needy families, TANF and we have to

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2 fight that off between now and April 1<sup>st</sup>, it's so  
3 important for us to be able to do the work that we  
4 want to do together on further implementation or  
5 further reforms. I appreciate very much the  
6 acknowledgement of the different labor unions that  
7 make up the workforce at HRA because as you said none  
8 of these reforms would be possible if it wasn't for  
9 the cooperation and help of the workers in the  
10 centers who you have to work with to actually get  
11 these reforms done and I know that President Wells is  
12 going to testify soon on some of his feedback on what  
13 needs to happen as well and I appreciate that. I only  
14 want to ask one thing and, and I don't mean to  
15 preempt Council Member Ampry-Samuel because it's her  
16 bill but I think it's one of the most important bills  
17 you heard Jazmine Headley say it, she talked about  
18 the need for social workers how essential that is for  
19 these HRA Centers, for the job centers, for the  
20 benefit centers so I looked at your testimony and  
21 it's fine that you gave... you didn't give a  
22 commitment, you talked about how many of the ideas  
23 that are being talked about through this legislation  
24 are important ideas and you're carefully reviewing  
25 them, I would love to hear though something more

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2 specific on getting more social workers in these  
3 centers and what your thoughts are on that.

4 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you very much for  
5 your... for your kind words and I, I accept them both  
6 in the spirit of appreciating your support but also  
7 knowing that together and with the Council there's  
8 much more that we need to do to, to help, help our  
9 clients. I... you know as I said in the direct  
10 testimony, we're going to implement a, a pilot in, in  
11 one center in each of the five boroughs, right, we're  
12 going to move to do that now because we want to test  
13 the effectiveness of the model. I think in  
14 conversations that I've had with Anthony Wells,  
15 conversations that Grace Bonilla and I have had  
16 together with the leadership of the agency and I know  
17 in the... in the very productive meeting that we had...  
18 Council Member Ampry-Samuel's... that... in that  
19 conversation and actually in conversations before  
20 then we've talked about a role that social workers  
21 could play. I think that Lisa Schreibersdorf's  
22 testimony actually raised a very important point of  
23 not creating additional layers and therefore we're  
24 going to... we wanted to pilot this to see how to  
25 operate this in the most effective way, so it doesn't

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2 become another layer that people have to get through.

3 We saw it as... for, for situations that arise in

4 centers that previously might have resulted in the

5 NYPD being contacted, we want the Director to be

6 involved but we felt that by having a pilot to have

7 social workers involved in that addressing the client

8 need that we could have a much more effective impact

9 on... for the client and that we would learn a lot if

10 we implemented in five places and then build upon

11 that to see how to build it out. I respect the

12 legislation that's been proposed and that you're

13 looking at a systemic change, I'm simply looking at

14 this as... you know the operator of the system together

15 with, with Grace Bonilla we want to see how we can

16 get it to work and to determine what would be needed

17 to, to make it the most effective. So... [cross-talk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: When... [cross-

19 talk]

20 STEVEN BANKS: So, we hear you, we've,

21 we've, we've heard you and we, we ourselves have been

22 looking at this and we want to move forward with it

23 now.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: When would the

25 pilot start?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: We need to work out the  
3 details as we do always with our labor partners and  
4 then we will move forward with it very expeditiously,  
5 it's something we're very interested in seeing  
6 whether it works.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I don't want to  
8 preempt Anthony Wells' testimony today, but I know  
9 that, and I don't speak for him but in my  
10 conversations and I know that he's a supporter of  
11 getting social workers in these centers and in seeing  
12 real value in that, so I don't... I know the details  
13 are important but one of your biggest partners I  
14 think comes at this supporting this concept which is  
15 a very, very good thing. Well Commissioner I'm, I'm  
16 grateful you're here, I want to leave time for, for  
17 the other members, I want to thank the HRA  
18 Administrator of course, Grace for being here as  
19 well, I'm really grateful and you know you said... and  
20 I don't want to keep repeating it but... and I know how  
21 heartfelt your testimony was and how devastating it  
22 was for you in the aftermath of December 7<sup>th</sup> and so I  
23 look forward to hopefully implementing these changes  
24 that you testified on today building on the success  
25 of the past, working with the Safety Net Activists

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2 who have been crucial in this conversation to, to get  
3 these done... get these things done as you just said as  
4 expeditiously and quickly as possible so that we  
5 don't have other incidents that are of course as  
6 horrendous as Jazmine Headley but also the incidents  
7 that may not rise to that level but still are  
8 demeaning on a daily basis, unproductive on a daily  
9 basis, disrespectful on a daily basis, we want to  
10 make sure that that doesn't happen which means that  
11 you need the resources to be able to implement this  
12 and the Council looks forward to standing with you as  
13 a, a ready, able and willing partner to get that  
14 done. So, again I really appreciate you being here, I  
15 look forward to working together and I'm going to.. if  
16 you wanted to say anything or I'm going to turn it  
17 over to the Majority Leader.

18 STEVEN BANKS: I appreciate your support,  
19 thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you. I  
21 want to turn it over to Majority Leader Cumbo and  
22 then she'll turn it back over to our great Chair  
23 Steve Levin.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you. I just  
25 wanted to get right into it because I know there are

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2 many members that want to ask a lot of questions.  
3 Miss Headley spoke at length today about the fact  
4 that she prepared, she took a day off from work, she  
5 took the whole day off, she brought clothes, toys,  
6 food, change of clothing. In your capacity with all  
7 of the changes that have been made up to this point  
8 if someone were to ask you could I do whatever I  
9 needed to do on my lunch, do I have to take a day  
10 off, what would be your response at this time up to  
11 the point where the incident with Jazmine Headley  
12 happened, would you advise someone with all of the  
13 measures that have been taken in place would you  
14 advise someone to take the day off to go to have  
15 their services taken care of?

16 GRACE BONILLA: So, thank you for the  
17 question Council Member Cumbo. One of the things that  
18 I would advise a client is to open up an account on  
19 ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA, it is the most expedient way  
20 to find out what is happening with your case. In this  
21 particular instance, there was a miscommunication  
22 between the systems at WMS which is a state system  
23 and the system that manages child care. For Miss  
24 Headley if she had had access to her... to her case she  
25 would have known at the point that it closed, I

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2 believe in her testimony she said she never received  
3 a notice, she would have had that information for us  
4 to be able to help her more efficiently.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, now that we  
6 know that and we've put forward a resolution  
7 surrounding that very issue, what is being done in  
8 order to systemize the communication between city and  
9 state because when you're a working mom you've got to  
10 get to work, you've taken the day off, your child is  
11 not in child care, you don't have the ability to  
12 navigate the difference between your state and  
13 system, systems cooperating with each other in order  
14 to get the services that are needed, so what are we  
15 doing to address that... [cross-talk]

16 GRACE BONILLA: Sure... [cross-talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: ...specific issue?

18 GRACE BONILLA: That is an excellent  
19 question and I have to tell you as a mom of three  
20 boys, as a mom who was a mom in my 20's I understand  
21 how overwhelming every day life can be... [cross-talk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Right... [cross-  
23 talk]

24 GRACE BONILLA: ...so that definitely is  
25 part of what brings us to this work, immediately

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2 after we discovered this glitch in the system, we  
3 have been working with our state partners to address  
4 it. I, I know that it... for the folks that are  
5 effected... were affected by the glitch it's not any  
6 solace but it was a very minor number, it was about  
7 167 cases that were affected by this, we were able on  
8 the back end to make sure that those cases had their  
9 child care open, we're consistently working with the  
10 state to make sure that we're working on, on notices  
11 that are plain language and efficient for our  
12 clients. In fact, we have over 12 work groups with  
13 advocates with, with clients that have been going on  
14 since this administration came into office to ensure  
15 that anything that is a local equivalent, equivalent  
16 to a state notice goes through these work groups. So,  
17 we are doubling down on those efforts and making sure  
18 that wherever we missed a communication with the  
19 advocates that we work with that they have a seat at  
20 the table to let us know where we need to change.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Because it's a  
22 critical point and what I want to drive home is that  
23 particularly for all issues but as we're focusing on  
24 this one in particular that child care is not  
25 interrupted while we're figuring out the bureaucracy

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2 of what should happen there. So, I want to work  
3 collectively with you all to make sure that that  
4 happens because that glitch and only 167 people,  
5 that's 167 different lives that are impacted in a  
6 trickle-down way on so many levels. Now I, I also  
7 want to ask from the video that we've seen several  
8 times Jazmine asked to see a supervisor, I want to  
9 see a supervisor, I want to see a supervisor why is  
10 it that a supervisor was never brought forward in  
11 order to speak to her, is that... is that a possibility  
12 in terms of... what is the protocol when someone feels  
13 that their issue, that their case is not being  
14 handled, did she have every right to have the ability  
15 to see a supervisor, why was one not presented to her  
16 and we want to make sure that we understand the  
17 protocols moving forward so that people entering the  
18 office clearly know that if you're not receiving  
19 appropriate care you can ask to see a supervisor and  
20 then second part of the question is on the back end  
21 for the Jazmine Headley's that we never have gotten a  
22 chance to see what is their recourse in terms of  
23 filing a complaint about how they were treated  
24 because if it hadn't been on the internet we would

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2 have never known about this and it would have been  
3 business as usual?

4 STEVEN BANKS: So, let, let me just...  
5 first of all Council, Council Member I want to thank  
6 you again for the... oh, I thought was a productive  
7 engagement that you have had with us to help us  
8 improve and I appreciate your, your perspective on  
9 this and again from a common sense perspective we  
10 shouldn't have to have clients having to pack up  
11 everything to come to see us.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Clearly...

13 STEVEN BANKS: Which is the reason why we  
14 can see success beginning to take shape on the food  
15 stamp only side where 93 percent of clients... or more  
16 than 90 percent of the clients are interacting with  
17 us by telephone not coming and doing transactions  
18 like you and I might do with banking to not have to  
19 come in to apply and recertify, we have to move cash  
20 there and then someone like Miss Headley wouldn't  
21 have to pack up all her belongings coming and waiting  
22 to see what's going to transpire for a type of  
23 function that could have been done online. In terms  
24 of the complaint process and I know I took up a  
25 little bit of time for your answer by going back and

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2 amplifying administrator Bonilla's answer. There are  
3 a number of complaint mechanisms but I want to go  
4 back to something I said at the beginning of the  
5 testimony, the problem here was that everything got  
6 escalated to the NYPD by our peace officers instead  
7 of following again what you and I would think, well  
8 why doesn't the director get involved here instead of  
9 the police department so that's why Administrator  
10 Bonilla and I issued a directive saying that before  
11 the NYPD would be called in a situation like that but  
12 as Miss Headley said she's just sitting on the floor,  
13 she wasn't creating a... an immediate threat to health  
14 and safety. In a situation like that where there's no  
15 immediate threat the director should be involved and  
16 then the supervisor gets involved. The protocol that  
17 we would have wanted wasn't followed that day by the  
18 peace officers, we have put in place a protocol to  
19 make sure that in the future this will not happen  
20 again. There is in every center a complaint  
21 mechanism, on every wall there's a, a phone number to  
22 call for the Office of Constituent Affairs, that  
23 office handles complaints and processes them, we get...  
24 we get involved at, at our level when things are...  
25 become systemic complaints and this incident of

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2 course makes us take another look at, at whether we  
3 can improve and I think the bill that the Speaker's  
4 got on the... got on the calendar today is one that we  
5 want to look and see how we can build upon what we're  
6 doing to take what we're doing into, into  
7 consideration with what happened. So, there is a  
8 complaint mechanism. I think the other issue is fair  
9 hearings, for years the agency used to say just go to  
10 a fair hearing, we don't think that that's a great  
11 response and that we should be resolve things and the  
12 reason why we've been able to cut down fair hearings  
13 by about 47 percent in addition to the policy changes  
14 is we've set processes in place to try to avoid cases  
15 being closed unnecessarily and that's what's  
16 resulted in the... I the reduction of fair hearings but  
17 obviously we, there's more we need to do.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: It would seem that  
19 with all of the work that you've done to reduce the  
20 amount of people that are coming into an office that  
21 that would free up your staff to be able to provide  
22 superb comprehensive service to everyone that's  
23 coming in now that there are so many people that are  
24 not coming in for services, why if so many people are  
25 being serviced on the telephone and I would add that

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2 as part of the testimony that we heard and it's  
3 usually a discrepancy we hear which and I hope you'll  
4 take it in a healthy way is that we have in our mind  
5 something that's happening and then when people come  
6 forward they're saying you can't reach HRA staff,  
7 they don't call back, they're avoiding my phone call  
8 so it's this... it's this... it's this thing where you're  
9 inspired but at the same time you're disappointed  
10 because it's like oh that sounds great but then  
11 someone is saying it's not happening?

12 STEVEN BANKS: Yeah, I'm both inspired  
13 and disappointed every day in my job so I totally  
14 understand what you're saying. I do think though that  
15 it's important to separate out the processes that  
16 we're talking about because they really have a big  
17 client impact. If you don't have a cash assistance  
18 case and you have a food stamp only case the total  
19 food stamp case load is 1.6 million people nearly.  
20 The cash assistance case load is about 360,000 people  
21 so we have people that have only food stamps, we were  
22 able to get the federal and state waivers and  
23 approvals we needed to take business onto the  
24 telephone and take business online, we haven't been  
25 able to do that yet for cash, we're beginning that

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2 process now and we're hopeful that we'll be able to  
3 get the same kind of online telephone access systems  
4 in place for cash that we got in place for food  
5 stamps. So, the world in which people are describing  
6 challenges and waiting times is the world that we're  
7 trying to reform, the world in which we've gotten  
8 much better client experience in terms of nine... more  
9 than 90 percent by telephone now, 30 percent fewer  
10 people coming into centers, you're absolutely right  
11 that the theory, the approach, the vision is if you  
12 have fewer people coming in there's more staff time  
13 focused on the people that need greater assistance.  
14 On the SNAP only side of the world not... people  
15 without cash assistance cases we've been able to get  
16 the waivers, the approvals and change the system,  
17 we're beginning that process on the cash side now  
18 with pilots that we're running in the Bronx and  
19 beginning next month as, as, as Bonilla and I said  
20 we're really going to have an awareness campaign for  
21 clients to know that there are things they can submit  
22 online now in the cash world that they couldn't  
23 before to try to cut down exactly what you said, you  
24 said it perfectly, cut down foot traffic and then the

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2 people that are there can focus more directly on the  
3 more complicated problems that might arise.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Just two more  
5 questions and then I'm going to turn it over to my  
6 colleagues. You talked in your presentation about  
7 reasonable accommodations for those that may have  
8 mental or physical needs and accommodations, this  
9 whole issue began around a seat, a chair, the ability  
10 to be accommodated, do those physical accommodations  
11 now simply... what are we doing about the most simple  
12 of needs which brought us here, the ability to have a  
13 mom with a stroller, with a child that's there all  
14 day, what type of accommodations can Jazmine Headley  
15 look for when she comes into your center the next  
16 time?

17 STEVEN BANKS: I think what she can  
18 certainly look for if she came into our center the  
19 next time is if she determined as I heard her say to  
20 sit on the floor that that wouldn't result in the  
21 NYPD coming, I think that's the most fundamental  
22 accommodation that we can offer her. There are chairs  
23 and I think the issue to me isn't going forward  
24 whether there are chairs or not it's whether or not  
25 people are treated with respect and if somebody is

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2 saying I'm sitting on the floor with my child I, I,  
3 I'm older but I used to have little kids, if someone  
4 says enough I want to sit down on the floor with my  
5 kid the result shouldn't be the NYPD being called,  
6 that's the most fundamental change on that level but  
7 all of the other... the retraining of the peace  
8 officers, the implicit bias training, the beginning  
9 starting today of new training for new workers to set  
10 the tone, all this is really taking further reforms  
11 that we've been making but were really inspired by us  
12 all looking at what we've been doing for the last  
13 five years to say what more can we do if this is what  
14 happened in one of our centers, what more can we do  
15 if this is what happened in one of our centers and  
16 that's where the changes that I described today are  
17 really coming from that place of saying we've made so  
18 many changes but if people are still feeling like  
19 they're not being treated in the way that we want  
20 them to be treated, in the way our values would say  
21 they should be treated we need to do more and that's  
22 the changes that we're trying to put in place which I  
23 know you're appropriately pushing us to do more and  
24 I, I appreciate that.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And finally my

3 last question, in looking at the video which is

4 probably the hardest thing to look at and part of the

5 aspect of this job that I hate is that I do have to

6 look at the video in order to be able to better

7 understand what happened and everything that we're

8 talking about and moving forward sounds like we're on

9 the right path but there's something like engrained

10 and what you're hearing in the final video is one of

11 the security officers there is stating the reason why

12 this incident had to happen as violently and as

13 brutally as it did is because and quote, "we can't

14 let just one flip", this concept that Jazmine asking

15 to see a supervisor, her demanding her rights, her

16 speaking up for herself could not be tolerated in

17 that environment and she had to be made an example

18 of according to this officer about how to keep people

19 in line and it was very reminiscent of plantation

20 life, it's very reminiscent of an overseer and those

21 that are put in place to oversee others. If that

22 critical aspect of people's mental thought process of

23 how they are treating, looking at, respecting people

24 is not changed then all of these provisions, new

25 programs, more staffing, more this is not going to

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2 change the dynamic of how someone is, is treated from  
3 the moment they walk in the door because it... the  
4 social workers is great and we should have it but  
5 it's almost like we shouldn't have social workers who  
6 get it but having peace officers, police officers,  
7 staffers who are not required to hold the same level  
8 of compassion at baseline as the social worker. So,  
9 so, that's really where I want to end on this because  
10 the ending of that video and hearing that is really...  
11 speaks volumes to the issue.

12 GRACE BONILLA: So, I, I do want to  
13 address that and I know that it's difficult to  
14 imagine humanizing the folks that work at HRR after  
15 the testimony of Miss Headley, I am remorseful that I  
16 did not get a chance to apologize to her personally  
17 not on behalf of just myself as a New Yorkers and a  
18 woman and a woman of color in this city but on behalf  
19 of all of the women of color that work in our agency.  
20 I have to tell you that when we saw the Facebook  
21 video and I went, and I saw it with the Director I  
22 know the Director was... it was gut wrenching for us.  
23 Our Chief Program Officer, Lisa Fitzpatrick was  
24 sitting here today which... who's worked more than 30  
25 years in the agency and worked at a center, it was

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2 gut wrenching for us to see it, it should have never  
3 happened, there is nothing that I can sit here and  
4 say to you that excuses what happened to Miss Headley  
5 or the language that was use... that was used by that  
6 security officer, it is the reason that... why we took  
7 such, such swift action in the agency so that we can  
8 send a message that this is unacceptable but I can't  
9 sit here today and tell you that the women of color  
10 that work in our agency that are a part of the fabric  
11 of New York City that really work their butts off to  
12 make sure that the most needy New Yorkers get what  
13 they need who are not disgusted by what they... what  
14 they saw.

15 [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you, I  
18 appreciate your sentiment, I appreciate the work that  
19 you do on an everyday basis but I can't recall the  
20 exact number but according to a New York Times  
21 article I believe and I'll low ball it that there  
22 were over 80 cases that resulted in NYPD being called  
23 in and we don't have a video for those so we're  
24 utilizing this particular hearing not to condemn but  
25 to improve and as we are elected leaders we want to

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2 make sure that we leave this city and, and the  
3 experiences that people have better than when we  
4 found it. Thank you so much for your testimony and  
5 thank you for answering the questions as honestly and  
6 as truthfully as possible, thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Majority Leader.

8 Thank you very much for your testimony Administrator  
9 and Commissioner. So, I just want to ask a few  
10 questions, also I want to acknowledge that we have  
11 been joined by Council Members Mark Gjonaj, Mark  
12 Treyger, Rafael Salamanca and Brad Lander, I  
13 apologize for not acknowledging you before. I'll ask  
14 a few questions and then I'm going to... I'm going to  
15 pass it along to my colleagues. The first question  
16 Mr. Banks you're your testimony on page three to four  
17 you listed a number of... and five you, you listed  
18 number of reform... and I'm sorry, I... excuse me, two to  
19 three where you... where you acknowledged the actions  
20 that are ongoing to address the client experience and  
21 this... some systemic issues here, new procedures, new  
22 levels of training, training for peace officers,  
23 training for staff, sensitivity training, complicit  
24 bias training, comprehensive intersectional, anti-  
25 depression training curriculum, the, the hiring of,

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2 of the first Chief Diversity and Equity Officer.

3 Okay, so my first question is why has it taken this  
4 long to do all of these reforms?

5 STEVEN BANKS: Can I answer that  
6 question?

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

8 STEVEN BANKS: So, if you look at pages  
9 seven to eight, the part of the testimony that I...  
10 that I left for the record, I think it's important  
11 to... and I actually appreciate you asked that question  
12 so we can get back to exactly that point because  
13 others might be thinking the same thing, so the staff  
14 training that we put in place over the last several  
15 years includes diversity and inclusion, everybody  
16 matters teaches how to create an environment where  
17 people feel included and at the same time understand  
18 how to manage conflict across differences; LGBTQI  
19 basics training; introduction to disabilities over a  
20 view of disability awareness; etiquette and culture;  
21 access to people disabilities, ensuring success  
22 through supervision; domestic violence; mental health  
23 first aid, effects of poverty and trauma; customer  
24 service. These were the trainings that we have been  
25 doing but we said to ourselves okay, we've made all

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2 of these major systemic changes, undoing 20 years of  
3 social services policy that we inherited when we came  
4 in, in 2014. We put in place all of these trainings  
5 that were intended to improve the client experience  
6 and nevertheless something happened as, as, as so  
7 many of you have said that is both, you know  
8 abhorrent but also reflects some other underlying  
9 issues... [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

11 STEVEN BANKS: ...and I'll... Commissioner...  
12 Administrator Bonilla made it very clear it was... it  
13 was appalling to all of us in leadership to see that  
14 but we didn't just say oh, well that was a one off  
15 horrible thing to see, what are the underlying issues  
16 and I think that Council Member Cumbo really brought  
17 that out which was if, if a security guard is on the  
18 tape saying, you know this is why we had to do that  
19 we need to do more and that's why we rolled out these  
20 additional things on top of the things that we have  
21 been doing because we said common sensually we're not  
22 just going to say well we're doing all these things  
23 let's just keep doing all these things, we said let's  
24 build upon what we're doing and do even more, create,  
25 create new structures, new approaches.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if you were to  
3 identify, you know five years into your tenure,  
4 almost five years of your tenure what the systemic  
5 barriers to the objectives that we're hoping to  
6 achieve here, what barriers would you identify?

