

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

March 25, 2019
Start: 10:17 a.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

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

ANDY L. KING
Co-Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

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

Greg Waltman
Owner of G1 Quantum

Lisa Gitelson
Associate Executive Director of the Council of
Family and Child Caring Agencies, COFCCA

Mikola De Roo
Vice President for Public Affairs at Food Bank
For New York City

Harold Alexis
Member of Neighbors Together, Resident of DHS

Towaki Komatsu
Federal Lawsuit Against the City

JoAnn Yoo
Executive Director of the Asian American
Federation

Ruth O'Sullivan
Clinician at the Center for Court Innovation's
Brooklyn Mental Health Court

Chris Durosinmi
Assistant Director of Government and Community
Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society

Louie Sawi
Policy Coordinator for the Coalition for Asian
American Children and Families, CACF

Andrea Louie
Founding Board Member of New Yorkers for Culture
And Arts

Mary Keane
Executive Director of You Gotta Believe

Ricardo Vasquez
Speaker and Youth Advocate for You Gotta Believe

KimAlysha Seligmiller
Youth in Foster Care

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

Eva Santiago
Parent Organizer at the Child Welfare Organizing
Project, CWOP

Ashley Sawyer
Director of Policy and Government Relations at
Girls for Gender Equity, GGE

Chanel Staggers
Resident at Marian Hall Group Home

Julia Duranti-Martinez
Community Land Trust Coordinator at New Economy
Project

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2 [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Back everybody. So,
4 we're going to go with the next panel around... sort of
5 around food insecurity Victoria Wolf, Neighbors
6 Together; Vernon Jones, Neighbors Together; Harold
7 Alexis, Neighbors Together; Mikola De Roo, Food Bank
8 of New York; Joel Berg, Hunger Free America, is Joel
9 still here? And Michael Ottley from Holy Apostle Soup
10 Kitchen. Alright, I think we've lost... okay. Well
11 we'll, we'll call some more folks then...

12 [off mic dialogue]

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, so Greg
14 Waltman, alright, Towaki Komatsu, Lisa Gitelson,
15 Clarke Wheeler, JoAnn Yoo, Rachel Aicher and Louie
16 Sawi, Okay, Mr. Sawi we'll put you on the next panel,
17 okay. Okay. Okay, whoever wants to begin.

18 GREG WALTMAN: Good afternoon, Greg
19 Waltman. I have a clean energy company called G1
20 Quantum, we're about seven years old, we specialize
21 in different types of proprietary innovation; solar,
22 tech. Just bringing to the attention of the Mayor's
23 Office today, a matter of importance, the issue right
24 out of the... right out of the gate, out of the
25 headlines is the issue of reciprocal real estate in

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2 the Gowan Heights with respect to instability and the
3 unnecessary need for that as it may relate to a
4 potential solar west bank solution that could ease
5 those tensions. So, I was just... I was just bringing
6 that to the... to the Mayor's attention because it does
7 relate back to the OMB and ACS and fiscal 2020
8 budgetary concerns as you build your vision moving
9 forward that parsing through the value of mainstream
10 media of narratives becomes at... you know a, a premium
11 to make sure that our allies Israel and other middle
12 eastern allies are protected with the best solutions
13 available at the time in... that these solutions can be
14 executed in a real time manner to create the type of
15 stability necessary. I know that's a paradigm shift
16 in thinking but these are real dollar and cent
17 solutions and if these walls, the U.S. Mexico border
18 wall, west bank wall are going to be in existence you
19 have 500 miles approximately of west bank wall that
20 could generate some 72 billion dollars of energy at
21 12 cents per kilowatt hour at ten feet of solar wall
22 on one side of the wall and when you're able to
23 create energy price stability you can create
24 reciprocity and when you do that in reapplication to
25 potentially legislated contracts out of New York as

2 it pertains to the U.S. Mexico border wall you're
3 able to reshape and redistribute different types of
4 funds within the state of New York to different types
5 of section eight NYCHA related housing so you can
6 supplement the federal budget with different types of
7 proprietary innovations and in different types of
8 needs where these issues can be addressed and, and
9 reach finality. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

11 LISA GITELSON: Good evening Chairpersons
12 Levin and King. I'm Lisa Gitelson, I'm the Associate
13 Executive Director of COFCCA. We represent 52 child
14 welfare agencies in New York City. I really
15 appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of our
16 members, the staff and the families that we serve.
17 First with regard to fair futures, I want to thank
18 everybody who participated today, it was really
19 incredible, thank you Council Person Levin for being
20 there. I want to just say three quick things about
21 fair futures, its about fairness for the youth, it's
22 about fairness fiscally for the city but even more
23 it's about fairness for all the members of New York
24 City because when any single member of our community
25 doesn't reach their full potential all of us are not

