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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

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2

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

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

3

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

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 7th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 SNAP center. A report will be posted on HRA's website
3 and submitted to the City Council by April 1st 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 7th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 7th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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-

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 fight that off between now and April 1st, 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 7th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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,

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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...

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 7th.

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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?

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 4th...

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No. She went there..

3 [cross-talk]

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

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

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

15 [cross-talk]

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

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

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

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

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

25

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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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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...

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 thee 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

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1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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,

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 30th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

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

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

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

EBONY ANDERSON: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There you go, thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 1st, 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 1st 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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...

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 2nd
24 Vice President of Clerical Administrative Employees
25 Local 1549 District Council 37. I'm here with my

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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...

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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.

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 1st, 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 26th, 2019. This paper gives

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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..

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 2nd, 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 18th but the letter
23 was postmarked the 19th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 18th, I had a very similar incident
23 at the 16th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 after the, the meeting at the 16th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 December 14th, 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 19th 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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 12th, I've been in contact...
8 I was in contact with HRA as early as March 10th of
9 2016 about a bait and switch that I talked to you
10 about so Mr. Banks's response to me on December 14th
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]

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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