7 STEVEN BANKS: Thank for... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because I, I, I just...  
9 I... we'll, we'll add to that better to give it some  
10 contexts, I mean you hear from a lot of clients, you  
11 know and a lot of people that have had interactions  
12 with HRA throughout their lives that, you know this  
13 is... these are issues that have been going on for a  
14 very long time and it's important I think to be able  
15 to identify or articulate what are those challenges,  
16 what are... what are the... what are the deep challenges,  
17 the engrained challenges that we're trying that we  
18 have to really work to undo and it's... and its  
19 difficult, painful stuff to talk about but what are  
20 they?

21 GRACE BONILLA: So, if I may before the  
22 Commissioner responds, as someone who was here before  
23 this administration it's sometimes not the people,  
24 it's the fact that we have policies that are hard to  
25 deliver on. When you have... when you're in the

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2 business of customer service there's always going to  
3 be more to do but when you have a 20 year history of  
4 vilifying clients that you have to change in an  
5 agency that's also a hard thing to do and I'll give  
6 you a recent example that I think we'll, we'll... we  
7 can all relate to, the shutdown... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

9 GRACE BONILLA: ...it will never make the  
10 news that our staff worked through the weekend and  
11 over time on Monday... on Monday and Tuesday following  
12 that... [cross-talk]

13 [applause]

14 GRACE BONILLA: ...to make sure that every  
15 New Yorker that was on SNAP got their, their February  
16 benefits facing what was coming from the federal  
17 government that the shutdown may continue, despite  
18 that if the shutdown had continued there would have  
19 been an HRA employee somewhere in the city that had  
20 to tell a client you're not going to get your March  
21 benefits and the headline would have been HRA denies  
22 SNAP benefits so that's the business that we're in,  
23 we're in the business of having to give bad news to  
24 people who are in desperate need of good news when we  
25

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2 don't handle all of the policies that create that bad  
3 news... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: ...so the policies that we  
6 need to change are sometimes federal and state level  
7 policies which I hope that you will support us in so  
8 that our clients and our staff can have a better  
9 interaction.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Always, sure.

11 STEVEN BANKS: So, I would just amplify  
12 that with as you know I, I sit at the agency that I  
13 run for many, many years before I became the head of  
14 it and I always believed the lawsuits were about the  
15 policies not the people at the agency and so when I  
16 became head of HRA everybody thought I would wipe out  
17 the entire leadership of the agency, I did not, the  
18 leadership of the agency it was... is the leadership of  
19 the agency still because you know what, the  
20 leadership of the agency are people that came to work  
21 at the agency to make change in people's lives and  
22 they were needed... and they wanted to make the changes  
23 that I wanted to make when I came and that all of us  
24 in this room wanted to make five years ago but I  
25 think that, you know Grace Bonilla's testimony is, is

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2 important to remember, if every day you're telling  
3 somebody the only amount you get to pay your rent is  
4 400 dollars the interaction between you and the  
5 person that you're telling you get 400 dollars is not  
6 going to be a good one, that is not going to be a  
7 good interaction but if you want us to be able to get  
8 rid of WEP we can do that... [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: ...we can stop clients from  
11 having to work off their benefits, I mean just think  
12 of what that really meant you can work off your  
13 benefits for free and I know how that felt to clients  
14 both representing them and what the reaction was when  
15 we got rid of it. We can say we're not going to make  
16 every senior citizen go to a single center and, and  
17 track into one place knowing that it's going to be  
18 hard to get there or every homeless person. We, we  
19 can make all those changes but larger social welfare  
20 policy we have some limitations on which is why it's  
21 so important that the council is supporting for  
22 example the home stability support, that will make a  
23 dramatic impact on what our workers say every day.  
24 Having said that there's something and I said it in  
25 my testimony I just want to say it again, we live in

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2 a world in which there's underlying structural  
3 racism, right, that, that is built up, that's, that's  
4 what we're confronting not just at our agency, not  
5 just in our city, not just in our state but across  
6 our country. We're saying at a social services agency  
7 the largest in the country we've made major policy  
8 changes, we put in place major training programs but  
9 it's still not enough if people feel that the  
10 treatment that they're getting is not the treatment  
11 that they want to experience and to the credit of the  
12 unions, the unions are saying we don't want to be in  
13 this position of having people not feel like we're  
14 treating them well because we are together with the  
15 clients, the, the... these unions have been fighting  
16 for client changes well... you know for years so let's  
17 take another look at what more we can do to address  
18 underlying structural racism, what more we can do to  
19 address the kinds of intersectionality that our  
20 clients come to us experiencing and that's what  
21 these reforms that we've put together in literally  
22 six weeks or intended or seven weeks or intended to  
23 do which is to go much deeper than we've gone because  
24 as deep as we've gone its not deep enough, I think  
25 that's reflected in the questions for example from

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2 Council Member Cumbo, we got to go deeper to really  
3 effect the changes that our staff want to make and  
4 that we want to make.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With the open society  
6 foundations that you spoke to in your testimony that  
7 there's... it will be a summit, is there going to be...  
8 is that a one time summit or is it ongoing... you know  
9 is it... is it looking at producing a report, I, I  
10 think... we just saw each other last week at the Foster  
11 Youth task force that ACS did where that's kind of  
12 this ongoing commitment produced a, a report with a  
13 set of recommendations and then the legislation that  
14 we passed made everybody come back and talk about the  
15 recommendation implementation which we all like  
16 actually, we, we had a... we've... it's actually been  
17 pretty successful so is that a... is that a one off  
18 thing, is it going to produce recommendations and  
19 what's, what, what do we hope to be the outcome from  
20 that?

21 STEVEN BANKS: I'm going to make a brief  
22 comment and then I'm going to suggest that Miss  
23 Bonilla can kind of have a perspective as well...  
24 present a perspective as well on this. Look I think  
25

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2 that there was an initiative that the NYPD started in  
3 having a, a racial disparity summit... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

5 STEVEN BANKS: ...and Commissioner O'Neil  
6 asked me to participate in it and I did and open  
7 society foundation is supporting these efforts and  
8 agencies and we said to ourselves we want to be the  
9 next agency that, that has this initiative, it's  
10 something that Wanda Kimbro is very much focused on  
11 helping us put together and I think that we will see  
12 how the summit proceeds, stakeholders will be there,  
13 Council Member Donovan was... Council Member Donovan  
14 was at the NYPD summit in part because of his role of  
15 oversight of the NYPD, I, I'm expecting that you will  
16 be at, at this summit as well and a part of I thought  
17 what was a good outcome from the NYPD summit was that  
18 there was a lot of focus on what was needed for that  
19 particular... to move that process forward and we're  
20 going to be very open to do so. I'm not being... I'm  
21 not telling you oh, we're going to have a report,  
22 we're not going to have a report, I want a process  
23 that's actually going to move us forward, we thought  
24 by bringing together stakeholders and leadership and

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staff that we can make the kind of progress we want to make.

GRACE BONILLA: We were part of the initial meeting with the NYPD with several other agencies across the city. We raised our hand first and said let's look internally, let's see what we can do to improve in this area which we know is critical not just for our workforce but for the... for the city.

STEVEN BANKS: By the way that summit happened before this... what, what happened to Miss Headley and we said to ourselves at that time we want to be the next agency and I think I'm grateful that we are because I think it will fit into what we're trying to accomplish after what happened to Miss Headley.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, going back to just newer initiatives here, the hiring of DSS's first chief diversity and equity officer, was that... had that been underway before this incident?

STEVEN BANKS: Yes, it had been.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, moving over to a couple of other topics and I'll, you know try to keep this brief...

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Can I... can I amplify the  
3 answer? Part of the beginning of the testimony I said  
4 the incident that happened in our center with Miss  
5 Headley and I also added in conversations that I have  
6 had and, and Administrator Bonilla had had and, and  
7 all of us have had with clients... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

9 STEVEN BANKS: ...so we've been saying to  
10 ourselves okay, what more do we need to do to really  
11 deepen what we're trying to accomplish in the agency  
12 so that was why that position was something that we  
13 were developing before the, the events of December  
14 7<sup>th</sup>.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to turn it  
16 over to my colleagues actually for questions then  
17 I'll, I'll come back, first up Council Member Vanessa  
18 Gibson.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you, thanks  
20 Chair Levin and good afternoon Commissioner, good  
21 afternoon Administrator, it's good to see you  
22 certainly under these circumstances, I appreciate  
23 your honesty, I appreciate your sympathy, your  
24 compassion and reading through your long testimony  
25 there's a lot that has been done and I certainly join

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2 the Speaker and others in applauding HRA for  
3 recognizing all the challenges that we face and  
4 continue to face and are willing to not only  
5 entertain changes but actually do them, right, not  
6 just talking about it but implementing changes and  
7 working with all of our labor unions that work with  
8 the workforce I really do appreciate a lot of the  
9 things that have been done and as you know I've met  
10 with Miss Bonilla and her staff a number of times, my  
11 office is literally right next door to job center 45,  
12 I know it by heart, the Concourse Job Center and just  
13 being there for five years I have seen a drastic  
14 improvement both exterior as well as interior but I  
15 do recognize that we still have a very, very long way  
16 to go. So, alluding to what the Majority Leader was  
17 talking about with wait times and trying to get an  
18 understanding of why clients understand and expect  
19 that when they go in at nine o'clock they may leave  
20 at five, I specifically want to ask with a lot of the  
21 job centers varying by borough, I represent the Bronx  
22 and the Bronx is known to have higher wait times  
23 compared to other boroughs. Now some may ask you  
24 represent the Bronx, why and what is it about your  
25 borough where clients have an expectation that when

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2 they go into an HRA center they're going to be there  
3 for hours, so I'd like you to give me a greater  
4 understanding from all the things you've done and  
5 under... and understanding the Bronx still has a lot of  
6 challenges that we're dealing with in terms of  
7 families, working families living at poverty level,  
8 struggling living paycheck to paycheck but it has to  
9 be more than that, it can't just be some of the  
10 societal things we're dealing with in the Bronx that  
11 would explain why the borough has higher wait times  
12 compared to other boroughs?

13 GRACE BONILLA: So, the caseload is  
14 definitely higher in the Bronx...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay...

16 GRACE BONILLA: ...and... [cross-talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: ...understand...

18 GRACE BONILLA: In recognition of that  
19 under this administration we actually opened another  
20 center in the Bronx to address and alleviate some of  
21 the, the wait time issues that you're... that, that  
22 you're pointing to, it... I should mention that the  
23 wait time across the city, the average is 48 minutes,  
24 right, that doesn't mean much to the person that has  
25 to be there for longer than they need to. The reality

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2 is that in attempt to make things easier for clients  
3 even though it may sound counterintuitive to some of  
4 our clients that are here today, we really try to  
5 make sure that we're addressing issues in one day and  
6 many times, more times than we would like once a  
7 client comes in they may present with one situation  
8 but then may need to see someone else for another  
9 which means that our transactions for one client may  
10 be many. What we have noticed is that the majority of  
11 the transactions that we're seeing is to prevent  
12 homelessness, we are having clients come in because  
13 they need assistance with eviction proceedings  
14 because they need assistance with housing and that  
15 has increased the number. We are a victim of our own  
16 success, right, we... as... the more that we handle an  
17 issue in the city like housing the more clients we're  
18 going to see.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: So just citing  
20 what you're talking about if a client goes in for  
21 SNAP or public assistance and you learn they have  
22 another issue they have to see a different workers  
23 to deal with rent arrears, they may have to see a  
24 different worker to deal with day care benefits so  
25 typically you may not know all of the issues the

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2 client is coming in with but the expectation  
3 according to what happens on the ground is you can  
4 have a client on average with a day's visit see  
5 multiple case workers about different issues, is that  
6 correct?

7 GRACE BONILLA: Not necessarily multiple  
8 caseworkers but it... depending on their issue they may  
9 need to see someone who's an expert in that area.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, which means  
11 that that client would have to wait in order to be  
12 seen so the fact that they go in for a PA or a SNAP  
13 but they may have a rent arrears case they would have  
14 to go that unit and wait in line so they wouldn't be  
15 given priority because they were already there for  
16 another matter because there were other people that  
17 were there initially for rent arrears so they would  
18 have to be in que and wait until they are seen by  
19 that particular unit, correct?

20 GRACE BONILLA: It's the reason why we  
21 want to move the way of SNAP, it's the reason why we  
22 want to make sure that we're maximizing what's going  
23 on in ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA so that clients can  
24 apply for rent arrears, so they can apply for utility  
25 needs through our ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA... the

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2 ACOMMITTEE CLERKESS HRA possibilities that we have  
3 but we are in conversations with the state to make  
4 sure that that happens.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay and I  
6 appreciate you raising that and, and Chair Levin  
7 knows we have gone to Albany a number of times as a  
8 former assembly member not afraid to go to Albany  
9 again even with cold weather but it's really  
10 important to understand the level of oversight that..  
11 has over HRA and DSS departments in the entire state.  
12 So, think it's really important as you develop  
13 priorities for this legislative session and we now  
14 have more friends in the state senate we really need  
15 to make sure that not only are they not putting more  
16 of a burden on us, not cutting more of our funding  
17 but also the policy changes that we need we have to  
18 get them done in a timely fashion, like when you  
19 think about the PA assistance, I mean it was 215 for  
20 the longest time and these are not cognizant of every  
21 day living in New York City and so I understand your  
22 struggle, trust me, things get stagnant at Albany  
23 quite a bit but I wanted to ask a last question and  
24 Council Member Ampry-Samuel and I had talked about it  
25 and Miss Headley mentioned it in her testimony, she

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2 talked about when she got to the HRA center that her  
3 son was not able to go to the child waiting area  
4 because he was not potty trained so I wanted to  
5 understand further for clients that have small  
6 children what does that process look like for them to  
7 access the child care accommodations at the local HRA  
8 center?

9 GRACE BONILLA: In locations where we do  
10 have a child's... a child corner or a, a children's  
11 corner if they're staffed by someone, our current  
12 policy is that you do have to be potty trained so  
13 it's usually open for child... for children from the  
14 ages of two I believe nine, that is the current  
15 policy. It's an opportunity to allow children who are  
16 a little bit older who can be distracted to be able  
17 to take advantage of that space while their parents  
18 are taking care of their business with HRA or  
19 speaking to a case worker.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, so there  
21 are no other accommodations we provide for any  
22 clients with children younger than two?

23 STEVEN BANKS: No, I think the  
24 legislation that Council Member Ampry-Samuel has  
25 proposed has made us take another look at how we have

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2 approached this. We have approached this previously  
3 as, as Administrator Bonilla said to try to create a  
4 way in which parents could be... put their child  
5 somewhere, if I'm reading the legislation right it  
6 talks about creating a space where parents can be  
7 with their kids that's not an office type flavor but  
8 that has more of an ability for Miss Headley with her  
9 child to be with her child in a more child centric  
10 kind of way. We had not been going in that direction  
11 before and I think that's what's led to the issue  
12 about under two, over two... [cross-talk]

13 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

14 STEVEN BANKS: ...we're look... this is  
15 actually what's a productive part of the process here  
16 there's a piece of legislation is proposed, it's  
17 slightly different from how we were looking at it, we  
18 want to have a, a... conversations with you that we  
19 have space constraints, we have other constraints but  
20 I think there's some pathway forward that we can  
21 work, work with you together on this.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, alright,  
23 I'll end, I know we have to keep moving on and I  
24 really want to hear testimony from the labor unions  
25 and the advocates that really do this work on the

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2 ground but I want to emphasize again the urgency, I  
3 appreciate opening a new site in the Bronx because it  
4 shouldn't be that we have a higher case load as the  
5 only reason why it's excessively waiting, you know  
6 long waiting times in my borough, I don't accept that  
7 and I never will, I want everyone to be given, you  
8 know efficient services and I think we all have that  
9 same expectation, you know again my office is right  
10 next door so I've seen a dramatic change but I can't  
11 tell you how many of the clients that visit next door  
12 come to us. So, what we've done now because we  
13 realize the high number of cases, my district staff  
14 works with the manager and we feed off of each other.  
15 If I have legal services coming to the office, I let  
16 them know and we just really work together because at  
17 the end of the day we're serving the same population,  
18 the same constituencies and we want to make sure that  
19 broadly we're providing all of the services. Like you  
20 said, a client may come in about SNAP today but have  
21 a rent arrears case that they may not even know about  
22 that will hit them a few days later and then they  
23 have to go back so we're trying to do a lot of  
24 preventative work and making sure but it can only  
25 happen with our cooperation on every body's part so I

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2 know we have a lot more work to do but I do  
3 appreciate what has been done. Thank you.

4 GRACE BONILLA: We appreciate your  
5 partnership and I would be remiss to say that we're  
6 also constantly looking at our operations and we're  
7 hoping that we can streamline some of the needs on  
8 the rent arrear side so that folks can talk to any  
9 case worker when they come in but more to come on  
10 that, we're constantly working on it, we appreciate  
11 working with you and I think you know how to reach me  
12 so anything that you hear please let me know.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you, thank  
14 you Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council  
16 Member Gibson and Council Member Rosenthal.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so  
18 much and thank you for your patience in staying to  
19 answer these questions from the Council Members. I  
20 have just two questions about the workers themselves.  
21 First is do you do... at the centers themselves if you  
22 have a unit that's a SNAP unit and maybe on a  
23 different floor it's a different type of unit, do  
24 they have regular team meetings, and would the peace  
25 officer be included in those team meetings?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: Do you want to go? That's  
3 a great question, we actually have monthly reviews of  
4 our centers, I know that in going to those monthly  
5 reviews those directors hold meetings with their  
6 staff to look at a number of things that affect the  
7 operation, so those meetings do happen. The  
8 relationship between the director and the HRA police  
9 force in each... in each center has developed  
10 organically, it's one of the reasons that shortly  
11 after this incident the Commissioner did put out a, a  
12 very clear directive that the directors and the HRA  
13 police have to work together during these incidents.  
14 We're working internally to make sure that we have  
15 very good relationships with our HRA police so that's  
16 also a work in progress, but I could tell you centers  
17 that I've walked through and I visit a number of  
18 them, where the director and the HRA police get along  
19 very well an incident like that would not have  
20 happened.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And just, just  
22 to clear up any confusion when you talk about a peace  
23 officer and an HRA police officer is that synonymous?

24 STEVEN BANKS: That's one and... one and  
25 the same.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay...

3 STEVEN BANKS: There are two kinds of  
4 security staff, there are peace officers who are  
5 members... who are employed by... directly by the  
6 Department of Social Services, HRA and then there are  
7 private contracted security guards. Here there was an  
8 involvement by the privacy... contracted security  
9 guards and then ultimately the peace officers were  
10 involved... [cross-talk]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Right... [cross-  
12 talk]

13 STEVEN BANKS: ...in the matter and I think  
14 that Council Member Cumbo was referencing comments  
15 made by a security officer... [cross-talk]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yep... [cross-  
17 talk]

18 STEVEN BANKS: ...towards the end of the  
19 body worn camera video which is why it was so  
20 important that we conducted retraining for everybody  
21 no matter what the title was.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah and so do  
23 the private... would the private contracted worker be  
24 included in the monthly review meetings?

25

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Generally speaking the  
3 private contracted security guard is sort of the  
4 liaison function is played by the HRA police  
5 operation citywide, but we'll tell... I hear what  
6 you're asking, and we'll certainly take a look at  
7 what you're... what you're getting at... [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And just like  
9 if you want somebody to be a team member that, that  
10 you include them in the team meeting..

11 STEVEN BANKS: Understood, understood.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And then  
13 similarly as you started to think about, you know  
14 changes and obviously it's comprehensive and you're  
15 doing a lot, I'm wondering if you sat down with the  
16 workers themselves at that center, at different  
17 centers as well as their union reps to say how could  
18 this flow differently and what do we need to make it  
19 flow differently?

20 GRACE BONILLA: So, that is something  
21 that we're very much committed to, we visit with our  
22 staff all the time. In fact, the policy that, that  
23 came out, out of this of making sure that a director  
24 and the HRA peace officers are in conversation before  
25 NYPD is called came from meetings with staff and

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2 directors, it really was a ground up type of approach  
3 to the work and the more we do that the more we get  
4 it right so we certainly include staff and our  
5 directors and our supervisors in these types of  
6 conversations.

7 STEVEN BANKS: By, by way of example...

8 [cross-talk]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And that's for  
10 the private contractor as well that they have that  
11 directive?

12 STEVEN BANKS: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay...

14 STEVEN BANKS: Yes, but by, by way of  
15 example Commissioner Bonilla and I were.. Friday met  
16 with a group of staff in one of the Bronx centers and  
17 we were talking to them about different training  
18 experience, the training experience if you go to the  
19 center first and get a little elbow training and then  
20 you go centrally versus... you go centrally and go to  
21 the center and reasonable minds can disagree on that  
22 and it was very interesting to hear from relatively  
23 recent hires about the pros and cons of each approach  
24 and that was a great opportunity, they weren't

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2 bashful about talking about their experiences and it  
3 was very helpful and insightful.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah, I mean  
5 it strikes me that, you know perhaps meeting more  
6 frequently as a team, maybe every two weeks you know  
7 would be worthwhile and it strikes me especially  
8 because they have such disparate jobs, you know what  
9 I mean? Every, everyone in the unit is doing  
10 something maybe highly specialized in coming  
11 together, a meeting together, you know people can  
12 understand what the other person is going through  
13 when you have these team meetings and you say so,  
14 how'd it goes this week.