2 reaching our full potential and to fully invest in
3 the people of our city is to fully invest in all of
4 us in the future for our city. In addition to
5 supporting fair futures, I just want to briefly touch
6 on some of the other areas my colleagues have talked
7 about today, all of whom have spoken extraordinarily
8 well so I just want to do a few more quick things.
9 Our members are working with youth who have
10 entrenched trauma behaviors, many of whom are a
11 danger to themselves and others, many of whom have
12 been recently incarcerated and need to be
13 appropriately reintroduced into the residential
14 settings and many with serious mental health
15 diagnosis. Our members have decades of experience in
16 working with these youth and we are really ready to
17 partner in meaningful ways with ACS to bring change
18 to these youths, to these families again to make sure
19 that New York City citizens are living up to their
20 full potential and we need full funding in order to
21 do this. We need structured funding to support new
22 ideas, to support the partnerships, we all are in
23 this together and want to do it effectively together.
24 I also just want to touch very briefly on the
25 preventative in Raise the Age programs. While the

2 numbers of foster youth have gone down so
3 significantly in New York City that's in part because
4 of the... our success with both the preventative and
5 Raise the Age programs. We want to continue to see
6 the funding that we're getting for those programs
7 exist so that we can continue to successfully work
8 with the youth in those programs. So, I want to thank
9 you for allowing me to testify, I need to excuse
10 myself because I do as you mentioned earlier have a
11 child at home that's sick and texting me
12 asking me to come home so I thank you for your time.

13 MIKOLA DE ROO: Good evening, I'm Mikola
14 De Roo, Vice President for Public Affairs at Food
15 Bank for New York City, the city's major hunger
16 relief organization throughout the five boroughs. I
17 want to thank the City Council, this Committee in
18 particular Chairs Levin and King, Council Member
19 Grodenchik and Speaker Johnson for your leadership
20 and for your investment in programs that work to
21 address hunger in New York City. During the course of
22 a year, food insecure New Yorkers face a meal gap in
23 their household food budgets of nearly 208 million
24 meals. These people, our neighbors rely on a diverse
25 network of services to put food on the table. As the

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Council works with the Mayor on the city budget, we urge you to continue to invest in vital programs that alleviate hunger including; expanding baseline food funding for EFAP, New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program as well as initiative funding for food pantries. Growing the food access and benefits initiative which connects low income New Yorkers to a range of anti-poverty services and continuing the campus pantry initiative which enables families to access nutritious food from pantries located in public schools. Last year thanks to the City Council's leadership EFAP received a historic increase to baseline food funding in the city budget, the first such increase in years. At a time when our anti-hunger safety net is under constant threat by draconian federal policies, any cuts to EFAP would result in exceptional harm to the most vulnerable among us and to the more than 500 New York City pantries and kitchens that rely on EFAP to serve those New Yorkers. Dedicated funding is still needed to fortify the anti-hunger safety network for low income New Yorkers in urgent ways. Essentially, we can't take food from pantry shelves to help promote access to anti-poverty benefits, we cannot impede and

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2 erode our own progress. This moment calls on us to
3 come together as a city and commit to the principle
4 that all New Yorkers should have access to an
5 affordable nutritious diet. Thank you.

6 HAROLD ALEXIS: Good afternoon members..
7 leaders. I am Harold Alexis from Neighbors Together.
8 Good afternoon Committee on General Welfare, I thank
9 you for this opportunity to testify today. I have
10 been in five, going on six years, I am sick of the
11 manipulation, threats, mismanagement I am subjected
12 to by DHS and HRA staff. In my time in the shelter
13 system I have had 22 case managers, I have been
14 passed from one staff member to the next and have yet
15 to receive the proper assistance I need to move into
16 housing, the DHS system that uses threats and
17 intimidation to make you feel utterly powerless and
18 submissive. My case managers expect me to find
19 housing under impossible conditions, I have a
20 physical disability, I cannot manage stairs very
21 well, I need a first floor apartment or a building
22 with an elevator and with my city FEPS voucher of
23 1,246 dollars that is an impossible requirement to
24 work with. When I go to my case managers with the
25 status of my own housing search, they would speak