15 STEVEN BANKS: We, we should definitely  
16 take a look, I want to say just from my own  
17 experience of going from.. running legal aid to then  
18 running HRA and now DHS as well there are certainly  
19 some perspectives that I've had of why don't we try  
20 this, many of which have worked some of which haven't  
21 worked as well and I've learned to listen to the  
22 people that are on the ground.. [cross-talk]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah... [cross-  
24 talk]

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2 STEVEN BANKS: ...about what works so the  
3 frequency of the meetings and so forth I'd want to  
4 defer a little bit to hear from the people on the  
5 ground but I hear your point which is making sure  
6 that, that there are those connections which are so  
7 important and those didn't happen here and we've now  
8 directed them to happen but we also got to  
9 organically make them happen too.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, I  
11 appreciate... I should ask a question about my bill,  
12 1382 which is a reporting bill. I'm wondering if  
13 you've had time to look at this particular bill and  
14 I'm sure you report on some of things we've asked you  
15 to report on here in terms of how you measure  
16 success, in terms of getting the benefits out and I'm  
17 just wanting to I guess confirm that you're open to  
18 looking at some of these additional ways to monitor  
19 success and maybe also I'm going to add in this  
20 amazing report from the Safety Net Project, I assume  
21 you've seen this, it was released I guess maybe today  
22 but I'm going to assume you've seen this and you've  
23 gone through it, it was built on by a previous report  
24 that they had and again the suggestions in here are  
25 so common sense which you mentioned in your testimony

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2 but just they, they looked at ways to measure  
3 outcomes and I'm wondering if you would consider some  
4 of their measurement tools as well?

5 STEVEN BANKS: So, first let me say Helen  
6 Strom, who's terrific gave me a copy on my way in...

7 [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Uh-huh...

9 [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: ...which I appreciated...

11 [cross-talk]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: You're so  
13 smart I'm sure you just... I just did it...

14 STEVEN BANKS: Right and look a word of  
15 praise for the Safety Net Activists from the  
16 beginning of my time in, in the various positions  
17 I've had in the administration and with the  
18 leadership for the agency Administrator Bonilla and  
19 others we've had a regular engagement with them,  
20 doesn't mean we always agree on everything but  
21 they've been a very important sort of touchstone  
22 about how things are going. Administrator Bonilla and  
23 I have met personally with, with them over time, they  
24 were on the phone with us with a, a very helpful  
25 conference call about the shutdown just a couple

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2 weeks ago so there's a... there's a... there's an  
3 openness, there's a dialogue, we'll certainly take a  
4 look at what they're proposing and I have appreciated  
5 both the support and constructive criticism that  
6 they've given to us over, over my time in this  
7 position.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That was a  
9 yes, you love everything in my bill, and it can go  
10 through easily?

11 STEVEN BANKS: Oh, your bill, I, I didn't  
12 answer the question about the bill... [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Back to my  
14 bill... [cross-talk]

15 STEVEN BANKS: I went right to the  
16 report. As to the bill, I think... I, I just want to  
17 reiterate something I said earlier which is there are  
18 a lot of bills on the... on the table and we want to  
19 make sure that we take the, the sort of going forward  
20 approach taking into account the, the whole of the  
21 bills as opposed to sort of a piece meal approach,  
22 there are... as I said there are some things that  
23 we're doing already or are committing publicly that  
24 we're going to do that are part... that are... that are  
25 touched on by some of the bills, we want to make

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2 sure that we build on what we're doing and don't get  
3 across purposes but I think it's a very comprehensive  
4 package of different bills and as we've worked  
5 previously with the Council we're going to eventually  
6 get to some sort of a yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I'll take that  
8 as a yes, right... [cross-talk]

9 STEVEN BANKS: Not necessarily on that  
10 individual though but, but I... but in terms of what  
11 the aim is... in terms of what the aim is.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you for  
13 all your work and your service to the city.

14 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you ma'am... [cross-  
15 talk]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: ...and to your  
17 workers as well.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you very much.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council  
20 Member Rosenthal. Okay, so I'm going to kind of do a  
21 little bit of clean up here and so I'm going to be  
22 bouncing around and then I'm going to turn it back  
23 over to Council Member Gibson for some more question  
24 but... first question just... this is following up on  
25 Council Member... one of Council Member Gibson's

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2 questions before about the child care room, I don't  
3 quite understand why there needs to be a distinction  
4 between potty trained or non-potty trained, you know  
5 as long as there's a diaper changing table, I don't...  
6 I don't really see why you couldn't have a room where  
7 parents could be... I understand that you're maybe  
8 looking at, at adjusting that but why parents  
9 couldn't be in the room with their kids...

10 STEVEN BANKS: As I said you... we had  
11 taken an approach initially of creating spaces where  
12 parents could leave their kids. One of the issues  
13 that has been highlighted by, by this incident...

14 [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

16 STEVEN BANKS: ...and by the dialogue that  
17 again I thought was reproductive that we've been  
18 having... [cross-talk]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

20 STEVEN BANKS: ...is that's actually really  
21 not... [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, nobody  
23 necessarily wants to leave their kid in some random  
24 place they just want to be able to have a... [cross-  
25 talk]

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Understood so we're...

3 [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, so they can run  
5 around... [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: ...taking a... we... right,  
7 we'll take a fresh look at the... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right and I have a... I  
9 have a two-year-old and like the idea of my two-year-  
10 old being in a waiting room at an HRA Center for two  
11 or three hours or more sounds like a recipe for  
12 disaster.

13 STEVEN BANKS: Right, so the idea of  
14 being with your kids as opposed to leaving your kids  
15 we'll take a fresh look at, at how to... [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

17 STEVEN BANKS: ...operate these things.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, Administrator  
19 Bonilla you mentioned just... you talked a little bit  
20 about why Jazmine's case was closed and that there  
21 was some... two systems were not speaking to one  
22 another and it only affects a couple hundred cases  
23 you said are you doing a top to bottom look at the...  
24 at, at the overall case load to see... I mean that  
25 can't be the only type of case where systems have to

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2 talk to one another, right, I mean it's not... it's not  
3 a... maybe that's one example but... I mean fundamentally  
4 Jazmine Headley didn't... wasn't supposed to be there  
5 that day because her child care benefit wasn't  
6 supposed to be cut off and, and so... yeah, are we... are  
7 we... are we examining whether there are other types of  
8 or profiles of cases that might see a similar glitch?

9 GRACE BONILLA: We are constantly  
10 managing those types of analysis with our IT team,  
11 with our state oversight, if we ever do identify any,  
12 we are certainly addressing them immediately. Like I  
13 said in this particular case it was two systems one,  
14 one of which belongs to the state another one to the  
15 city as soon as we caught the 167 cases we addressed  
16 it immediately but that is the type of action that we  
17 would take in, in types of cases like this not just  
18 in transitional child care but other types of, of  
19 glitches if they exist but...

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Speaking of  
21 transitional child care and I'll just keep it moving  
22 because I know it's getting close to four o'clock  
23 here. In 2013 under the previous administration  
24 that's... see if I can see on your face you're trying  
25

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2 to remember, you might not remember it because it was  
3 before your time... [cross-talk]

4 STEVEN BANKS: Okay... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the, the last peg  
6 that I remember, and this is... this is an outdated  
7 term, we don't even call them pegs anymore but the  
8 last peg and maybe some people in the room might  
9 remember is when we... is when... I think it was HRA that  
10 proposed cutting post transitional child care so you  
11 have... you have child care then you have transitional  
12 child care for a year that you're entitled to and we  
13 up to 2013 had another year of extended child care  
14 called post transitional child care, it was about 13  
15 million dollars at the time that was pegged and it  
16 was the last thing the Bloomberg administration did,  
17 it's kind of an ACS but it's kind of an HRA, is it  
18 something that we could take a look at in this coming  
19 year's budget? I'm not sure that, that Jazmine's... I  
20 mean I don't think Jazmine's case would have  
21 necessarily been under post transitional because it  
22 was during the transitional period, she was entitled  
23 to the transitional but, but is that something that...  
24 I mean this is a... this was a, a benefit that used to  
25 be there up to 2013 that's no longer there.

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you for making it  
3 clear on the record that whatever this is it predated  
4 me... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: ...thank you very much. I'm...  
7 have to take a look at it, I, I need to understand...  
8 [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: ...what it was, who it  
11 covered and, and, and what... you know what the  
12 effectiveness of it was, but I'll certainly take a  
13 look at it.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Yeah, I would  
15 reach out to, to ACS and see if it's something that  
16 they would support certainly it was something that we  
17 were opposed to cutting when it was cut.

18 STEVEN BANKS: And the funding was in the  
19 HRA budget or the ACS budget?

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It might have been in  
21 the... I think it was in the HRA budget, but I'll get  
22 back to you on that.

23 STEVEN BANKS: Okay, we can talk offline.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay. Have you  
25 seen recommendations put up by Local 237 regarding

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2 reforms that they would like to see with, with, with  
3 the peace officers?

4 STEVEN BANKS: I have not, I know that  
5 body worn cameras was something that they... that the  
6 Local had wanted, it was something that, that we  
7 thought was a good idea and so we're moving ahead  
8 with it but I'm always happy to look at the  
9 recommendations, we have a very... you know very active  
10 labor management process with all of our locals...

11 [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

13 STEVEN BANKS: ...in which proposals are  
14 made and, and reviewed so I'd be happy to look at  
15 whatever they're putting forth.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I'm just  
17 looking at their recommendations right now and, and  
18 you know... I mean this has been... I, I don't want to  
19 kind of rehash everything that went into this  
20 incident but I think that there's a fair consensus  
21 that the actions by those two peace officers were,  
22 were inappropriate and when I saw the body cam  
23 footage which I, I did see which has the minutes  
24 leading up to the video that, that we all saw  
25 publicly what I saw was numerous exit ramps on, on

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2 the road towards confrontation and, and these were..  
3 and I saw a lot of exit ramps that... I mean you don't  
4 have to reply on this but I saw, this is my opinion,  
5 my interpretation, a lot of exit ramps that weren't  
6 taken and, and that speaks to a lack of training in  
7 my opinion and low and behold in my conversation with  
8 237 which is the union that represents those two  
9 peace officers they spoke to their lack of training  
10 and their first recommendation is lack of formal and  
11 effective training for HRA officers, HRA officers do  
12 not attend an academy unlike every other group of  
13 special officers in the city, the new officers are  
14 provided... I'll just read it; the new officers are  
15 provided on the job training which consists of them  
16 observing other officers at a particular site for one  
17 year, the newly hired officers also receive two weeks  
18 classroom training from an instructor who comes from  
19 up state, we feel that this training is inadequate to  
20 prepare the officers for a variety of difficult  
21 circumstances and they confront... or that confront in  
22 carrying out their duties, they face individuals who  
23 are all... who are by all accounts in crisis while in  
24 fact on a daily basis they manage to handle the, the  
25 various difficult circumstances with common sense and

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2 dignity we feel is not an adequate substitute for  
3 regular comprehensive training on how to handle  
4 etcetera. I don't endorse all of the rest of their  
5 statement which characterizes clients, but I think  
6 the jist of training is a structural issue. First  
7 off, HRA officers do not receive the same level of  
8 training that ACS peace officers or DHS peace  
9 officers receive, is that right?

10 STEVEN BANKS: I don't... I don't  
11 necessarily agree with that, let me just say for the  
12 record what training they do get. HRA special  
13 officers, that's the title, receive 167 hours of  
14 training which includes the New York State of  
15 Divisional Criminal Justice Services requirements  
16 that incorporates HRA topics including de-escalation  
17 training, mental health for law enforcement, officer  
18 training, training for HRA policies and procedures  
19 and on the job training at a job center. The  
20 onboarding process is the same as a DHS since they  
21 all have civil service titles. Having said that as  
22 you know one of the first things that we announced  
23 was that we would be implementing a retraining on de-  
24 escalation which we did, as I said I attended each...  
25 I've attended the sessions that have been held, there

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2 are ten more officers that need to be trained, I will  
3 go to that as well... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

5 STEVEN BANKS: ...and that we are making  
6 this an annual mandatory training for the peace  
7 officers so while I disagree that they didn't receive  
8 training, I agree that we need to do more training  
9 and that's exactly why between, between December and,  
10 and the present we did... we implemented a, a complete  
11 retraining for these peace officers.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How, how many peace  
13 officers are there?

14 STEVEN BANKS: Approximately 100.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What would be the  
16 down side of giving them the exact same training... I,  
17 I saw the, the training institute for the, the  
18 training program for DHS peace officers at the  
19 Bedford Avenue shelter in that... Laurie was there...  
20 [cross-talk]

21 STEVEN BANKS: Yeah... [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...you know what's the  
23 down side... I mean that's, that's a number of... I mean  
24 that's... it's not the police academy but it's, it's

25

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2 you know a high number of, of academy hours... [cross-  
3 talk]

4 STEVEN BANKS: Right, that's 200 and this  
5 is 167, there's also the... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But the... yeah but the  
7 difference being that... I think this 167 includes on  
8 the job training, right?

9 STEVEN BANKS: It, it does include some  
10 but as does the, the, the sort of situational  
11 training that DHS does but look we're always willing  
12 to look at anything... [cross-talk]

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

14 STEVEN BANKS: ...I think there are  
15 differences about that academy and, and what, what  
16 we're expecting HRA peace officers to do given the  
17 differences in the job responsibilities but again  
18 seven weeks in, wanted to retrain everybody and we'll  
19 continue to look at other things you, you all from  
20 this committee and beyond the committee have had very  
21 constructive ideas for us and I think we've been  
22 pretty transparent in not saying we're the repository  
23 of all knowledge, so I'm open, open to thinking about  
24 why you're asking me.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. The other thing  
3 that they mentioned has to do with staffing levels at  
4 HRA centers for peace officers and I... don't  
5 necessarily have to read all of this but when... so  
6 this, this particular center at Bergen Street took  
7 some of the volume from 500 Dekalb when 500 Dekalb  
8 closed so... this is a two-pronged question there's...  
9 [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: Not, not exactly and I'm  
11 going to turn a little bit over to Administrator  
12 Bonilla, but I think the center used to be a SNAP... it  
13 was a building in which... it was a SNAP center and we  
14 changed it into a job center... [cross-talk]

15 GRACE BONILLA: So, I think that it's  
16 important... [cross-talk]

17 STEVEN BANKS: ...and here's... and here's  
18 the reason why we should give a reason why for the  
19 record.

20 GRACE BONILLA: I think it's important to  
21 realize that the reforms that we've made on the SNAP  
22 side has allowed us to really look at efficiencies.  
23 One of the things that we've been able to look at is  
24 space so that was the, the reason why we made the  
25 changes that we did in Brooklyn, right, for the

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

Dekalb job center where the incident happened the access to job center space did not change all that much, it was really more of an effort to respond to the lack of foot traffic on the SNAP side and I think there's been some confusion about those two things.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, some of the confusion stems from the fact that the Bergen Street center is called the Dekalb Center, the Dekalb Center and then 500 Dekalb was the one that was closed but...

[cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: That, that... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Understandable... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: ...that's, that's true...

[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...confusion, yes... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: That's true...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's a little bit confusing but I... but... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: But, but just for the record...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Can I just say for the  
3 record, the reason why we had to rearrange the  
4 footprint in Brooklyn... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: ...was because the landlord  
7 of the building where we had been operating the  
8 Dekalb, Dekalb Center... [cross-talk]

9 GRACE BONILLA: Yes... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: ...refused to give us an  
11 extension while... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No month to month...  
13 [cross-talk]

14 STEVEN BANKS: ...while we... while we...  
15 [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You couldn't get a  
17 month to month... [cross-talk]

18 STEVEN BANKS: ...we couldn't get any  
19 extension while we wanted to... we wanted an extension  
20 until we were able to open the brand-new Evergreen  
21 Center that I think everybody is... [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But that's not for  
23 another year?

24 STEVEN BANKS: Correct so we had this gap  
25 and we said well we have 30 percent fewer clients

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 coming into SNAP centers let's reposition where our  
3 SNAP centers are and move the Dekalb Center to what  
4 previously was the Bergen Center and we created... you  
5 know the complexity is we didn't want to call it  
6 Bergen because you... people used to go to Dekalb will  
7 think of where's Dekalb but I get that it's on Bergen  
8 Street not Dekalb.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: And that's its own  
11 challenge.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And okay I just... but  
13 according to 237 the 275 Bergen Street site's  
14 clientele rose from approximately 60 to 100 clients a  
15 day to approximately three to 350 a day, I... I'm  
16 assuming that, that you disagree with that.

17 STEVEN BANKS: We, we also... we disagree  
18 with that but also the security that had been at  
19 Dekalb moved to Bergen.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well so they said the  
21 Dekalb site was manned by an HRA sergeant and three  
22 HRA officers and in contrast 275 with the additional  
23 clients only has an HRA sergeant and one HRA officer  
24 so according to them the two people that we all saw  
25 on camera were the only two peace officers working at

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 275 Bergen that day as opposed... two... so that would be  
3 two, two people one a sergeant and one an officer in  
4 contrast to 500 Dekalb which prior to it's closing  
5 had you know one sergeant and three officers so four  
6 personnel...

7 STEVEN BANKS: So, so I think we can sort  
8 this out offline because... [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: ...actually it's getting us  
11 to a place where I think we don't want to be that's  
12 assuming that this matter should have been handled as  
13 a law enforcement matter, it should not have been  
14 handled as a law enforcement matter, it should be... it  
15 should have been handled as a human matter as... of a  
16 woman who was sitting on a floor because she was  
17 tired because she was disgusted because she had the  
18 challenge of being in an office with her child that  
19 shouldn't have resulted in... [cross-talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Under... [cross-talk]

21 STEVEN BANKS: ...this being dealt with as  
22 a law enforcement matter.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood, I mean...  
24 [cross-talk]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: So, I don't want to... I  
3 don't want... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I... and we could also  
5 ask about where the supervisor was in this  
6 conversation... [cross-talk]

7 STEVEN BANKS: No, no... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The, the... but the... it  
9 does... [cross-talk]

10 STEVEN BANKS: The supervisor was part of  
11 this incident.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The supervisor... not  
13 the... not the... not the peace officer supervisor, I  
14 mean the... [cross-talk]

15 STEVEN BANKS: Yes, the peace officer  
16 supervisor was part of this incident... [cross-talk]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, no, I know I'm  
18 saying... I could also ask where the HRA supervisor was  
19 in this incident.

20 STEVEN BANKS: At the time that the call  
21 was made the supervisor... the director had not been  
22 involved in the interaction.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, so that's a  
24 protocol issue because that should have been the  
25 person that came down first... [cross-talk]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Correct, correct... [cross-  
3 talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...to talk to a client...  
5 [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: Correct... [cross-talk]

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...rather than security  
8 but it does... it, it... if this is correct and I... you  
9 said you disagree with the facts of this assertion  
10 but if it does... I mean if, if a... if, if the security  
11 personnel... if we're going to have security personnel  
12 and they're better trained they should... they should  
13 also be staffed in a way that doesn't... mean they  
14 should... means that they're not necessarily over  
15 worked, I mean or that it's... that it's... that it's an  
16 appropriate level of staffing and if, if they're  
17 right that there were four people at 500 Dekalb and  
18 there are two people at 275 Bergen and the, the  
19 client level went from 60 to 100 to three... 350... three  
20 to 350 a day that's a huge, huge... there's a fivefold  
21 increase and I'm just... I'm just pointing out that  
22 it's, it's... I'm not... I in no way think that this  
23 should have been, or a similar situation should be a  
24 law enforcement experience but at the same time we  
25 want to make sure that staffing levels are correct.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Right, I think that this  
3 is probably best left as a labor management issue  
4 between us and Local 237... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: Obviously there was a  
7 dispute about the disciplinary actions that I took,  
8 and I respect the, the union's role of contesting  
9 actions that I took as a manager in, in... to, to  
10 discipline these two officers... [cross-talk]

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

12 STEVEN BANKS: ...I thought it was the  
13 right thing to do and I don't want to get into sort  
14 of the disputes about whether there were, were enough  
15 staffing and that that, that was a factor here, I  
16 don't believe that, that this was a law enforcement  
17 matter, it should have been dealt with as a human  
18 being matter.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so to that  
20 point then what, what's the protocol for civilian  
21 staff or you know non-peace officer staff, their  
22 interaction with a matter that, that warrants their  
23 attention in, in the waiting room, if there's... if  
24 there's a client who is saying look, I've, I've... I...  
25 you know I came in... this is... something is wrong here,

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 I want to speak to a supervisor, I mean she... I saw  
3 her on the... on the body cam say I would like to speak  
4 to a supervisor... [cross-talk]

5 STEVEN BANKS: Right, it... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How come... what's the  
7 protocol for that person to be able to speak to a  
8 supervisor?

9 STEVEN BANKS: She should have been able  
10 to speak to a supervisor, but the challenge of that  
11 particular incident is that it already had become a  
12 law enforcement matter and that's why we changed the  
13 protocol that if a client is having a... an issue that  
14 the NYPD should not be called unless there's a health  
15 and safety matter. Let's not forget... [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Be... sorry but be...  
17 [cross-talk]

18 STEVEN BANKS: If, if I could just  
19 finish... [cross-talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah...

21 STEVEN BANKS: Let's not forget that the  
22 presenting problem that made it become a law  
23 enforcement matter was that she was sitting on the  
24 floor, I don't think that... [cross-talk]

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I... [cross-talk]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: ...the work... if I could just  
3 finish.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

5 STEVEN BANKS: I don't think that a  
6 worker would have seen that as a defiant act, and I  
7 think that's what part of the challenge here was  
8 which is why we have changed the protocol to not have  
9 matters escalate into law enforcement matters.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I can only  
11 assume that she had asked to see a supervisor before  
12 the NYPD showed up.

13 STEVEN BANKS: I, I, I do not want to... I  
14 don't... there are matters that are under disciplinary  
15 proceedings about who asked what when, there are  
16 matters that are under litigation about who asked  
17 what, what when, there was a request to see a  
18 supervisor, it was being addressed and then the  
19 matter escalated into a law enforcement matter.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so, so then it  
21 can... been conveyed... I'm just wondering what the  
22 protocol is so... [cross-talk]

23 STEVEN BANKS: To let her see a  
24 supervisor.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah...

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: That's the protocol.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so if somebody  
4 walks in... and they've been there for three hours,  
5 something is not working right, she... starting to... you  
6 know starting to get nervous that you... your case  
7 won't be resolved by the end of the day you might  
8 have to take another day off of work, a new job, I  
9 mean it's a really difficult situation so now you say  
10 I would like to speak to a supervisor and, and that  
11 will happen?

12 STEVEN BANKS: That's the protocol that  
13 was in the process of happening on that particular  
14 day.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What's the process if  
16 the supervisor is not... you know if a manager is not...  
17 is not actually there that day?

18 STEVEN BANKS: Right but that's why  
19 we've... Administrator Bonilla and I have put in place  
20 a, a protocol that makes it clear that if there are  
21 client issues the director or the deputy director  
22 should be involved and as we've indicated at the five  
23 pilot centers we're going to add social worker  
24 staffing to see if all of this can create new models  
25 for us to approach these kinds of things that clients

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 raise with us because it's a... it's understandable  
3 that issues may arise from time to time.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so the social  
5 workers are, are a pilot right now...

6 STEVEN BANKS: We've announced today that  
7 we're going to be implementing this pilot, it's going  
8 to require conversation with Local 371 and then we'll  
9 move forward as expeditiously as possible.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay and have you  
11 determined what would be required in terms of  
12 resources to, to implement it across the system?

13 STEVEN BANKS: We're going to... the reason  
14 why we want to implement it as a pilot is to see  
15 what's effective and then depending on what's  
16 effective, we'll make a determination about what the  
17 scale that would be needed would be.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so depending on  
19 what the scale is would you be willing to commit to  
20 a, a, a new needs request for social workers to go  
21 throughout the system depending on... but I don't want,  
22 want to say what that exactly is in terms of how big  
23 the... how big a, a workforce that needs to be but a  
24 scale... a scaled up allocation?  
25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Obviously I have the... we  
3 had the commitment at the agency to implement this  
4 pilot and we have the support to move forward with it  
5 and let's see what the results are and then we'll  
6 determine... [cross-talk]

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How long... [cross-  
8 talk]

9 STEVEN BANKS: ...whether... [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...is the pilot for?

11 STEVEN BANKS: It's being announced for  
12 the first time today.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay because it's  
14 February 4<sup>th</sup>...

15 STEVEN BANKS: Yes...

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Preliminary budget is  
17 coming out in a couple of days, we're going to have  
18 hearings then we're going to have an exec budget then  
19 we're going to have adoption sometime in the middle  
20 of June, can we try to see if that can be a scaled-up  
21 version by adoption or is that too quick? I'm just... I  
22 don't... [cross-talk]

23 STEVEN BANKS: Scaled up or a pilot?

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Scaled up, I mean the  
25 pilot is happening so... [cross-talk]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Oh no, the pilot... let's  
3 make the record clear, I'm just filing under oath, I  
4 announced the pilot today, I'm going to have a sit  
5 down with that partner over there, Anthony Wells to  
6 work through how it's going to operate then we're  
7 going to have to operationalize it then I'm going to  
8 have to hire people consistent with the Civil  
9 Services law then I'm going to have to train them  
10 then I'm going to have to put them in place. I think  
11 the next time I'm going to see for certain is mid-  
12 March... [cross-talk]

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I don't think  
14 it's going to be ready by mid-March.

15 STEVEN BANKS: I don't think I'm going..  
16 [cross-talk]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But we... [cross-talk]

18 STEVEN BANKS: ...to have results by the  
19 end of March.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But we have an  
21 executive budget hearing in mid-May so that's all I'm  
22 saying.

23 STEVEN BANKS: We're... [cross-talk]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And we have a full,  
25 you know three-week negotiation... budget negotiation

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 that new need... that, that... you know new funding...

3 [cross-talk]

4 STEVEN BANKS: We're, we're clearly  
5 committed to do this... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep... [cross-talk]

7 STEVEN BANKS: ...and we're going to make  
8 it work because we think it's the right for our staff  
9 and for our clients.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, just a couple  
11 questions about wait times here. The survey that was  
12 put out by Safety Net Project today shows wait times  
13 that are according to their client surveys much, much  
14 higher, an average of 3.13 hours for job centers  
15 which is down, you know so dually acknowledged down  
16 from 3.5 in 2014 and 2.78 for SNAP centers but  
17 obviously that is very different from HRA's numbers  
18 so I'm just wondering why would that be?

19 STEVEN BANKS: I'd have to look at the  
20 report but again in the SNAP world 87 percent of the  
21 recerts, of the applications and recertifications are  
22 happening online... [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah but there's  
24 still 13... I mean I'm just... [cross-talk]

25

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: ...I'd have to... I'd have to  
3 look at the report... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

5 STEVEN BANKS: ...and... but that's the whole  
6 reason why we've been trying to do what we've been  
7 doing in the SNAP only side which is move to  
8 telephone interviews, now more than 90 percent of the  
9 interviews by telephone and all this is to avoid  
10 people coming into the offices and we'll have to take  
11 ea look at the report. As I said I spoke very highly,  
12 and I continue to... we'll continue to speak highly of  
13 the Safety Net Activists group, and we will look at  
14 the report and sit down with them and see what we can  
15 learn from it to make reforms going forward.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

17 GRACE BONILLA: I just want to highlight  
18 one conversation that we had with our staff just last  
19 week. One of the critical things that we need to do  
20 as an agency as management is really build awareness  
21 around ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA, more than on one  
22 occasion we've heard from... case managers have said,  
23 you know the minute I go out there and I tell people,  
24 you know if you have an account you can actually  
25 upload this document you came in for they either

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 leave or they're like oh my goodness I didn't know  
3 about this, right, so we're taking that very  
4 seriously, there are mechanisms that we have right  
5 now where we can bring down that wait time which is  
6 why we're starting a campaign in March to build  
7 awareness around ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I just, just...  
9 but it's... I'm, I'm curious in how we're calculating  
10 wait times. When... so, so Jasmine's case she had two  
11 separate issues she was seeing, she was following up  
12 on, on, on PA obviously they're related, they're kind  
13 of one in the same, child care is dependent upon PA  
14 so was her... some data as, as a hypothetical is that  
15 case... is, is each individual wait time is that... is  
16 that... is that two wait times or is it one wait time  
17 for her?

18 STEVEN BANKS: Again without... I want to  
19 be careful to not get in... [cross-talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hypothetical... [cross-  
21 talk]

22 STEVEN BANKS: ...case but... well it's...  
23 [cross-talk]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hypothetical.  
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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

STEVEN BANKS: It's a real situation so  
my... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but, but it  
presents a... it presents an... let's put it... let's put  
it in the realm of hypothetical... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: No, no I'll answer your  
question... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...a client... a client  
has two cases like the... they're there for, for two  
separate things is their wait time then aggregated or  
is their wait time per thing?

STEVEN BANKS: Right in that case... in  
that case she was actually there for one thing which  
was the child care problem because she was seen by a  
screener if you will to figure out what was going on  
and it was determined that she needed to see a, a, a...  
see a... see a child care specialist but I think to go  
back to the answers... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: To see a... I'm sorry,  
correct, it, it was determined that she went to see  
the child care specialist, it was determined that she  
should see a PA specialist?

STEVEN BANKS: No.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No. She went there...

[cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: She came in to be seen because she said my case is closed, I have a problem and then it was determined oh, you need to see a child care specialist.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

STEVEN BANKS: So that was her... that was the experience but I think to go back to Council Member Gibson's question is pretty instructive here, someone is going to come in on a recertification face to face, we want that to not have to be something you have to come to the office, that's what we did for...

[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: ...food stamps... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean we all agree about that like there's nobody... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: ...but during the... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...show of hands who agrees with... everybody agrees with that, yeah.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 STEVEN BANKS: Right. During the face to  
3 face it's determined that the person is in rent  
4 arrears, right, rather than have the person come back  
5 to have the rent arrears case be dealt with we think  
6 it's wise to send them to a specialist who can try to  
7 deal with all the issues around rent arrears so  
8 that's going to take not a single appointment then  
9 there are other people that are going to come in for  
10 one thing and they're going to be in, in and out on  
11 their one thing that they're doing and so if it's on  
12 the SNAP side it's an average of less than 30 minutes  
13 and if it's on the... on the cash side its... [cross-  
14 talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, we don't count  
16 our wait times together even if people are there for  
17 multiple things on a day, their wait time is, is  
18 broken up into how long they're waiting to see each  
19 individual?

20 STEVEN BANKS: Because we're trying to  
21 actually manage how each of those processes are  
22 working and how long it's taking for, for different  
23 processes to work.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, will HRA phone  
25 agents take a complaint if the wait time for a single

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 transaction is less than two hours? Well, another  
3 question... [cross-talk]

4 STEVEN BANKS: Infoline will take  
5 complaints on a broad range of issues, I don't know...  
6 I'm not familiar with what exactly you're asking me.  
7 I can tell you... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If, if somebody wants  
9 to call say I want to... I want to make a complaint  
10 about a wait time it was an hour and 37 minutes would  
11 that complaint be taken and logged?

12 GRACE BONILLA: So, as the former Deputy  
13 Commissioner over the Office of Constituent Affairs  
14 we are under obligation to take absolutely every  
15 single complaint so that would be... that would be  
16 tracked.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, a very  
18 high percentage of people in the Safety Net Project  
19 survey said that their calls to HRA were never or  
20 rarely answered. It's... again shows signs of  
21 improvement, in 2014 it was 86 percent now it's 64  
22 percent but that's two thirds...

23 STEVEN BANKS: Again, I think that's  
24 exactly why we need to move the cash world onto  
25 online and on demand interviews because... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I feel the same way.  
What, what is the... so, so what, what do we have to do  
to make that happen?

STEVEN BANKS: So, recertifications are,  
are going to be... that's part of the campaign that  
Administrator Bonilla referred to, to encourage  
clients to recertify online, we have a demonstration...  
a pilot running in the Bronx to show the state that  
applications can be appropriately processed and then  
we have other things that we want to do in the same  
way we've done for SNAP to try to cut down on the  
need to come to the center for other kinds of things  
like the face to face interviews, a whole range of  
different appointments that are required and our goal  
is to cut down the number of appointments.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Required by whom?

STEVEN BANKS: Required by the state and  
by the federal government.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so we need  
state law change or state administrator change?

STEVEN BANKS: It depends...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For the ones that are  
at the city...

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Some are... some are  
3 procedures that, that need approval, and some are  
4 laws that need to be made.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, are there... is  
6 there legislation put forward in the current  
7 legislative session on those matters that need to be  
8 done through legislation?

9 STEVEN BANKS: The, the major issue  
10 that's before the state is the one you are working on  
11 with us which is to deal with housing stability  
12 support which would have the beneficial effect of  
13 eliminating the rent arrears or, or mitigating I  
14 should say the rent arrears traffic which is a big  
15 issue for people to come to centers and also pressure  
16 on the staff so that would be a significant change  
17 for us, it would have a dramatic impact on people  
18 having to come to centers.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right but we... you  
20 know we have this opportunity in the current  
21 legislative session so, you know it'd be good to see...  
22 be good to know what... which, which issues are  
23 dependent upon state law and, and make sure that  
24 those are at least part of the conversation up there,  
25 it may not get passed but you know we should be able

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2 to have... we should be able to have a champion up  
3 there who's, who's able to take these issues on, we  
4 have a state senate with 37... 39 member, a democratic  
5 body so, you know one would think that that would...  
6 and, and a lot of that is obviously from, from the  
7 city so we would... we would hope that these issues  
8 would resonate with, with that... those caucuses.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Right, I should say we  
10 have a, a very productive working relationship...  
11 working relationship with OTDA... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

13 STEVEN BANKS: ...and why don't we set up a  
14 time to brief you on some of the... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great... [cross-talk]

16 STEVEN BANKS: ...things that are beyond  
17 the ability of our working relationship with OTDA to  
18 address, again I think they've been a good partner  
19 with us on many issues.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I'll pass it  
21 over to Council Member Gibson for further questions.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: I'll be quick  
23 because I know we still have more of the hearing.  
24 Language access I know is something that we all are  
25 very cognizant of and prioritizing and I don't

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2 remember who but someone... oh, one of the attorney's  
3 referenced a client who went into a center where  
4 Spanish was her primary language and so obviously I  
5 throw that out to make sure especially on behalf of  
6 the Bronx that that's something that we're very aware  
7 of and I wanted to ask a number of the issues that we  
8 hear constantly about that's also in the safety net  
9 report is reducing documentation errors. So, if you  
10 have the mobile app, if you go to one of the kiosks  
11 you're given a receipt either a, a hard receipt or  
12 you're given an email confirmation outside of that  
13 when you go to the centers and you visit with a case  
14 worker are the clients given any sort of receipt or  
15 any documentation to substantiate that they did  
16 provide it? So, there are many instances where  
17 clients will tell us that the documents were lost,  
18 they were never received, someone else has them, I  
19 don't have them, etcetera, etcetera so how are we  
20 dealing with streamlining that process?

21 GRACE BONILLA: So, to answer the first  
22 part of your question, language access, it certainly  
23 has been a priority for many years to make sure that  
24 language access is something we're addressing as an  
25 agency, it's a priority of the city as you can see

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2 from before the administration to this  
3 administration, we've added a number of languages,  
4 our staff is trained consistently on providing  
5 language access, I, I urge any advocate that's in the  
6 room to please bring this to our attention because it  
7 is something that we have been drilling down in the  
8 agency for years. On the instance of, do people walk  
9 away with anything where they come in, yes, they  
10 should. A case worker should say you provided the  
11 following documents to us and they should walk... that  
12 is definitely the policy, if that is not happening,  
13 we definitely want to hear about that as well. The  
14 reason why opening up an, an... and I sound like a  
15 broken record but the reason why opening an  
16 ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA account is important is  
17 because whether you give it to the case worker,  
18 whether you're uploading it you will see what you  
19 handed in and that is going to be like the best  
20 verification that you can have on what you handed in  
21 and the agency in the various ways that we have to  
22 submit documentation.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, the Bronx  
24 cash assistant pilot that started last July, not been  
25 a year yet but you indicated in your testimony there

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2 were 14 CBOs that you're working with so each of  
3 those CBOs has a HRA staff assigned to work at the  
4 CBO or is that the CBO's responsibility and I would  
5 also hope now not knowing the 14 CBOs but I can think  
6 of a number in my district that cover my zip codes  
7 and hoping that they are involved because we're  
8 trying to prevent clients from going to the centers  
9 in the first place, we're trying to streamline a  
10 process but we also have other CBOs that do a lot of  
11 this work as well so if we can send them there they  
12 won't have to sit at an office for hours on, on a  
13 given time.

14 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh, one... I mean one  
15 of the things that we know about many of our, our  
16 clients is that they find resources in many, many  
17 different areas, right, one of them is definitely the  
18 CBO world... [cross-talk]

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
20 talk]

21 GRACE BONILLA: ...the beauty of the pilot  
22 is to empower CBOs while they're working on whatever  
23 else they're doing with those... with those clients  
24 whether it's child care or youth development whatever  
25 it is that they're doing and they're like wait a

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2 minute, do you need to apply for cash assistance  
3 through HRA let me help you with that application,  
4 right, so that is what we're testing; what does it  
5 look like when an HRA worker doesn't need to  
6 necessarily help someone apply for cash assistance.  
7 The reality is that because those clients also need  
8 to have a face to face, they're still walking into an  
9 HRA job center, but we have found with the pilot is  
10 that the quality of the application is better because  
11 they're doing it A, with a trusted individual and B,  
12 with some assistance. So, that's what we're hoping to  
13 prove to the state so we could expand this pilot to  
14 the very organizations that you're probably thinking  
15 about that are not doing it currently.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: And what's the  
17 time frame the state has given you to evaluate the  
18 pilot?

19 GRACE BONILLA: We are... we're still in  
20 conversations with the state, we're having a much  
21 larger conversation post this, this incident... [cross-  
22 talk]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay... [cross-  
24 talk]

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2 GRACE BONILLA: ...to really look  
3 comprehensively at where we really need to be more  
4 aggressive with our partnership with OTDA so that we  
5 can expand some of the access on other services not  
6 just this pilot.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay and my last  
8 question as we move on is the Local Law 175  
9 Commissioner that talks about the training for  
10 implicit bias and discrimination and cultural  
11 competency, I think a number of other agencies are  
12 also looking in it as well, I think about DOE and our  
13 teachers and educators and there's a deadline of  
14 2020, mid-July to do that and I wanted to understand  
15 the content and the actual curriculum so as I  
16 mentioned my office is right next door understanding  
17 the life of what a client goes through but also the  
18 life of what a case worker goes through. There are  
19 many late nights, I'm leaving my district office and  
20 HRA is still there and case workers are still there  
21 and going through the inordinate amount of cases  
22 every single day and you know I, I put this on the  
23 perspective of what we're doing with cure violence,  
24 how we respond to violence from a holistic  
25 perspective and we take care of that family that's

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2 traumatized but we also take care of the worker  
3 that's also traumatized as well because it's not easy  
4 to spend eight hours of your day dealing with a  
5 number of client cases and go home and have to return  
6 the next day. The same thing for clients too, to  
7 spend five hours of your day, you know dealing with  
8 this and you have to go back to work the next day so  
9 again I look at it from both perspectives because  
10 it's hard to fill both of those shoes. So, my  
11 question is in the curriculum of this training that  
12 we're doing are we looking at it from both  
13 perspectives so we want everyone to have common  
14 decency and courtesy and served with honor and  
15 integrity and basic respectfulness of who we are as  
16 human beings but are we looking at it from both  
17 perspectives because I know you alluded Commissioner  
18 that it's not easy to deliver bad news but it's also  
19 the delivery in how you deliver that news as well  
20 that does make a difference so I want to understand  
21 how you're doing this implementation and what can we  
22 expect by the deadline?

23 STEVEN BANKS: I, I think... I agree with  
24 all of your concerns and all the points that you're  
25 making, the implicit bias training that we announced

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2 that we'd be rolling out, we're moving forward  
3 expeditiously to have the appropriate vendor to do it  
4 and it is very much focused on the worker. For  
5 example, in just the de-escalation training that I  
6 went to that we just rolled out for retraining for  
7 our peace officers, you know one of the important  
8 messages we want to give you the tools to be able to  
9 do the job that we're asking you to do every day on  
10 the front lines and so that's certainly a perspective  
11 in all the training that we're... that I described in  
12 the testimony today that our staff are on the front  
13 lines every day, they're dedicated and they're also  
14 in situations that are very stressful for them too in  
15 the same way that they're very stressful for the  
16 clients.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, thank you,  
18 thank you Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council  
20 Member Gibson. So, Commissioner and Administrator I  
21 just have a, a few more questions here and then I'll  
22 let... I'll let you go. First off, I want to say I, I  
23 didn't... I didn't mean to imply that we should do away  
24 with the ability for parents to leave their children  
25 if they deem that fit in a... you know as is currently

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2 practiced I just think that we should be augmenters,  
3 people should have the option of being able to stay  
4 there with their, their children and particularly  
5 children that are not necessarily potty trained and  
6 then secondly just as a... as a follow up, while we  
7 agree and wholeheartedly support all the efforts to  
8 get as many applications and recertifications and  
9 document uploading's done online, people still want  
10 to be able to reach somebody when they call on the  
11 phone particularly those that are not tech savvy and  
12 the number on the... I mean that should be a, a red  
13 flag for anybody that number in the 64 percent saying  
14 that they, you know either never or usually can't get  
15 somebody on the phone and that's, that's a real  
16 problem...

17 STEVEN BANKS: Right, we'll, we'll take a  
18 look at that, we have complaint procedures, we have a  
19 number of processes, I want to understand what that's  
20 referring to... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

22 STEVEN BANKS: ...and see what we can do to  
23 address this...

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because I mean I can  
25 speak for myself whenever I have to like, you know

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2 call an automated service the first thing I do is  
3 dial zero like a thousand times because I want to  
4 speak to an operator because going through an  
5 automated service usually does not get me as a  
6 customer the information that I want or need.

7 STEVEN BANKS: One of the things that I  
8 know I, I had testified about in the last budget  
9 process was our capital investment in basically HRA  
10 one number to combine a whole range of different ways  
11 that people contact us to try to make it more  
12 streamlined for people and we can talk more about the  
13 status of that following the hearing.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

15 STEVEN BANKS: But we understand.. the  
16 technology changes we're trying to put in place with  
17 one number is addressed to, to, I think.. I think what  
18 the safety net activists are raising but I want to  
19 take a closer look at their report too.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Local Law 20 of  
21 2018 requires DSS to display in the job centers  
22 information on how to make a complaint and requires  
23 the department to issue a tracking number to track  
24 the status of the complaint.

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2 GRACE BONILLA: We certainly do have the  
3 number up in every center, there is a tracking number  
4 that's associated with every compliant.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, if you will...  
6 can, can contract that tracking number, there's a way  
7 for them to figure out what the status is?

8 GRACE BONILLA: There is a way to... yeah...  
9 [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, you type in  
11 the tracking number online and... or you... I don't know...  
12 how, how do you track it?

13 GRACE BONILLA: I would actually have to  
14 go... I'm sorry, I'm going to have to get back to you  
15 on that, I know there's a tracking number, how  
16 clients use it is something I'd have to get back to  
17 you on.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is it on the... do you  
19 know if it's on the ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA app or  
20 something like that or...

21 GRACE BONILLA: It's not on the  
22 ACOMMITTEE CLERKES HRA app.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, we should  
24 figure out how to, you know do that... you know UPS or  
25 USPS or FedEx or what have you.

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2 GRACE BONILLA: We'll get back to you...

3 [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...Amazon whatever...

5 Office of Constituent Affairs how do they... HRA's

6 Office of Constituent Affairs how do they receive

7 complaints and what do they do with the complaints

8 when the receive them?

9 GRACE BONILLA: So, complaints are

10 received through Infoline as well as, as the Office

11 of Constituent Services, they are tracked in a

12 separate system, those complaints go to job centers

13 to respond to, sometimes they're just inquiries

14 they're not necessarily complaints I believe that if...

15 just to have a stat we get about 50,000 calls...

16 inquiries a week and out of those about 4,000 of them

17 are questions about Medicaid, many of those calls...

18 [cross-talk]

19 STEVEN BANKS: About 1,000... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: About 1,000... many of

21 those calls are answer... are inquiries so they're

22 answered by our IVRS system... [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

24 GRACE BONILLA: ...but that's how... that's

25 how we track complaints they go to the center, we

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2 work off the complaints, there's a reporting  
3 mechanism and a tracking mechanism to the resolution.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How... what if a  
5 complaint needs to get resolved in real time or needs  
6 to be at least addressed in real time, how, how, how  
7 do clients do that?

8 GRACE BONILLA: If they get a live person  
9 at Infoline it's usually.. that person can go to their  
10 supervisor and its escalated up to either a director  
11 or other leaders in the program if it's an emergency.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But they need to be  
13 able to get to somebody obviously so.. it's my  
14 understanding that sanctions have been.. or were  
15 suspended was that.. was that subsequent to, to the  
16 Jazmine, Jazmine Headley incident or no?

17 STEVEN BANKS: No, the, the.. we advocated  
18 for and the state passed it, I think I testified to  
19 it a law that eliminated durational sanctions in New  
20 York City and the state has recently provided us with  
21 direction to begin the sanction process again but  
22 without the durational sanction requirement, it  
23 provides a cure provision which is what we and legal  
24 aid and, and other groups had asked.. advocated for in  
25 legislation.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do, do... so that was a temporary... you know reprieve from sanctions... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: Right, the state... the state had directed us after the law passed to refrain from sanctions pending guidance about how to implement non-durational sanctions for the cure provision and we've just... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

STEVEN BANKS: ...recently been given that directive.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we expect an increase in the demand on HRA centers from clientele as a result of sanctions being reimplemented?

STEVEN BANKS: I mean we're... we, we've... we have no WEP anymore which was a big driver of sanctions and we think that we have better programs now and we have reasonable combinations in a much different level than we had for people with disabilities and that was a big driver of sanctions we thought so I think with the number of the changes we've put in place we, we are... we're ready to, to implement the state's guidance and again I think the

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2 key is that the state law provides a cure provision  
3 which was never there before.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh...

5 STEVEN BANKS: And we think that was a  
6 really important change which we advocated for along  
7 with legal aid and others.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so we've heard  
9 complaints from constituents that they have to go to  
10 a center repeatedly for the same reason submitting  
11 the same request or being turned away due to  
12 allegedly having incorrect documentation, later HRA  
13 or even hearing officers are skeptical that attempts  
14 were made and there's no receipt given for those  
15 attempts so can you speak to why no receipts are  
16 given when someone has to go for... or when someone  
17 goes to present incorrect documentation for example  
18 or they, they go to present the documentation its  
19 incorrect there's no receipt given for that  
20 interaction and then... and then they may get... [cross-  
21 talk]

22 GRACE BONILLA: So, as a point of  
23 clarification are you saying that we will ask for a  
24 particular document, the client may come in with the  
25

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2 wrong document and they do not get a receipt for  
3 wrong document?

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They don't get a  
5 receipt for their interaction and so then it's... so  
6 then later on a hearing officer or other HRA staff  
7 will say well we don't have a record of you coming  
8 in, they say no I came in, I tried but I had the  
9 wrong documents.

10 GRACE BONILLA: They should get a receipt  
11 for their visit... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Any visit should get  
13 a receipt?

14 GRACE BONILLA: Any visit should get a  
15 receipt as... and, and they will... and once the  
16 interaction is done the, the, the receipt should be  
17 given, that... again if that is not happening, we  
18 definitely want to hear about that.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. We'll, we'll  
20 communicate where we've heard that from.

21 STEVEN BANKS: I mean again I would just...  
22 to amplify Administrator Bonilla's answer, the whole  
23 reason... one of the whole reasons to create the  
24 receipt system or ticket system is, you know from my  
25 life at legal aid and everybody's life in the room

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2 probably client says I was there, agency says no you  
3 weren't but if you get a ticket it says yeah, I was  
4 there and that was the... that was the... one of the  
5 points of putting in place the ticketing system.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you describe  
7 auto posting and the reason policy.. [cross-talk]

8 STEVEN BANKS: We eliminated it.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You eliminated it?

10 STEVEN BANKS: Yep.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay..

12 STEVEN BANKS: By the way I don't mean to  
13 just roll over that, this was something that had been  
14 a huge problem where the system called auto posting  
15 was put in place that presumed that the case would  
16 close and then the worker was put in the position of  
17 having to rush to reopen it, it added a tremendous  
18 amount of, of work for workers and a tremendous  
19 amount of harm for clients, it was one of the reasons  
20 why when we first engaged with our unions that we  
21 said you know these reforms are both pro-client and  
22 pro-worker which is why it created the extra work for  
23 workers to both close the case and then reopen the  
24 case so we eliminated auto posting.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And then...

3 [cross-talk]

4 STEVEN BANKS: Is somebody saying that  
5 it's still in effect?

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sorry?

7 STEVEN BANKS: Is somebody saying it's  
8 still in effect?

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not sure just...

10 STEVEN BANKS: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, my last question  
12 is something that, that Jazmine had brought up in her  
13 testimony which was why it's... why it's the policy to  
14 have a recipient of benefits see different people,  
15 you know for, for, for instance in the case... in her  
16 case, I mean as a... as a... as a hypothetical child care  
17 and PA why is it... why would that require... it's one...  
18 it's one system, I mean I can understand maybe SNAP  
19 being a different system and... but even, even that  
20 doesn't... I don't quite understand why it's... why one  
21 worker can't have the ability to work on an  
22 individual's entire case as opposed to going and  
23 seeing multiple people even if those wait times are,  
24 are not counted consecutively or aggregated it still

25

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2 means that people have to wait for multiple  
3 appointments.

4 STEVEN BANKS: I think... you know when I  
5 was... I listened to her testimony very carefully on  
6 that point and I think, you know she... essentially she  
7 was testifying in favor of a... of a universal worker  
8 that cuts across many different functions in the  
9 agency some of those functions are specialized, some  
10 of those functions are handled by different unions  
11 but I listened very carefully to her testimony and I  
12 think we'll certainly take a look at what can be done  
13 with all of those issues in terms of expertise versus  
14 titles versus other things.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh, okay..

16 STEVEN BANKS: I, I listened very  
17 carefully to what she had to say.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, again we'd hope  
19 that it would... that's something that could... that  
20 could have a real benefit on, on client's experience.

21 STEVEN BANKS: Right but I, I'd... I want  
22 to... I want to just... [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Its challenging...  
24 [cross-talk]

25

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2 STEVEN BANKS: ...make sure the record is  
3 clear on what I said there are issues around  
4 expertise... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And... [cross-talk]

6 STEVEN BANKS: ...there are issues around  
7 title... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep... [cross-talk]

9 STEVEN BANKS: ...and there are issues  
10 around, around representation.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

12 STEVEN BANKS: And all of those are  
13 complex but we have certainly addressed a lot of  
14 complex problems over the last five years.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I... sorry, I was  
16 mistaken, I do have one more question.

17 STEVEN BANKS: Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Would you be in favor  
19 of having staff where some type of identification so  
20 that people know who it is that they were talking to  
21 eliminate some confusion on the backend?

22 GRACE BONILLA: Again, this is one of the  
23 areas where the policy is that staff is supposed to  
24 identify themselves again if that is not happening,

25

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2 we definitely want to hear about it. So, if they're..  
3 [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: ...having an issue with a  
6 staff member who refuses to give their name for, for  
7 example we want to hear about that.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, okay, I mean  
9 having a badge or a name tag of some kind is that  
10 something that would be... is that something that would  
11 have be negotiated with unions or is that something  
12 that HRA could implement?

13 STEVEN BANKS: I think it would be good  
14 for us to take your question under advisement and  
15 leave our labor management relations to that process.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, okay, I think  
17 it's something that would... that would make a lot of  
18 sense so that people can say I was talking to Mr.  
19 Davis and you know he told me XYZ.

20 STEVEN BANKS: As I think Administrator  
21 Bonilla said the policy is to identify oneself and  
22 there are... you know there are a range of different  
23 labor management issues involved here, the... we will  
24 again take into account issues that may be raised by  
25 you or by the safety net activist report.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Identify themselves  
3 if asked or identify themselves if not asked?

4 GRACE BONILLA: Usually their names are  
5 by their desk so they shouldn't have to be asked...  
6 [cross-talk]

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

8 GRACE BONILLA: Again, not happening we  
9 want to hear about it.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

11 STEVEN BANKS: Just to emphasize that  
12 last point, so Administrator Bonilla and I go out to  
13 offices, one of the things that we find to be  
14 important is actually to go to people at their desk  
15 and thank them for the work they're doing on the  
16 front lines and talk to them about their experience  
17 and I can... I don't know the name of all the thousands  
18 of workers, but the name is right there, and I see it  
19 so if there are other issues that are arising so the  
20 clients don't know those names, we're going to take a  
21 look at that.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I do want  
23 to just say that you know I, I do believe that the  
24 vast majority of, of HRA staff out there in the  
25 centers, you know are doing this because they want to

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2 help people, they're professionals, they have a lot  
3 of experience and, and they generally care about the  
4 clientele and in my experience going to centers  
5 myself with clients which I've done they've been  
6 treated courteously and, and offered help and  
7 assistance. With that said we have got to do better,  
8 and this administration has made great strides and I  
9 commend you for that and a lot of that has been in  
10 collaboration with our union partners and, and, and a  
11 lot of good things have come. This is one area where  
12 we still need to work hard at this, I intend to be  
13 here for another two years and ten months.. 11 months,  
14 I hope you all are too and, and I think.. I hope  
15 Anthony is as well and I hope that.. not to be  
16 political.. but I, I hope that, that we have the  
17 opportunity and can demonstrate our commitment to  
18 making clients experience better, that people feel  
19 respected more respected and, and that ultimately  
20 we're achieving the objective that I think we all  
21 share of helping New Yorkers who need a helping hand  
22 get the assistance that they have a right to, that  
23 they have a right to and that they deserve. So, with  
24 that... [cross-talk]

25 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you... [cross-talk]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...I will leave... do any  
3 of my colleagues have any other comments?

4 STEVEN BANKS: So, so thank you very much  
5 and I, I just want to... appreciate... I appreciate the  
6 acknowledgment of how much we've done but I want you  
7 and everyone to hear our commitment to do more, our  
8 commitment to do more because we need to do more, we  
9 will do more.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright, thank you  
11 very much. Okay, we are going to call up our first  
12 panel and this is a panel from Safety Net Activists;  
13 Brenda Riley; John Otrompke and Ebony Anderson, that  
14 is the first panel. Okay, whoever wants to begin you  
15 may begin.

16 BRENDA RILEY: Hello, my name is Brenda  
17 Riley, I'm a passionate yet dedicated person with  
18 the... member of the Safety Net Activists at the Urban  
19 Justice Center. The reason I'm here before you today  
20 is that I have a responsibility to raise my  
21 grandchildren who reside with me and receive HRA  
22 benefits. Our house... our household income is limited.  
23 I'm currently experiencing the real possibility of  
24 homelessness for the first time as I speak, from a  
25 home that I've lived for the past 16 years. My family

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2 and I are growing faces of marginalized poor people  
3 who can't get the need of housing subsidies and are  
4 excluded from access approval. Due to my destitute  
5 state of affairs and lack of ability to pay my rent  
6 and other bills don't get paid, the pay Paul and  
7 forget Peter is my syndrome. I had to visit my  
8 assigned job center which is Clinton Hill in November  
9 or October of last year to resubmit my  
10 granddaughter's school letter and request payment for  
11 my utility. The school letter had been submitted  
12 numerous times, over and over again. My  
13 granddaughter... in my granddaughters' behalf she could  
14 not attend this next meeting that I would have to go  
15 to. So, she could not go due to the concerns of her  
16 school saying that she had been out too many days  
17 trying to get this resolved. Oh god... so I carried  
18 with me a letter from my doctor because I'm  
19 permanently disabled, my social security ID and my  
20 benefit card... her benefit card to try and resolve the  
21 issues at hand and to document the needs for special  
22 accommodations, I was told by security if I was not  
23 able to be... to be online I couldn't be processed and  
24 would have to leave. Understandably I was in crisis  
25 so I stood until the pain caused notable sweating and

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2 the clients online assisted me in telling me to sit  
3 down while I could be seen by intake. In addition, I  
4 had to sit from ten a.m. to 2:30 p.m. causing  
5 additional pain. When I left the HRA Office my last  
6 20 dollars had to be spent on a cab service. I tried  
7 walking two blocks to the nearest bus service but  
8 couldn't make it. Seniors nor people with  
9 disabilities should never be treated in such a  
10 disrespectful manner. Two days later, of being bed  
11 ridden I had to visit my doctor; the medication that  
12 I was taking for the pain wasn't working. I began to  
13 have pains in my chest and in my back and, and my  
14 knee, I've had a replacement knee, that's another  
15 whole story. The reason I stand before you today is,  
16 I felt strongly about the mistreatment and this type  
17 of treatment has already previously... it had already  
18 previously occurred to me. Since then I've been  
19 actively advocating to reform the way clients are  
20 being treated and wait time in the HRA Offices  
21 through Safety Net Activists. To hear of horror  
22 stories of mistreatment that makes my testimony small  
23 and now the reason we are still... we are here because  
24 its escalated. Thank you for allowing me the  
25 opportunity to ask those who lead to request change,

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2 to look at the regulations and program changes that  
3 can enhance costs to the... to the rather... the... to  
4 enhance costs rather than to increase in medical,  
5 housing and other streams that increase when people  
6 in our communities are ignored until it becomes an  
7 epidemic. In our coming... in our coming together we  
8 collaboratively can bring about change for  
9 marginalized people's lives for centuries to come. We  
10 have this opportunity and we should take very good,  
11 well knowledge and comprehension thoughts about what  
12 we are going to do and today I will commend all of  
13 you because you have given human thought and that's  
14 more important than anything else that will happen to  
15 another individual, I don't think anyone purposely  
16 wanted to be... mine came as a result of my, my husband  
17 having cancer and died and it just changed my life. I  
18 just felt that bill number 2019-3, 3648, 3653, 3661,  
19 3662 and 3667 are all things that need to change. The  
20 Safety Net Activists at Urban Justice Center supports  
21 this administrative code of requests that the city  
22 and the New York... and New York try to amend the  
23 current standing policies of reporting the use of  
24 force in Human Services Administration Offices by  
25 Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Adrienne... and these people I

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2 want to bring thought to; Adrienne Adams and Laurie  
3 Cumbo and others. The current standing of regulations  
4 to reporting the use of force incidents occurred in  
5 the Department of Social Services and Human Resources  
6 Administration Office is at best antiquated at best  
7 and overall the history has left many people harmed  
8 in humane... inhumane ways. After carefully  
9 collaboratively in discussions, it is our hope these  
10 newly request in plans would be... will assist clients  
11 and staff and security in the de-escalation in  
12 incurred situations to ways to deal with the state of  
13 trauma related issues that hostility between security  
14 staff and people seeking help are done with. Thank  
15 you for your encountering and allowing me to speak  
16 regarding the treatment of clients and to have  
17 collaborative input to develop new ways for security  
18 and staff to treat people already traumatized by  
19 needing help to be more respectful and professional  
20 while assisting people in job centers across New York  
21 City. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
23 Miss Riley, thank you.

24 [applause]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, please, please  
3 turn on the, the red light should be on. There you  
4 go.

5 JOHN OTROMPKE: Is, is that better?

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's better.

7 JOHN OTROMPKE: Great, so my name is John  
8 Otrompke and I am here representing the Safety Net  
9 Activists that... which are associated with the Urban  
10 Justice Center. I recently applied for cash  
11 assistance and food stamps with HRA when I sought  
12 shelter at the 30<sup>th</sup> Street men's shelter, which I  
13 think used to be the... part of the Bellevue  
14 Psychiatric Hospital which was around May of 2017.  
15 So, you have... you have my statements, you have my, my  
16 paper statement which only echo what other folks have  
17 said but when I was listening to some of the other  
18 speakers, I had a couple of other ideas which I  
19 thought that I might bring up to you. One of them is  
20 that Miss Headley I think had proposed that what if  
21 there were an individual... everybody had their own  
22 unique individual case manager at HRA and it... and it  
23 kind of echoes something that I thought for a while  
24 which is that it might be very helpful for example if  
25 I had access to sort of a really dedicated career

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2 counselor. I had... personally I had been a freelance  
3 medical journalist which I still am but I had been  
4 self-sufficient up until maybe some time a couple  
5 years after the recession so up until around 2009 or  
6 so but after that my business as a freelance medical  
7 journalist trailed off quite a bit, dropped by  
8 perhaps 50 percent or more so that's one thing I've  
9 often thought is that if I had access to a personal  
10 career counselor could help me become more self-  
11 sufficient and also arguably serve as a benefit to  
12 HRA to help reduce any burden I may pose to HRA. I  
13 know there are some career counselors at the Science  
14 Industry and Business Library who speak there several  
15 times a week but one thing that I've experienced with  
16 them is that if you want to get any really valuable  
17 information out of them or valuable personal advice,  
18 they start to want to charge you money. I think it  
19 was quoted 125 dollars an hour or something by one of  
20 these career counselors so... which unfortunately I  
21 cannot afford right now but the other thing that  
22 occurred to me was when I was listening to some of  
23 the comments regarding what happened with Miss  
24 Headley, it sounds to me like a lot of folks there  
25 may have been videotaping the events with their

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2 phones and I know that I personally was at an HRA job  
3 center, I think it's the Waverly Job Center, sometime  
4 maybe a year or so ago when there started to be kind  
5 of a dispute eat the counter and a lot of people  
6 sitting there in the... there in the hall began  
7 videotaping with their phones and the staff actually  
8 started to either threaten to expel these people or  
9 actually did expel them because apparently it looks  
10 like there are some signs inside the H, HRA Centers  
11 that say videotaping with your phone is not allowed,  
12 maybe no kind of videotaping is allowed and the sign  
13 says that this videotaping is not allowed, you know  
14 for the comfort and convenience of the HRA  
15 beneficiaries who are seated there but I mean it was  
16 the beneficiaries themselves who were doing the  
17 videotaping and who seemed to support being able to  
18 videotape and in fact it was at the same center, the  
19 Waverly Job Center where if I understand it correctly  
20 someone was convicted of rape sometime within the  
21 last couple of years of raping a beneficiary. So, my  
22 thought is... I mean I, I don't know sometimes I do  
23 wonder if maybe some of the staff are maybe a little  
24 bit paranoid about videotaping or audio taping but  
25 from my perspective maybe it would be a good thing to

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2 let them videotape, let us videotape, it may even...  
3 there may even be a constitutional right to videotape  
4 inside there so maybe the City Council and HRA could  
5 impose new policies of letting people videotape if  
6 they want to if it's right out in public in the  
7 public waiting room there. So, other than that you  
8 have some of my written comments which rather reflect  
9 with what other people have said. With that I would  
10 like to thank you, I hope this testimony has been  
11 helpful to the General Welfare Committee and its  
12 efforts and thank you for the opportunity to speak  
13 today.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
15 sir, thank you.

16 EBONY ANDERSON: Good afternoon City  
17 Council. My name is Ebony Anderson and I am here  
18 today as a member of the Safety Net Activists but I'm  
19 also here today representing myself.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Could you get... pull  
21 the mic in front a little bit closer.

22 EBONY ANDERSON: Sure.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There you go, thank  
24 you.

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2 EBONY ANDERSON: But since there are  
3 thousands of people like me throughout New York City,  
4 I also represent the nameless and faceless masses.  
5 Those through a variety of unfortunate circumstances  
6 find themselves sitting in the reception area of an  
7 HRA Job Center. Many like myself wondering where it  
8 all went wrong and watching how a snowball becomes an  
9 avalanche. I submitted written testimony for the  
10 record but here is a summary of some of what I've  
11 experienced since entering the shelter about a year  
12 ago. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, a second and final  
13 familial domestic violence incident caused me to be  
14 kicked out of my home. After a week of sleeping on a  
15 nearly deflated air mattress at a friend's home, I  
16 was blessed to be accepted into a domestic violence  
17 shelter. I have cerebral palsy and from what I know  
18 of the women's shelters within the city I honestly  
19 feared going to one. March 1<sup>st</sup> of last year, I  
20 applied for public assistance for a single-issue case  
21 for housing. After waiting almost three hours to be  
22 seen, the worker at the center was nice but  
23 incompetent as she told me that I did not need to be  
24 finger imaged. Less than a month later, I received a  
25 denial for failure to comply. I went back to the same

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2 center and spoke with the same worker, she assured me  
3 that this time my case would be processed properly  
4 and that for a second time I did not need finger  
5 imaging, she even went as far as to show me the  
6 screen that populated a page that said, I did not  
7 need to be finger imaged. For my records I said well  
8 that's great, but can I have a copy of that screen  
9 just in case something goes wrong and she, she gave  
10 me the paper, I said great, I went home and waited  
11 for my benefits. And another month later I got a  
12 denial for the same reason. So, at this point I  
13 ordered... I asked for a fair hearing. When you ask for  
14 a fair hearing as we all know HRA requires the  
15 mandatory dispute resolution appointment which I  
16 appeared to. I went there and I sat with the  
17 supervisor and gave him my proof of what I had been  
18 told, it was completely ignored. He went to the  
19 Director and she completely ignored it and all I was  
20 told was you have to come back tomorrow to reapply  
21 and next time make sure you comply with HRA  
22 regulations as if it was... as if it was my idea not to  
23 comply. Finally, after three months the following day  
24 I went to a different job center and I was able to  
25 actually open a case by June of 2018. In... at the end

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2 of June 2018 I finally received my housing voucher  
3 which was five months into my six-month allotted stay  
4 at the shelter. I am still currently at that shelter,  
5 but I am only there because I have had to fight tooth  
6 and nail for extensions so HRA could be accountable  
7 for the mistakes that they made that caused me to sit  
8 there and wait. During this hearing I heard a lot of  
9 things that made a lot of sense. I came in here  
10 saying, you know HRA is the worst and nobody cares  
11 about you, but I've heard another side and after some  
12 reflection I think that perhaps HRA workers they  
13 require some sort of help as well. I know social  
14 workers and therapists, usually see social workers  
15 and therapists because they come across a lot of  
16 trauma in their daily lives and they need some way to  
17 lift it off of them. I would suggest that perhaps  
18 there be a way for HRA workers who have to deal with  
19 client's day in and day out at the centers receive  
20 some sort of care to make sure that they are in the  
21 proper mental state to deal with people in  
22 traumatizing situations.

23 [applause]

24 EBONY ANDERSON: I support the  
25 legislation today and I appreciate that you're taking

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2 the time out to address these issues however I do  
3 have some concerns. For example, I have a concern  
4 with the Intro 1328 which requires the Department of  
5 Social Services to conduct an audit of the services  
6 at the center. I support HRA being audited on the  
7 services however if HRA is the agency that is  
8 conducting the audit they are more likely to be  
9 kinder to themselves than be more critical. So, I  
10 think that there should be some outside agency to  
11 monitor if not at all... totally conduct the audits.  
12 Additionally, I believe the city must attend to the  
13 fact that landlords are still not accepting city  
14 vouchers, this is still a major issue. I thank you  
15 for allowing me to share my story and to put at least  
16 one more name and one more face to the masses. I am  
17 happy to answer any questions that you may have.  
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much for  
20 this testimony, I'm just looking at your written  
21 testimony. You speak a little bit in your written  
22 testimony about the voucher?

23 EBONY ANDERSON: Yes...

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Saga?

25 EBONY ANDERSON: Yes...

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you in the  
3 permanent apartment yet?

4 EBONY ANDERSON: Not as of yet, I have a  
5 current application pending and preferable it will go  
6 through by the end of this week.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The end of this week?

8 EBONY ANDERSON: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Amazing, feel free to  
10 reach out to my office if it does not... if there's  
11 another snag because I... looking at it you... it's hit a  
12 lot of snags, none of them are your fault but, but we  
13 want to make sure that you are in permanent housing  
14 and, and back in a... in a safe... in a safe environment.

15 EBONY ANDERSON: Thank you for that.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you and  
17 Council... Majority Leader Cumbo wants to add  
18 something.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I want to thank  
20 all of you for your testimony but I do want to thank  
21 you in particular because with what you are dealing  
22 with for you to be here today and for you to take the  
23 time out to type up your testimony, to come up with  
24 ideas, to come up with solutions and even to see it  
25 in yourself to put the employees of HRA before your

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2 own situation and your own set of issues that you're  
3 dealing with shows that you have a really big heart  
4 and a really depth of your soul to continue to be  
5 able to see the challenges of others before even  
6 yourself. So, I thank you so much for your ability to  
7 still be able to see both sides of the coin in this  
8 particular set of circumstances, so I just wanted to  
9 applaud you.

10 EBONY ANDERSON: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Amen to that, Council  
12 Member Gibson? Thank you so much to this panel, thank  
13 you very much for your insight and we look forward to  
14 working with you as this... these pieces of legislation  
15 move forward.

16 EBONY ANDERSON: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Next  
18 panel; we have Anthony Wells, President of SSEU,  
19 Local 371 and Ralph Palladino, second Vice President  
20 of Local 1549 of DC37.

21 ANTHONY WELLS: Is this on... [cross-talk]

22 RALPH PALLADINO: I've been chosen to go  
23 first, sorry. My name is Ralph Palladino, I'm the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
24 Vice President of Clerical Administrative Employees  
25 Local 1549 District Council 37. I'm here with my

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2 President Eddie Rodriguez who was an employee of HRA  
3 and SNAP program. First, I want to say that we  
4 believe in Local 1549 in DC 37 that every single  
5 client that comes in should be treated with respect  
6 and dignity. Our members from 1549, we have members  
7 who are on... were and are on the SNAP program, we have  
8 members who are at... were homeless so we get it. The  
9 bills that are in question are well intended to help  
10 clients, there possibly needs to be modifications and  
11 some we kind of agree with and not but we have to  
12 delve into that but the central issue that we see  
13 that's a, a key is what's going on, on the ground to  
14 do more preventative medicine so you don't need to  
15 have the... as much oversight and that would be the  
16 issue of lack of staffing. The backlogs, the tension,  
17 the outright hostility stem from lack of, of, of  
18 staffing. The key role in the SNAP eligibility  
19 process are the eligibility specialists. I refer you  
20 to Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's report on...  
21 entitled "The Role of Eligibility Specialists", it  
22 was the eligibility specialists that signed up all  
23 those people on the shutdown, Trump shutdown, that  
24 was the work that they did working with management on  
25 that. ESs are not responsible for the problems in

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2 SNAP wait times and other issues, there are almost 25  
3 percent less ESs working in HRA today than at, at  
4 this time four years ago, see the report that we  
5 handed out that was our testimony, that's central, it  
6 documents this. Despite the reductions of staff  
7 supervisors have always been on our members to do  
8 more with less and there's been issues with that  
9 we're trying to deal with internally with  
10 administration. The public at times unfairly blames  
11 the ESs who by law must make sure all proper  
12 documentation is produced. Sometimes this is because  
13 of incorrect information provided by some CBOs. So,  
14 the ESs must be the ones to tell the clients to bring  
15 back or resubmit proper documentation, the ESs must  
16 tell clients that they are not eligible when they are  
17 not eligible. This often leads to anger, verbal and  
18 even physical abuse by clients at times who do not  
19 understand, that's it, they just don't understand,  
20 and I understand that they don't understand. I was in  
21 that place many years ago when I lived in Southern  
22 California. The front line... the, the... to decrease  
23 the, the tensions in the waiting rooms especially we  
24 would suggest that especially in the SNAP home care  
25 areas that the front-line centers should be staffed

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2 by ESs in the rooms with the... with the clients who  
3 can navigate clients to the correct areas of service.  
4 It's also critical to have bilingual interpreters who  
5 can assist clients whose English is limited in all of  
6 the HRA centers, this will help less, lessen tensions  
7 and give information to people who are sitting there  
8 rather than just seeing law enforcement and no other  
9 staff there. Interpreters should be on duty for the  
10 face to face interpreting of clients, the use of the  
11 phone... the private contractor phone lines are not  
12 adequate and that's all they're using. This also  
13 occurs in TIPS, there are some issues in TIPS with  
14 interpreting on the phone that are problematic that  
15 we can discuss without getting into it here. This  
16 leads to the longer waits of clients waiting for  
17 service, I refer you to the New York State Report on  
18 Social Services Chaired by then Senator Avella who  
19 talked about and also the New York Immigration  
20 Coalition Survey that summarized the importance and  
21 need for face to face interpretations. So, the key is  
22 lack of, of staffing. It would reduce tension, reduce  
23 overtime and backlogs and increase proper and  
24 respectful servicing and just to say one thing about  
25 TIPS, the TIPS is no excuse to reduce staffing

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2 because the eligibility specialists still have to  
3 deal with every single case that comes in through  
4 tips as if somebody was in front of them so  
5 understand that, 25 percent reduction in the last  
6 four years, 25 percent. This is President Rodriguez  
7 who works in the... in TIPS, used to work... not TIPS,  
8 I'm sorry, food stamps.

9 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Good afternoon,  
10 my name is Eddie Rodriguez, I'm the President of  
11 Local 1549 which I represent the eligibility  
12 specialists' level one, level two and level three and  
13 they're in different programs, they're in... they're in  
14 SNAP, they're in HASA, Senior Works Infoline and  
15 Medicaid. These eligibilities do their... they, they  
16 really work hard and they're very professional  
17 workers and they do respect the clients. Today it is  
18 important I put two people from SNAP that does the  
19 work what you need to hear the people that does the  
20 work that see these clients every day, sometimes  
21 seven days a week, sometimes we work overtime, we  
22 make sure that clients get their food stamps. So, I  
23 would like to have these two workers, eligibility to...  
24 they should really tell you about the job they do,  
25 that's what you need to hear, the people that do the

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2 work and by the way HRA does help and I want to thank  
3 Commissioner Banks, he's a great help he is, that's  
4 one thing he reach out to me and I reach out to him  
5 and we do... when we come together we do serve the  
6 client, that's what it's all about management and  
7 also the working employee, it's, it's a team work so  
8 I would like to hear... I would like to give permission  
9 have these two workers and really... and tell the job  
10 they do because that's what you need to hear. Are  
11 they here? oh, they are right behind me you can go  
12 first. I'll do TIPS first because that's what's  
13 important... [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I, I... they need  
15 to fill... [cross-talk]

16 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Clark, excuse me...  
17 [cross-talk]

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...out speaker forms so  
19 can...

20 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: I was not told, okay,  
21 they'll fill it out.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Everybody that speaks  
23 have to fill out a form.

24 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Okay, they'll fill it  
25 out.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if, if... maybe Mr.  
3 Wells wants to, to speak while, while... [cross-talk]

4 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Oh, we'll put... put  
5 Anthony Wells... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...they're submitting  
7 but all... every... you know everybody has got to...  
8 [cross-talk]

9 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Which I got more  
10 seniority than he does, go ahead...

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We start... before I  
12 just have a question for you... [cross-talk]

13 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Sure... [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...Mr. Rodriguez or, or  
15 Mr. Palladino...

16 ANTHONY WELLS: He has a question, he has  
17 a question...

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The head count...

19 RALPH PALLADINO: Yes...

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What's the... why, why  
21 has it gone down by 25 percent I don't understand?  
22 What's... this has been in the last five years...

23 RALPH PALLADINO: Quite frankly, we don't  
24 understand.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, this has not  
3 been... [cross-talk]

4 RALPH PALLADINO: We do not understand...  
5 [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...conversation  
7 between... [cross-talk]

8 RALPH PALLADINO: Not if there's backlogs  
9 and overtime, we don't understand and complaints and  
10 tension to our staff and management and tension...  
11 [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But is that a... is  
13 that a concern, I mean is there... as the... has the  
14 staffing line been reduced or is it... or is it...  
15 [cross-talk]

16 RALPH PALLADINO: I have no clue...

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...or is that just  
18 attrition...

19 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: It... well... [cross-talk]

20 RALPH PALLADINO: The attrition, people...  
21 [cross-talk]

22 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: It would be... [cross-  
23 talk]

24 RALPH PALLADINO: It could be... go ahead...  
25 [cross-talk]

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2 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Go ahead... attrition,  
3 people got promoted or they, they fail it's, it's a  
4 management thing, we're working on it... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

6 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: We are working on it.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's certainly  
8 something that I, I mean obviously the  
9 administration... as the panel... as the last... but, but  
10 we can... we'll have our preliminary budget hearing  
11 next month and I'll bring it up.

12 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: And it... we need more  
13 eligibility specialists.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

15 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: We do, and they can do  
16 the work.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, Mr.  
18 Wells.

19 ANTHONY WELLS: Good afternoon, my name  
20 is Anthony Wells, I'm the President of the Social  
21 Services Employees Union Local 371, also DC 37 Vice  
22 President. I want to thank you Chairman Levin,  
23 Majority Leader Cumbo and Council Woman Gibson and  
24 all your other colleagues who were here earlier but  
25 you stayed so you get a special thank you from me...

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm required to stay.

3 ANTHONY WELLS: I know...

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm... [cross-talk]

5 ANTHONY WELLS: But let's, let's give you  
6 some credit anyway, why not. First of all, we would  
7 also like to offer apologies to Miss Headley for her  
8 treatment and to anyone that's not treated the way  
9 they should be treated when they seek services from  
10 any public agency or entity including elected  
11 officials and HRA. My union represents over 5,000 HRA  
12 employees in various, various jobs. When this  
13 Commissioner came aboard, he and I made one  
14 commitment... a few commitments, one we made to us  
15 together which it changed the culture of HRA. In my  
16 packet you will see a picture and a story reminding  
17 us... reminding us of the condition of HRA Offices in  
18 2012 when there were lines outside of many offices,  
19 okay, many offices which was outrageous both to the  
20 clients and to us. And we are committed, this local  
21 particularly and DC37 are committed to the service of  
22 citizens of New York, we take it very seriously. In  
23 1965 and 1967 this union went on strike not just for  
24 better benefits for our members for better benefits  
25 for the clients. So, we understand the relationship

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2 between clients and services and it's not acceptable  
3 at all for anybody to be... anyone to be mistreated in  
4 any center on any given day. So, there have been  
5 improvements. Like I was saying earlier the  
6 Commissioner and I made a commitment that we were  
7 going to change the culture of HRA, he was going to  
8 do it in management and we were going to do it from  
9 worker up and I will say this to you, over the last  
10 four years we made some improvements but as you say  
11 there's still a ways to go. I debate how long that  
12 way is, okay and I... and I commend and thank the  
13 youngsters to... Miss Anderson for having an open mind  
14 and understanding what this process is about, okay,  
15 no one that I represent or, or, or Mr. Rodriguez  
16 represents goes to work every day says let me see how  
17 I can abuse the clients, let me see how I can be  
18 nasty today, okay and if those individuals do exist  
19 we need to address it and we will. This Commissioner  
20 had... have taken issues, matters very seriously. I'll  
21 give you one example, we had a, a transgender... a  
22 transgender client who the worker could not... could  
23 not recognize it from... whether block... not any... on, on  
24 purpose and this Commissioner took decisive action to  
25 make sure that every client gets treated correctly

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2 and he also understands that if you treat the workers  
3 with dignity and respect then hopefully they will  
4 treat the clients with dignity and respect. On your  
5 bills and I... and I had conversation with you guys  
6 probably, I think one thing you didn't do, and you  
7 should do is talk to all the stakeholders because we  
8 can give you some perspective on the other side, one.  
9 Some of the bills are already being... the, the  
10 policies are, are in effect already. I'm concerned  
11 about publication of termination notices that may..  
12 that may violate client's rights to privacy and  
13 accessibility to their privacy, that is very  
14 important. I think if we all take a step back and,  
15 and do concrete things to make it a better experience  
16 but let's, let's understand one thing, going to HRA  
17 offices for help and not going to Macy's, I tell my  
18 workers all the time, this is not Macy's, this is  
19 not... the people who we service need help and we ought  
20 not be judgmental, we ought not act like the money is  
21 our money because it's not, okay, it is not our  
22 money, okay and we ought to treat people... because a  
23 lot of our members are clients now, we have people  
24 who get food stamps, we have people who live in  
25 shelters who work every day and understand what our

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2 clients go through. Will there be mistakes, will  
3 there be confrontations, yes, it's how we resolve  
4 those and how the policies are set from this  
5 administration to address those things when they  
6 happen. We all should work for them not to happen but  
7 no one in this room can assure you that there will  
8 not be another unfortunate incident no more than they  
9 can ensure you in this room that there won't be an  
10 incident outside in this world and people will tell  
11 you that I'm not telling you the truth, what we need  
12 to work on is trying to prevent it and then address  
13 it when it's done in a fair manner and treat clients  
14 as they are, they're people, we're people. Our, our  
15 workers come from the same communities, they have had  
16 the same experiences. I remember going with my mother  
17 to the projects to get the cheese in the basement in  
18 laundry bags like everybody didn't know what the hell  
19 you had in the laundry bag, everybody knows the  
20 difference between a, a, a dirty shirt and a box of  
21 cheese pushing out. Those days are gone because you  
22 know what, that stigma... because so many people work  
23 at Verizon had jobs, Verizon laid off 10,000 people,  
24 do you think they all got jobs, no, they came to get  
25 services. One more thing I'm going to add before I

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2 close. I sat in this for 20 years a republican rule,  
3 this union stopped HRA from create, creating a bad  
4 people center, they wanted to create this center  
5 worked in '71 that if you had any violations they  
6 would send you to the center of East River and this  
7 union said we're not going to participate in that,  
8 we're not going to create a bad people center, what,  
9 what is wrong with you, okay, so we, we got a long  
10 way... we got a ways to go, this is a step in the right  
11 direction, I am happy with the tone at the end of the  
12 day that was done here, this is not one to pit  
13 clients against workers, clients who have advocacy  
14 groups... advocacy groups advocate, is it... is it  
15 perfect, no... and I don't accept... because they told  
16 me... I called the union nobody ever answers the phone,  
17 I don't accept that, I mean nobody, nobody doing  
18 their job, nobody ever... I'm, I'm sorry, I, I just  
19 don't believe that, I've been doing this too long.  
20 Yes, there are problems let's work at addressing the  
21 problems and let's make sure that you are getting  
22 services, that workers are not being over,  
23 overwhelmed, voicemail is... it has to be... has to be  
24 returned, I'm, I'm just... I don't understand why he  
25 will but that's a different... and this system in this

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2 world now everybody has voicemail, you call any of  
3 their offices you get voicemail...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: That's right...

5 ANTHONY WELLS: ...you go... anyplace you  
6 call, any professional business now here's... I hate... I  
7 hate voicemail but guess what that's what we're going  
8 to and at the end of the day, at the end of the day  
9 in a job center or any HRA Center, there are two,  
10 two, two entities nothing is more important, nothing  
11 is more sacred than the client worker relationship  
12 and this administration has to continue to encourage  
13 that, enforce it and also try to make people who come  
14 through the door feel like they are human, wait  
15 times, I'll tell you what, wait times should be cut  
16 down. On any given day it all depends on what's going  
17 on if you were in center two weeks where they made  
18 all our workers work overtime, not going to their  
19 families at five o'clock but work overtime to ensure  
20 that clients continue to get service in spite of the,  
21 the craziness in Washington and for three days we  
22 told our workers this is what you have to do because  
23 we're there to serve, if there's no clients there's  
24 no us, it's not any bigger than that. Thank you for  
25 this opportunity to speak to you, I appreciate it.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you  
3 Anthony.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Wells.  
5 And I... and I do just want to acknowledge in my... in my  
6 first four years on, on this committee the number of  
7 times that your union and, and you testified against  
8 the actions that were proposed by the previous  
9 administration so I, I want to acknowledge... [cross-  
10 talk]

11 ANTHONY WELLS: Thank you... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the good work that  
13 the unions did during that republican rule to stand  
14 up to, to bad decisions.

15 ANTHONY WELLS: And one more thing and  
16 that... people forget their purpose was to get people  
17 off of... off of services that was their goal to reduce  
18 it at... on the backs of people who couldn't afford it,  
19 they just have one rates, they used to celebrate one  
20 rates, we want 85 percent of our cases in fair  
21 hearings I said that was the craziest thing, they had  
22 foreign investigators looking underneath people's  
23 beds and looking for shoes and all that nonsense.  
24 This administration does not do that. As a matter of  
25 fact, they, they try and there's... and there's so many

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2 programs sometimes they have overextended but it's  
3 all in the name of trying to provide services for  
4 people.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood. Thank  
6 you, thank you for your testimony.

7 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Ready?

8 [off mic dialogue]

9 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: I'm going to just use...  
10 like I said have two people that works for SNAP,  
11 they're the frontline, they do the job. I come from  
12 food stamp, I've been working for the agency it's  
13 going to be 47 years so I'm in eligibility, so I now  
14 work the food stamp, things have changed, technology  
15 is here, we understand that. Just like Anthony says  
16 our job is to take care of the community, we work  
17 very hard to make sure that the clients get their  
18 benefits, we didn't give up. Most of my members are  
19 single parents that have children, they have to  
20 really get other babysitters so they can come like a  
21 Saturday or a Sunday. So, these are the things that  
22 we do, we do sacrifice and that's what we believe.  
23 Let me give you one of my members, he's an ES2, he  
24 works in TIPS 4E2, Mr. Clark.

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2 KENNETH CLARK: Hi. Good afternoon, my  
3 name is Kenneth Clark, I am an eligibility specialist  
4 at TIPS 42 at 2500 Halsey Street. I started out with  
5 HRA working in the TIPS program, started when the  
6 clients had to call us and then it, it, it  
7 transitioned into on demand where the clients would,  
8 would call up... no, we would call the clients and then  
9 it would transition to on demand where the clients  
10 would call us. Since the transition there was  
11 introduction to several software databases that we  
12 have to interact with before loading up so we can  
13 actually conduct an interview with the clients, we  
14 found... well I found that there's been significant  
15 wait time in terms of these databases to load up so  
16 we can effectively do our job. These databases will  
17 cross reference housing, social security and other  
18 things just to make sure we get an accurate picture  
19 in terms of what the services the client is asking  
20 for. I've also noticed that when it comes to  
21 translation we were forced to utilize a, a contractor  
22 where we have to call a... we have to do conference  
23 calls in order to get the translators to translate  
24 what the clients were talking about that creates wait  
25 times as well too because sometimes what would happen

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2 is, is that these translators are not trained  
3 eligibility specialists so sometimes the questions  
4 that we're asking it gets lost in translation and  
5 we're not getting an accurate picture or we're not  
6 getting accurate information so it just makes our  
7 interviews go that much longer. That increases the  
8 wait time, that frustrates the applicants who are  
9 looking for speedy service and then sometimes you  
10 know in trying to rush and trying to get to the next  
11 call as eligibility specialists we are forced to just  
12 look at the information not really study the  
13 information. Another thing is the indexing and the  
14 scanning of or submitting of documents. So, like in  
15 the perfect world if everything is working perfectly  
16 meaning that a client calls, they submitted their  
17 documents, the documents have been indexed in a  
18 timely fashion so by the time that we... they get to us  
19 we're able to open up the software, look at the  
20 databases and look at the documents as well too, that  
21 doesn't happen in a perfect world. In my world what  
22 ends up happening is, is I have to wait long periods  
23 of time for the databases to load and then if I need  
24 to look at any documents the view is not properly  
25 working, or I can't see the documents which causes me

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2 to defer clients on documents that they already  
3 submitted. This can frustrate clients and just  
4 increases the wait time. I think that if we had more  
5 eligibility specialists to help with the interviewing  
6 and also to help with the, the indexing it would  
7 bring down the wait times and it would lessen the  
8 frustrations of the applicants.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
10 and I appreciate the, the good work that you do every  
11 day, thank you.

12 KENNETH CLARK: You're welcome.

13 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: The next person is  
14 Green, she works for Home, Home Center.

15 YOLETTE GREEN: Good afternoon... [cross-  
16 talk]

17 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Which is 45 next to  
18 you... next door to you.

19 YOLETTE GREEN: Good afternoon, my name  
20 is Yolette Green. I would first like to thank Miss  
21 Gibson for her statement in terms of knowing that we  
22 are... we work hard. We are open to the public and  
23 which in itself is extremely challenging because we  
24 have to accept each and every person who comes in and  
25 we have to service them to the best of our ability

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2 and sometimes it can be challenging... oh, okay and  
3 sometimes it's challenging because when people come  
4 they have presented documentation and a lot of times  
5 that documentation is anywhere from two to four years  
6 old so then we have to refer them back to return with  
7 the proper documentation and updated. Although a list  
8 goes out it's a form that goes to their home when its  
9 time for applications, recertifications informing  
10 them what information is needed and we also have  
11 something that is called the periodic report which is  
12 processed through the state to find out whether or  
13 not a client is continue, continues to be eligible  
14 for the benefits that they've received. That's in  
15 interim, the periodic report is in between the  
16 recertification period. So, a client has anywhere...  
17 they have... they have 30 days from the point of  
18 application to submit all of their documentation and  
19 they have 60 days for a recertification which gives  
20 them plenty of time to return with the documentation.  
21 Now a lot of times when they come in, they, they  
22 obtain a ticket and that has been structured in order  
23 to keep order in our sites so that we know who has  
24 what purpose there. Each ticket informs us as to  
25 which area that they are supposed to go to and

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2 sometimes clients obtain more than one for two  
3 different services and that causes a wait problem for  
4 them also.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you  
6 very much to this entire panel and I, I think it's an  
7 important conversation that we can have collectively...  
8 yes, go ahead.

9 YOLETTE GREEN: I'm sorry, one other  
10 thing, if possible... is it possible that the screen  
11 that, that gives the client's information in terms of  
12 obtaining child support, if it could be structured so  
13 that it would give a listing of what paper documents  
14 the clients are to come to the agency with that would  
15 assist them with not having to return to the center  
16 because they're sitting there watching the screen for  
17 the time that they're sitting there and it would give  
18 them information in order to empower them to have the  
19 proper documentation and not to repeatedly come into  
20 the center and to make notes that it must be current  
21 information. Sometimes members... I mean clients come  
22 in and they will state that they cannot read in which  
23 instance then they have to be taken aside with a...  
24 with a worker to explain to them what the  
25 documentation states and what it is they must return

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2 with but if it's something that is, you know given to  
3 them step by step, a listing that they can see on the  
4 screen that would also assist them. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

6 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: May I say something on  
7 the language, interpreters, there's a title called  
8 interpreters, a civil service title, the interpreters  
9 are not just there to translate but also translate  
10 the documents, when you call somebody on the phone  
11 that person on the other side cannot see the  
12 document, can't see the document and by the time you...  
13 and by the time he translates back and forth and if  
14 they don't... if they don't understand what the worker  
15 is saying that also takes a long time. We... you do  
16 need interpreters, there is a title again and  
17 interpreters not just translate but they also look at  
18 documents so when the client comes in they can go  
19 over the document, they can explain it and they help  
20 them to fill out so that's what we need... this is what  
21 we're saying, we've been saying that for many years.

22 ANTHONY WELLS: Just real quick, so we've  
23 also said that, we have many, many members in all our  
24 unions who are bilingual and can use their language  
25 and for 25 years in my local the city says you can do

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2 it but you pay for it, okay, the other piece is I  
3 would... can't go home if I don't tell you that we  
4 clearly support the pilot project that, that HRA  
5 wants to do on social workers and we appreciate your  
6 support on social workers, we think that program is  
7 going to be successful, it needs to be expanded so it  
8 can do other duties not just de-escalation but also  
9 address some issues that people have and, and not  
10 getting addressed, okay?

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, let's put it as  
12 a new need in the budget, the FY '20 budget.

13 ANTHONY WELLS: Yeah but you know I'll  
14 let you all... you guys talk about that I don't know...  
15 [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Listen, we  
17 understand... [cross-talk]

18 ANTHONY WELLS: ...what that means, I know...  
19 I know if there's a will to get it done you guys in  
20 this chamber and down the hall find ways to get  
21 things done, this is one that addresses an immediate  
22 problem.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks, okay... [cross-  
24 talk]

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2 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: It's important that,  
3 you know an addition to eligibility, you know it's,  
4 it takes a team.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

6 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: It takes a team to do  
7 the work, to take care of the community, okay.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you...

9 EDDIE RODRIGUEZ: Thank you...

10 ANTHONY WELLS: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, next panel  
12 Helen Strom, Wendy O'Shields, Charisma White, Ira  
13 Klein and Jonathan Sunshine and I apologize folks,  
14 we're going to put a, a... folks on the clock from here  
15 on out just because it is after five o'clock here and  
16 we do want... we have one more panel after this so we  
17 want to keep things moving so we'll put a time clock  
18 of four minutes per testimony. Thank you. Yes, yes, I  
19 want to give credit to our Majority Leader Laurie  
20 Cumbo and Council Member and Committee Member Vanessa  
21 Gibson on their incredible dedication probably  
22 canceling meetings, cancelling events, staying here  
23 and, and Commissioner... and, and Commissioner Banks  
24 and Administrator Bonilla and your entire staff for  
25 staying we greatly appreciate that, thank you.

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2 WENDY: Good afternoon, my... excuse me, I  
3 have a little post nasal drip. My name is Wendy  
4 O'Shields and I am a New York City Welfare and  
5 Homeless Rights Advocate working with the Urban  
6 Justice Center Safety Net Project and Activist. I  
7 support Intro bill 2018-3440 for the HRA centers to  
8 report annually on the number of complaints made by  
9 applicants or recipients. I support 2019-3697 for HRA  
10 center oversight and much of the legislation that's  
11 been proposed, I believe these following suggestions  
12 will improve the HRA centers, staff, facilities and  
13 recipient's experience. HRA center staff. Number one,  
14 the addition of New York State licensed social  
15 workers in good standing with a master's degree from  
16 an accredited college or university. The HRA staff  
17 social workers can triage the audience and direct  
18 applicants or recipients to the correct locations,  
19 answer questions, deescalate with trauma sensitivity,  
20 refer to DHS homeless shelters, drop in centers, safe  
21 havens, faith based beds, soup kitchens and process  
22 for emergency food or clothing and also offer other  
23 life sustaining resources. Please consider a ratio of  
24 full-time social workers per HRA center needs e.g.  
25 three to four staff for an extremely busy center, two

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2 to three staff for a moderately busy center and  
3 centers with the least traffic one to two staff.

4 Number two, mandate HRA staff to inform street  
5 homeless or recently evicted about DHS homeless  
6 shelters, drop in centers, safe havens, and faith  
7 based beds especially during code blue or a code red.

8 Three, on site employees to wear name tags on their  
9 person identifying their first initial and last name.

10 Four, yearly ethics class and a comprehensive exam,  
11 certification upon completion. Five, set a deadline  
12 and... for all present HRA employees on the job from  
13 January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 to complete doctor Willie

14 Tolliver's comprehensive HRA trauma-based training.

15 Number six, an FDNY approved ratio of onsite staff to  
16 learn their CPR and NYS oasas Naloxone certification.

17 HRA center facilities; number seven, working phone  
18 numbers for HRA centers and staff. Eight, clean  
19 common areas and bathrooms at HRA centers. Nine,

20 signage for HRA centers outside the building with a  
21 clearly visible address in large type in a prominent  
22 place and possibly lit signage. Ten, signage for HRA

23 centers inside the building with a clear address,  
24 name of the center director, managers, supervisors,  
25 building manager, operations manager, HRA law

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2 enforcement, FJC security guard supervisor and HRA  
3 child care staff with their New York State license  
4 displayed. HRA center applicants and recipients;  
5 eleven, an applicant or recipient maximum visit of  
6 one hour for most HRA center interactions. Number 12,  
7 an HRA center receipt at the end of every visit  
8 listing all documents, benefits applied for a name of  
9 all staff were serviced by. Thirteen, HRA center  
10 applicants and recipients need a way out of poverty.  
11 Consider developing a work program similar to the... to  
12 the comprehensive employment and training act CETA  
13 1973. HRA recipients could be mentored and thoroughly  
14 trained by many New York City agencies for  
15 professional jobs, a collaborative end goal of  
16 employment with the same training agency. This  
17 employment opportunity would be offered to recipients  
18 that successfully complete their job description over  
19 a years' time. A similar CETA program could mostly  
20 replace HRA back to work program allowing the city to  
21 allocate millions of NYS TANF dollars to exclusive  
22 recipient considered assistance. Let the record show  
23 I'm also submitting a paper by Peter Germanis, TANF  
24 is broken, the real irony is believing that it's been  
25 a success dated January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This paper gives

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2 a history of 1996 US block grant TANF better known as  
3 public assistance and how accessing life sustaining  
4 public benefits have been blocked from eligible poor  
5 citizens. Please see my additional documentation  
6 enclosed. Thank you for considering my suggestions.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Miss  
8 O'Shields, thank you, it's nice to see you.

9 HELEN STROM: Hello, my name is Helen  
10 Strom, I'm the Benefits Team Supervisor at the Safety  
11 Net Project and I also work with the Safety Net  
12 Activists. I want to thank the Council for holding  
13 this hearing today and for all of the oversight and  
14 attention you're giving to this issue and I want to  
15 thank HRA for all the work that they have been doing  
16 and that they are doing to try an improve these  
17 systems. We know that they are not of their creation  
18 however every day that these systems continue in  
19 these matters there are thousands of people across  
20 the city who are unable to access food and who are  
21 facing evictions because these systems don't work  
22 properly. So, thank you for allowing me to be here  
23 today. I wanted to... I submitted testimony for the  
24 record on all the different bills and I just wanted  
25 to speak to a couple of different issues that have..

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2 that came up over the course of the hearing that I  
3 thought were worth mentioning. One is the ability to  
4 resolve problems and resolve complaints. So, as was  
5 mentioned there is an office at HRA, the Office of  
6 Constituent Affairs so if people happen to see the  
7 sign in the center and they see the number for the  
8 complaint or they are able to get through the  
9 Infoline and get to the Office of Constituent Affairs  
10 in theory they are supposed to be able to submit a  
11 complaint. In practice what we find happens far too  
12 often is when people call that number, they're told  
13 oh, go to your center and a complaint is never filed.  
14 I've had this happen personally five to ten times  
15 when I've called that office and I say okay I'm here  
16 with someone, they're SNAP application was denied for  
17 this document they submitted this document on that  
18 date and the staff member says well I don't see it in  
19 the system so they should go to their center, I say  
20 well I, I would actually like to submit a complaint,  
21 well we don't see it in the system so they need to go  
22 to the center to address that issue. So, making sure  
23 that people actually are able to file complaints when  
24 they contact the agency whether it's by the phone,  
25 through the Infoline, Constituent Affairs and also in

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2 the center. I think there's a lot of time where folks  
3 are presenting problems in the center and they're  
4 being told to reapply or request a fair hearing still  
5 and I think that is probably very related to some of  
6 the staffing issues that we talked about earlier in  
7 the day, staff is working overtime, staff is working  
8 long hours, staff wants to go home maybe there isn't  
9 a supervisor available for whatever reason but when  
10 people are presenting issues at HRA all too often  
11 they're being told reapply, request a fair hearing.

12 Miss Anderson's testimony earlier she went to a  
13 mandatory speak... resolution, an appointment where the  
14 sole purpose is to resolve an issue and was told  
15 apply again, right so I think... and I, I actually  
16 think this is very related to staffing in the offices  
17 and, and one thing that we would like to see is  
18 additional staff at the centers because... and  
19 additional staff that are able to solve problems  
20 because there continue to be many situations in which  
21 you need a person to fix a problem for you and in  
22 those situations there often is no one available even  
23 when you talk to someone at Constituent Affairs they  
24 themselves often are not able to take action to  
25 resolve the issue, they forward it to the home center

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2 but the home centers are already overloaded which is  
3 why as our report shows the vast majority of calls at  
4 the individual centers are not answered or returned.  
5 When we brought this up and we talked to staff at the  
6 centers and we talked to HRA it's a capacity issue,  
7 they don't have time to return calls or pick them up  
8 because they're so many people in the centers that  
9 they're trying to see. So, what we'd like to see is a  
10 real commitment from HRA, from the Council, from the  
11 city of New York to adequately staff these offices so  
12 that people can be served in the manner that they  
13 need to be because until we have enough people that  
14 are able to fix problems and we have enough people in  
15 the offices I don't think many of these problems are  
16 going to be resolved. I think... the other thing I want  
17 to say is with the cash pilot and the, the pilot to  
18 try and make things more accessible in the Bronx, I  
19 think that you're going to continue to see issues  
20 because folks applying for public assistance still  
21 have to go to a ton of appointments for cash  
22 assistance in order to be approved. They have to go  
23 to BEV in Brooklyn, they have to go to the office of  
24 child support enforcement, they have to go to all of  
25 these work appointments, they have to... like there's

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2 so many different appointments and they still have to  
3 do an in-person interview at the center. So, I think  
4 consolidating as much into one appointment and I  
5 think also just trying to make sure that there are  
6 people that you can talk to like the procedure was  
7 already that Jazmine Headley should have spoken to a  
8 supervisor, that was the policy in place when you  
9 have an issue you're supposed to have access to a  
10 supervisor but the problem was there wasn't an easily  
11 accessible supervisor for her that saw her day, right  
12 so I think that is at the core of the problem that we  
13 need to address. Yep.

14 CHARISMA WHITE: Hello, my name is  
15 Charisma White, I'm a, a client at HRA, I've been a  
16 client for several years now. I have a medical  
17 condition, I have severe anemia which causes me to  
18 pass out and things like that. I have a care provider  
19 which is my fiancé and we went to HRA one day because  
20 we're currently homeless and DHS system they kind of  
21 like went into our case, changed stuff around so they  
22 wanted us to consolidate our case into one as a  
23 family unit and when we went to the center to try to  
24 get it resolved I was attacked on the elevator by a  
25 DHS peace officer and FJC security and a plain

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2 clothed officer which I have no idea came from where  
3 or what his job description was actually, he was  
4 plain clothed. And when it was all said and done the  
5 response, I got from HRA was that these security and  
6 DHS could do what they want to people and there's  
7 nothing nobody could do. As of now I am still trying  
8 to get a result for how I got attacked, how I feel  
9 now going into centers and everything is just  
10 overwhelming. There needs to be a big change in that  
11 perspective, we are human, we're not animals, we're  
12 not to be herded or anything like that. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, thank you  
14 for your testimony.

15 JONATHAN SUNSHINE: Hi, my name is  
16 Jonathan Sunshine and I'm with the... I'm a... I work  
17 with the, the Safety Net Activists and I'm part of  
18 the Safety Net... the overall Urban Justice Center, I...  
19 you know I'm more... you know I'm a business consultant  
20 kind of at my... but the thing is that I... you know I  
21 was listening to the testimony of the lady that...  
22 Headley... Miss Headley, that lady that got the... her  
23 baby ripped away from her by the, the... I think that  
24 first of all what I think about this is that you... if  
25 you had people to come in, you know you have people

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2 working that, that... at the things of... where they  
3 could have a, what they call... you know like... you're  
4 special... you know like I'm a peer specialists too and  
5 with peer specialists... if you had peer specialists  
6 working within the DHS and the... and the HRA and  
7 everything all it... I mean if they had special  
8 assignments they could come in they could hold like  
9 these little meetings to let people know what their  
10 entitled to, what their benefits are, what their  
11 rights are before they get into... you know before  
12 they, you know get into the thing, I mean right after  
13 they... right after they go through the kiosk and stuff  
14 like that then they would have this before they see  
15 their workers and stuff like that because sometimes  
16 I've seen... you know I've seen arguments break out  
17 over, over these issues in, in, in these various  
18 centers and stuff like that, I've got... I mean when I  
19 was young they used to do it a lot, they... you know  
20 and my mom used to have to deal with the lines and  
21 all of that and as for needing the food and  
22 everything that they used to have in the... you know  
23 they used to do all that kind of stuff too and now  
24 you know they want to cut down on the foods, they  
25 want to cut down on the... you know they want... they

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2 want to send it back to like the 1920s, you know I  
3 mean if it's left... if it's left up to the powers that  
4 be in Washington they.. we would be going back there,  
5 I mean we... I thought we've been progressed, I mean it  
6 was not... it's not the time of, you know George  
7 Washington and all of that, I mean we had Obama and..  
8 you know and, and lord knows how long it was between  
9 George Washington and Obama, you know so I'll just..  
10 I'll just put it this way, if you had better.. it's,  
11 it's got to be more respect for one another, you know  
12 what I mean, the, the, the clients that go into the  
13 place they go in there, they, they ask for dignity,  
14 they ask for respect, they ask for courtesy and  
15 kindness, when they go in there to deal with these  
16 issues, they got a lot of issues that they have to  
17 deal with and that's the last thing they need.. the  
18 last thing they need is somebody saying, you know  
19 denying them their services because they either can't  
20 speak the language or they don't have the right  
21 documents or something like that or their documents  
22 are too old or whatever, ever the situation that's  
23 caused by the bureaucracy, I mean you know they,  
24 they.. you know a lot of people put.. you know they..  
25 they're told to come in a certain day and then, then

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2 reschedule and then... that could be like four or five  
3 years down the line by the time they get to the next  
4 time they see this, this person. So, they... those  
5 documents they either shred it or whatever, you know  
6 its old information, but they want you to have  
7 information from 20, 30 years ago when you walk in  
8 there. So, you know it's any wonder that a lot of  
9 this stuff aren't really updated because a lot of the  
10 documents they need are long gone or thrown out or  
11 people moved and stuff like that. In my case... in my  
12 case it was... they, they, they... you know they throw  
13 out my stuff so you know what, what can I say, you  
14 know what I mean? So, this is where I... where I... this  
15 is the way I see it, if peer specialists would help...  
16 you, you know we are the Safety Net Advocates, we can  
17 put in those things but those... that's what's really  
18 needed also in addition to the things we are doing,  
19 we're, we're there to help and... we're there to help  
20 but we can't be the ones always on the front lines,  
21 we have to have other organizations come in and help  
22 us and other services and products, you know other  
23 services come in along with us so that's what we're  
24 asking from the... you know from the council here and

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2 we thank you for our time.. for your time and effort.  
3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr.

5 Sunshine, it's nice to see you. Alright, I want to  
6 thank this panel very much, thank you for the good  
7 work that you're doing, and we look forward to  
8 working with all of you as these pieces of  
9 legislation move forward and on into the future,  
10 thank you. Next and final panel Towaki Komatsu;  
11 Raqibah Fatimah, Basir; Kelly.. yes, sorry. Scott  
12 Parkins.. sorry, Hutchins, sorry Scott and Sharitza  
13 Lopez Rodriguez. And if anyone else would like to  
14 testify please sign in with the sergeant at arms,  
15 this will be the final panel.

16 SCOTT ANDREW HUTCHINS: I guess I'll go  
17 first. I'm... my name is Scott Andrew Hutchins and I'm  
18 with Picture the Homeless, I've been with Picture the  
19 Homeless for the past six years. I've been dealing..  
20 the, the... Jazmine Headley's case reminded me very  
21 much of the 2012 incident where I was violently  
22 arrested at an HRA office for raising my voice  
23 because I was sent by the director of my current  
24 shelter to obtain documentation explaining that  
25 because I was on employment at the time that I could

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2 not have my storage paid for by HRA, they refused to  
3 give me that documentation so I raised my voice and I  
4 was arrested by about six officers. The charges were  
5 dismissed because the summons they, they charged me  
6 with disorderly conduct and put a line in the  
7 description case and Mr. Banks was given a very  
8 lengthy blog entry describing this in detail a number  
9 of years ago. I've been dealing with HRA since 2005  
10 actually because I graduated from the college of  
11 Staten Island on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 20, 20... 2005 with a  
12 master's degree and 13 days later I was in the  
13 emergency room with a chronic issue and I have to say  
14 that for the most part the only improvement I've seen  
15 at HRA personally is the computers in the... in the  
16 registration area and even that's not that big of an  
17 improvement because even though it cuts down on the  
18 wait time on numerous occasions I'll bring the print  
19 out where it's supposed to go, the person writes  
20 something on the... on, on the, the printout because  
21 the printout was wrong and acts like I'm stupid  
22 because I went where the printout told me to go and I  
23 didn't know the information that they wrote on the  
24 sheet so that, that was an issue. The past year or so  
25 I've been trying to get a housing voucher at the

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2 discretion of my shelter, they keep sending me back  
3 there and there have... there have always been issues.  
4 I was... I was escorted out by cops for raising my  
5 voice because they, they refused to update my  
6 address, they've been refusing to update my address,  
7 I was just in last week the, the address that they  
8 had was still the shelter on Avenue D where I haven't  
9 been since early 2016 even though they've been  
10 brought numerous residency letters and I've gone to  
11 numerous different workers, they've all just not  
12 updated my address so they're sending these denials  
13 to an address where I can no longer receive them. I  
14 also was recently given a denial because I failed to  
15 attend the back to work program even though they were  
16 provided with a letter by my employer so basically it  
17 was like oh, we closed your case so... like you didn't  
18 attend back to work because you were provided with an  
19 employer letter and like they don't care, they,  
20 they're given the information, full documentation and  
21 they just don't do what's required and of course in  
22 my experience the back to work program is completely  
23 useless because I come to them with medical  
24 documentation that says limit standing, walking,  
25 lifting, bending, pushing, and pulling and they want

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2 me to be a parks janitor or do... load trucks for Fresh  
3 Direct and then they wonder why I'm a long term  
4 stayer in the shelter system because I'm not on my  
5 own, I've been applying for... literally applied for  
6 well over 3,000 jobs over the course of my  
7 homelessness and the... and gotten interviewed for  
8 about 30, most, most of the responses I get to my  
9 resume is for the entry level marketing scam so... and  
10 that's not even a desk job so I, I, I'm doing the  
11 best I can on my own and they're acting like oh,  
12 you're such a problem because you're not leaving the  
13 shelter system well nobody's lifting a finger to  
14 actually help me because they see my education, they  
15 see my medical restrictions and they say parks  
16 janitor, Fresh Direct, it makes no sense to me and I  
17 really have not seen any improvement like I said  
18 other than the computers but if the computers are  
19 giving you the wrong information that's not an  
20 improvement either. So, I guess... I'm sorry, I didn't  
21 have written testimony this time and I know you've  
22 seen me in here before. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
24 for your testimony, thank you. Oh, and sorry we're  
25 just going to also call Juliane Williams from Safety

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2 Net Activists as well as the final member of the  
3 public. Sorry, you have to turn on the light.

4 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: Okay, are we  
5 good? Good evening everybody, my name is Raqibah  
6 Fatimah Basir, I'm a lengthy client as well as a  
7 resident of the shelter system. I'm not alone, I  
8 would like to take it.. turn the clock back to 1974.  
9 Some of you all that are present up there are aware  
10 of my situation as well. In 19... June of 1974 at the  
11 Dyckman welfare center and I understand this is  
12 before your time Commissioner, I went to Dyckman  
13 welfare center, got caught in the rain with a three-  
14 week-old baby, my son, my oldest son who is now 44  
15 and at the time the desks used to close at two p.m.  
16 When I got there I was two minutes before two p.m.  
17 and I was denied services so by me requesting to  
18 speak to a supervisor at the time because I had an  
19 urgency because my then mother in law did not want me  
20 to stay no longer with her after her son had got  
21 killed and I carried my son and gave birth so the  
22 realtor who was holding the apartment for me at the  
23 time stated that if I didn't come with the rent and a  
24 security and brokers fee that he was going to give  
25 the apartment to someone else. So, with that urgency

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2 I requested a supervisor instead of a supervisor it  
3 was an HRA officer by the name of Rupert Bowen and I  
4 will never forget that man's name for as long as I  
5 live. Now Rupert Bowen came to me at the time and  
6 said ma'am what is the problem and I stated to him  
7 the problem is, is that I'm about to be put out from  
8 my then mother in law's apartment and I have a three  
9 week old baby, I just gave birth, I got caught in the  
10 rain two blocks away from here now and now I'm being  
11 told that I'm not going to be receiving services and  
12 I... and well either you leave or you... your... or you'll  
13 be escorted out of here, I said well sir I have  
14 enough pampers and formula for us to sit here on the  
15 weekend, I cannot leave until I, I receive this rent  
16 security and brokers fee. So, by him hovering over me  
17 and mind you I'm almost five four, this man is six  
18 four... six feet four inches, I, I got up to move away  
19 from him and I moved away from him in such a way but  
20 being that he was taller than I was he went and took  
21 his fist, so I had my baby like this in my arm, three  
22 weeks old and instead of swinging on me he hit my son  
23 by his temple and if you could have seen the  
24 expression of my three week old son at the time, this  
25 is a true story, okay, I was... I was violently

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2 arrested as well for it. When I saw the shock in my  
3 son's mouth was stuck, beet red, stuck I had to shake  
4 my baby with this arm to get him out to get a cry out  
5 and it was then, yes, I acted violently, I grabbed a  
6 wooden chair and I commenced to beating this man for  
7 what he did to my baby then a number of other HRA  
8 officers came to join the attack as opposed to  
9 defusing the situation. One of them came from behind  
10 me and tripped me, there was this white woman with  
11 her four children, I will never forget her name Mari  
12 Revreby, she had hollered at them what is wrong with  
13 you all she has a... she's a baby, she has saved my  
14 son's head, this... say this is the floor, my son's  
15 head was this much from hitting that floor and could  
16 have died. So, while the 34 precinct entering the  
17 Dyckman Welfare Center and everybody was in an uproar  
18 as to how I was being treated, it was this white  
19 woman and her four kids as well as three elderly  
20 women who tried to intercede, the police were not  
21 hearing them as well as HRA, yes, I was arrested, yes  
22 they snatched my son out of my arms the same way they  
23 did to Miss Jazmine Headley last month... or excuse me,  
24 in December of 2018 so I have experienced the same  
25 type of, of abuse at the hands of HRA. Now turning up

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2 to 1984, 1984 I and my children as of... as a result of  
3 me being victimized and the home that I was staying  
4 with I was violated with one of my children next to  
5 me, my other children had been enforced to care being  
6 mistreated so I was in the process of trying to get  
7 them and try to get housing, you don't ask a mother  
8 to look for housing while you're holding her  
9 children, you understand hostage in the... in the... in  
10 the ACS system and then expect... and then expect to  
11 tell her that well you can't get your kids back  
12 unless you... unless you obtain an apartment, how is  
13 that possible, it's like a catch 22 situation. So, at  
14 that time from 1983 to 1984 the, the HRA system and I  
15 understand this is before you Commissioner Banks  
16 while paying 5,000 dollars for seven people to stay  
17 in a welfare hotel at the time was called the  
18 Travelers. I met a lot of confrontation not only with  
19 the staff or residents, nobody even at HRA something  
20 Boulevard in Jamaica Queens Welfare Center was trying  
21 to assist me and my family, nobody, okay. At the time  
22 that I asked a case worker before me and my family  
23 was victimized, and I was wrongfully incarcerated,  
24 named Naomi, I have all this written down for years,  
25 for decades. I asked her I said ma'am isn't there

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2 some way that you can take this 5,000 dollars because  
3 it seems to me the shelter system is monetarily  
4 benefiting off of misfortunes of people like myself,  
5 they're not assisting me and my family to get into  
6 permanent housing, they're running me ragged looking  
7 for it and my health is taking a hit, well I don't  
8 know what to tell you ma'am. There was no solid  
9 answer period, okay. That... later on that night my  
10 family and I were victimized, my... one of my children  
11 were murdered, I found in the apartment who I  
12 entrusted my kids with somebody's care while I was  
13 unwinding, I was at the welfare center Dyckman... not  
14 Dyckman but something Boulevard in 1984 obtaining a  
15 check. Mind you at the time you used to go to the  
16 welfare center at eight a.m. and don't come back to  
17 the welfare... to the welfare hotel with their check  
18 and whatever bill you had to pay there for until  
19 eight p.m., this is the... this is the, the, the  
20 extenuating circumstance and, and from what I  
21 understand now from some people that I speak to,  
22 nothing has much changed, yes, they have updated the,  
23 the, the technology but they are still the same  
24 mentality of staff, I'm not going to accuse all the  
25 staff but there, they're the same mentality where

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2 sometimes you do have to go back to the welfare  
3 center repeatedly with the same type of paperwork  
4 that was already submitted. Okay, maybe the worker is  
5 having a bad day and to piggy back on what the other  
6 people said, yes, there's needs to be some type of  
7 consideration and this is not an... in direct attack on  
8 workers but you know because whatever personal  
9 problems they're going through you understand on top  
10 of the clients going through, you know there's needs  
11 to be some type of area where they address their... not  
12 only their personal issues so they can function and  
13 provide better services but also too to question  
14 their, their, their drug or alcohol use because  
15 sometimes I feel as though many of them are under the  
16 influence. Now, now up to date, we're talking about  
17 from 1983... I mean '74, '83, '84 now we're in 2019  
18 nothing has changed, I commend the Commissioner for  
19 trying to better, better HRA and you know he's a pro...  
20 he was pro client once upon a time who used to  
21 represent legal aid... [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

23 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: ...you cannot fix  
24 something with... when you have the same individuals  
25 who are disgruntled with him and also denying me and

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2 other people from obtaining a shelter voucher, for  
3 the time I've been home which is eight years now I'm  
4 still dealing with the shelter system, I've been  
5 moved from one shelter to the other and now I'm in a  
6 shelter scattered site apartment which is contracted  
7 with the city, DHS, I have not moved out of the  
8 shelter system, the same rules and, and, and activity  
9 applies... [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

11 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: ...this is supposed  
12 to be under supportive housing as well as under  
13 mental health... [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

15 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: ...okay, nobody...  
16 I'm not being adequately assisted so my thing now is  
17 that where do we draw the median here, we have the  
18 same system from the, the, the 70s or early 80s when  
19 the homeless situation really started getting out of  
20 hand to now 2019... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep... [cross-talk]

22 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: ...where does an  
23 individual like myself receive... where do I get... who  
24 helps me... [cross-talk]

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So... [cross-talk]

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2 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: ...who adequately  
3 helps me?

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm, I'm happy to if  
5 you want to call my office tomorrow or send me an  
6 email... [cross-talk]

7 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: I've been there  
8 already, honestly, I don't know why your worker never  
9 got back to me.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I will follow up for  
11 sure, for sure.

12 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: Thank you Mr...

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You got it, thank  
14 you. Thank you for your testimony.

15 RAQIBAH FATIMAH BASIR: You're welcome.

16 KELLY GRACE BONILLA PRICE: I just want  
17 to say I'm sorry that things have been so hard for  
18 you ma'am and, and I can relate. I'm Kelly Grace  
19 Price from Close Rosies and I'm an Ad Hoc member of  
20 Safety Net, I have been for years not that active but  
21 I'm very proud to call myself a member. I've been a  
22 client of HRA since 2011 when I was wrongfully as you  
23 know my story and Council Woman Gibson and I believe  
24 Miss Flattery knows, definitely Commissioner Banks  
25 knows my story that Cy Vance threw me as an innocent

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2 person on Rikers Island as a survivor of domestic  
3 abuse and trafficking to protect the credibility of,  
4 of my batterer who was providing proffer that allowed  
5 Cy Vance to sweep through uptown Manhattan and make  
6 all those big RICO gang busts a number of years ago  
7 and ever since then I have been dependent on HRA to  
8 help me restore myself to the status that I enjoyed  
9 before my malicious prosecutions on lawful detention  
10 and wrongful arrests. I've made a lot of progress  
11 thanks to Mr. Banks, I know he remembers my case when  
12 legal aid defended me and I'm very appreciative to  
13 his staff. I've sought solace in the HRA centers and  
14 to be quite frank I think I've received extra  
15 attention because Mr. Banks and his general counsel  
16 Molly Malloy, Molly Malloy... Molly Murphy, hi met me  
17 at a Safety Net Activist meeting at the Urban Justice  
18 Center a few years ago. I'm very proud to be a  
19 client, there have been a number of occasions where  
20 things haven't gone right. For instance, just  
21 Saturday I got something in the mail saying please  
22 come in for an appointment on the 18<sup>th</sup> but the letter  
23 was postmarked the 19<sup>th</sup> of January so I'm looking  
24 forward to working that out but luckily, I have a  
25 special liaison to help me. I brought Frank Sinatra

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2 my service.. my service dog with me today, he's new,  
3 he's only eight months old, he's my third service  
4 dog, I'm also a survivor of the terrorist attacks on  
5 the twin towers and I really need my service dog but  
6 I've had a number of incidents lately where I've been  
7 just outright discriminated against by HRA workers.  
8 I, I emailed my testimony to you Councilman Levin,  
9 I've also emailed it to you Miss Flattery and other..  
10 to Council Woman Gibson thank you for accepting my  
11 email submissions, I don't have a printer but I, I  
12 just want to, to emphasize how triggering it is for  
13 me after I've made all this progress to be met with  
14 blatant discrimination and this is not every HRA  
15 worker. I'm, I'm on a first name basis with, with the  
16 workers in the Dyckman Center, I knew Miss Mota the  
17 former director, I know a lot of those workers, they  
18 live in my neighborhood of Fort George but there was  
19 one particular worker and I'm going to call her out  
20 very quickly, her name is Miss Blessing Game who  
21 outright discriminated against me at an appointment I  
22 had on December 18<sup>th</sup>, I had a very similar incident  
23 at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street center in December where the  
24 worker did not want to service me because of my  
25 service dog and she retaliated against me actually

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2 after the, the meeting at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street center I  
3 was supposed to go to WeCARE for my annual  
4 verification that I have a disability or whatever it  
5 is and the worker didn't give me the letter saying  
6 show up at WeCARE on this date, she said to me.. she  
7 was bitter because her manager made her service me  
8 and she didn't want to because she didn't like Frank,  
9 she kept saying I don't like pit bulls and I kept  
10 saying Frank is not a pit bull, Frank is a boxer but  
11 she wasn't accepting that, she said I know pit bulls  
12 when I see one but to retaliate against me because  
13 she was forced to accommodate my needs she told me  
14 that there were no appointments at WeCARE that she  
15 could schedule but that I would get a letter in the  
16 mail about it but in fact she did schedule the  
17 appointment she just never gave me the letter so of  
18 course then I got a letter from WeCARE saying you  
19 must come in and make up this appointment. These  
20 things repeat themselves consistently and I really  
21 hope that somehow in, in your revision of these bills  
22 because I do understand there will be some.. a modicum  
23 of revision of these bills that you include the  
24 mandatory ADA, American's for Disability Act training  
25 needs to be instituted not just for HRA workers but

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2 for their partners. Last week at the West Side  
3 Coalition Against Hunger the program director  
4 threatened to call the cops and have me arrested for  
5 trespassing because of my service dog, I've, I've  
6 sent out a round of few emails and Helen Rosenthal is  
7 helping with this... me with this because it's in her  
8 district, thank you for letting me testify, I know no  
9 one is bringing up this issue and I, I appreciate  
10 your consideration.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We'll definitely take  
12 that into consideration as we move forward..

13 KELLY GRACE BONILLA PRICE: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

15 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Hi, I'm Towaki Komatsu  
16 and I testified in this... well to you many times  
17 truthfully unlike Mr. Banks over there. I have a  
18 federal lawsuit against the city as... that I apprised  
19 you about previously. My testimony today it's not for  
20 you, it's for the judges assigned to my federal  
21 lawsuit. There's a video camera staring me straight  
22 in the face and so for the audience's benefit and  
23 Judge Lorna Schofield as well as Judge Gabriel  
24 Gorenstein let me play an audio recording of a face  
25 to face conversation that I had with Steven Banks on

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2 December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Brooklyn that I think I  
3 previously played for your benefit.

4 [video recording audio]

5 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Earlier today prior to  
6 coming to this hearing I talked to a disabled  
7 military veteran who resides in my building, I also  
8 testified on his behalf in this room previously. I  
9 had a conversation with Mr. Banks in Brooklyn in  
10 August of last in regard to having repairs made in  
11 that building by Urban Pathways which is the, the  
12 landlord, I have specifically asked Mr. Banks  
13 repeatedly to terminate HRA's contract with Urban  
14 Pathways on the grounds that it has defaulted on that  
15 contract. Sorry, one second.. so let me play, I'll  
16 turn this around, here's the disabled military  
17 veteran that I had the conversation with earlier  
18 today.

19 [video recording audio]

20 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Okay and the last brief  
21 part of the video that I'll play for your benefit as  
22 well as the audience is testimony that I gave on June  
23 19<sup>th</sup> of 2017 to the Committee on Oversight and  
24 Investigations with regards to having an inspector  
25 general independent of HRA outside of HRA to

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2 essentially investigate fraud and corruption by HRA  
3 as well as its business partners.

4 [video recording audio]

5 TOWAKI KOMATSU: So, let me cut to the  
6 chase prior to coming into this room today I notified  
7 someone from the New York State Attorney General's  
8 Office as well as the City Law Department of my  
9 intent to file an order to show cause application of  
10 my federal lawsuit tomorrow. It's my full intent to  
11 deliver on that commitment. Prior to coming here  
12 today I also talked to Darren Martin from Mr. Banks  
13 team, he essentially stonewalled me at a public  
14 resource fair meeting that the, the Mayor held last  
15 week in the Bronx unfortunately Vanessa Gibson is too  
16 preoccupied with violating our due process rights to  
17 give us time of day so she's lying unfortunately  
18 she's not under oath so with regards to due process  
19 what I see all around me are empty seats. When this  
20 meeting began there were about ten people from your  
21 panel in chairs in this room, right now if you look  
22 around there is Miss Gibson, there's you but where is  
23 Adrienne Adams, where is Laurie Cumbo, where is  
24 Jumaane Williams, where is Mr. Grodenchik. So, with  
25 regards to the public's right to due process and also

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2 if you look at the ceiling, if you actually take  
3 heart of what it says, where the hell is due process  
4 when I have to go home tonight there aren't repairs  
5 being made in my building, I got 15 f###ing... sorry, I  
6 got 15 punches to my left temple after there was an  
7 attempted assault on May 12<sup>th</sup>, I've been in contact...  
8 I was in contact with HRA as early as March 10<sup>th</sup> of  
9 2016 about a bait and switch that I talked to you  
10 about so Mr. Banks's response to me on December 14<sup>th</sup>  
11 of 2017 was that HRA is not responsible for a crime  
12 even when people put them on notice that there's a  
13 mentally unstable guy who's about six foot two or six  
14 foot four trying to kick your... kick you or something  
15 in your living room and you ask for a good reason for  
16 that person to be evicted so that you won't be taking  
17 those 15 punches to your head, where's the oversight?

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
19 for your testimony, we appreciate...

20 JULIANE WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, I'm  
21 Juliane Williams, I am a member of the Safety Net  
22 Activist Group and I am a recipient of public  
23 assistance. I first would want to say thank you to...  
24 [cross-talk]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Could you pull the  
3 microphone closer to you if you don't mind... [cross-  
4 talk]

5 JULIANE WILLIAMS: Yeah, I first want to  
6 say thank you to Urban Justice, I've been through  
7 different situations with HRA and I want to say thank  
8 you to them for assisting me, thanks also to the  
9 Commissioner and his staff. I know there are a lot of  
10 issues that are not resolved, and my part is that we  
11 can all get things resolved so that needy people will  
12 get the assistance that we really need. I'm here to  
13 speak about students that are in college that... as a  
14 college I'm in the WEP program and it's very, very  
15 difficult especially when you're in certain courses  
16 that deal with health care to do like certain hours  
17 when you're out of class time to be studying to be  
18 working while other students are really vigorously  
19 studying to really get out of system and to move on  
20 with your career. So, I'm hoping that the  
21 Commissioner and his staff will kind of address those  
22 situations so students who receive public assistance  
23 and get... and are in college and really want to get  
24 into the workforce can really be given more time, the  
25 time that you do work you will be given... you will

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2 help, we need help like people to assist us so we can  
3 get off the system and get into the workforce.

4 Another situation I encountered is where I went for  
5 recertification with my daughter now deceased and my  
6 documents were mishandled or misplaced by the staff  
7 and my case was closed right away. We suffered

8 immensely like for a period of six months we didn't  
9 get SNAP benefits thanks to Urban Justice we had to  
10 go to a fair hearing and my benefits were restored

11 but I would ask that cases are not closed immediately  
12 when there's an issue because sometimes it's not...

13 that documents are not submitted, I had my receipt, I

14 had everything submitted that I was supposed to

15 submit and my case, my daughter and I suffered. In

16 addition to losing my benefits I had lifeline and up

17 until this day I tried very hard to get

18 representation from HRA to send into the phone

19 company to remove this charge of over 200 dollars on

20 my credit report which is still there today not for

21 any fault of mine but because my case was closed

22 because of an HRA staff member's mistake or whatever

23 they did the computer closed my case. So, I want to

24 say thank you to Urban Justice and HRA for what

25 you're doing but if you could do something more to

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2 help more in deleted programs that are given to  
3 college students who are on HRA so they can focus  
4 more to get into the workforce to get their life  
5 independent and if and when documents or whatever the  
6 situation is that allows any form of interruption  
7 with your case not to close one's case because  
8 sometimes it's not the recipients fault and we suffer  
9 immensely when, when needed benefits that we need are  
10 shut down. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
12 Miss Williams, thank you. I want to thank this panel  
13 very much for your testimony and I look forward to  
14 working with all of you moving forward on all of  
15 these issues that you brought up today and I want to  
16 thank all of our panelists, everybody that has stayed  
17 throughout this hearing which is, you know going on  
18 five hours now so I thank all of you for, for your  
19 dedication to this issue. Obviously, your dedication  
20 is demonstrated by all of your willingness to  
21 participate in this hearing and we look forward to  
22 working with all of you moving forward. I want to  
23 thank Vanessa Gibson my colleague for, for being here  
24 till the end as well as Committee staff Aminta  
25 Kilawan, Tonya Cyrus, Crystal Pond, Julia Haramis and

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2 my staff Elizabeth Adams and Deedra Cheatham who are  
3 here and Mr. Banks and your staff I thank you for  
4 being here and staying and the Speaker, all of my  
5 colleagues and, and obviously Miss Jazmine Headley  
6 for her very important and powerful testimony this  
7 afternoon and with that at 6:07 p.m. this hearing is  
8 adjourned.

9 [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

March 7, 2019