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2 down to me consistently. When I... when... have leads
3 they wouldn't help. I'm going to go off the script
4 for a second and just say that this has been a
5 traumatizing experience for me. I've been sick and
6 tired of going from shelter after shelter with
7 promises of housing and when it looks very great it
8 seems to... I'm going a step backwards, the funding is
9 not there, I have storage in the Bronx. We've, we're
10 touched it... because where... I lost my apartment I was
11 in the Bronx; my belongings are in the Bronx. I have
12 explained to the staff members at my shelter that if
13 you make me take a room I lose my belongings, HRA
14 will no longer pay rent because they will consider
15 that, that a room is, is housing and to me it's not
16 housing, I'm not a bum on the streets, I don't
17 collect garbage, I have memoirs, I'm a railroader,
18 I'm a... I, I have a train collection, I have car
19 collections, I've got dishes, everything and I'm...
20 that I want to bring into an apartment, and I'm stuck
21 in shelter. I'm really sick of these threats that
22 they put upon me, I'm being signed with papers and I
23 don't know what I'm signing, I feel very intimidated,
24 I'm very disgusted. I've been here since ten o'clock
25 this morning, its... this has been a very overwhelming

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2 day and when I go back to the shelters the same old
3 foolishness, where are you? Can you come to the
4 office? Can you sign this paper? I'm a nervous wreck
5 since I've been in the shelter system, I've had it, I
6 want furniture to go back to an apartment, I'm ready
7 for an apartment, I'm ready to go home. And I just
8 want to bring this Committee, this is my second
9 experience and journey to City Hall, and I thank you
10 for listening and taking time and patience with all
11 your efforts, please I need your help. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Alexis,
13 thank you.

14 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Hi, my name is Towaki
15 Komatsu, my testimony today is for a federal Judge
16 Lorna Schofield for, for my lawsuit against the city.
17 This is an audio recording of a chat I had on August
18 29th, 2017 with a witness about the vicious assault I
19 experienced on July 2nd, 2016 due to zero oversight
20 by HRA of its business partner Urban Pathways where I
21 reside that it's housing for military veterans. That
22 assault followed an attempted assault on May 12th,
23 2016 and was preventable and foreseeable. Oops...

24 [audio recording]

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2 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Okay, that's one. The
3 next audio recording I'm going to play for your
4 benefit is a face to face conversation with... that I
5 had with fraud, HRA Steven Banks on December 18th of
6 last year in regard to a FOIL request that I
7 submitted to him and my federal lawsuit.

8 [audio recording]

9 TOWAKI KOMATSU: In three days I have to
10 be in housing court, I need a defense, I submitted
11 FOIL requests to HRA to try to ascertain what
12 corrective action if, if any it took in response to
13 my complaints against Urban Pathways so you're the
14 Chairman of this... of this Committee, there's also a
15 public hearing about proposed contracts, HRA is
16 illegally preventing me from examining, examining
17 those proposed contracts in its offices. Again,
18 you're the Chairman of this Committee that is
19 supposed to have oversight of HRA, what can you do
20 about that?

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Certainly the
22 contract budget is within the purview of the, the
23 budget as a whole and so, you know there's... we
24 actually discuss that we... earlier in the hearing
25 today around desire to have a clearer picture of

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union appropriations because its, it's not... [cross-

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talk]

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TOWAKI KOMATSU: That's not the issue,

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he's... HRA is making proposed contracts available for

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drafting... for inspection at... trade to every other

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member of the public, when I make that request to go

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there to see those contracts their position is, we're

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not going to let you in the building to our offices

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to see those with your own two eyes.

11

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And certainly, if you

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could send over the FOIL request to me as well, I'll,

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I'll do what I can to ensure that it is... it's a

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public document that would be made public.

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TOWAKI KOMATSU: The court hearing is in

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three days; can you get that turned around within

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three days?

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't know if I can

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do that but send me an email tomorrow and we'll,

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we'll see what we can do.

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TOWAKI KOMATSU: I sent one yesterday,

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didn't get a response.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well we'll, we'll see

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what we can do.

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JOANN YOO: Good afternoon Council Member King, Council Member Levin, it's nice to testify in front of my own Council Member. My name is JoAnn Yoo and I'm the Executive Director of the Asian American Federation and I'm here to submit testimony on behalf of our 70 plus member and partner organizations. As you all know, Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in New York, having increased 61 percent from 2000 to 2017 and we are about 16 percent of the population. With this dramatic growth also comes drastic need. One in four Asians live below the poverty line and about 33 percent of those who... Asian Americans who are eligible to submit... apply for food stamps do not. I think one of the things that we've seen... the challenges that we've seen, we did a study from... that ranged from 2000 to 20... 2000 to 2014 of all the organizations, the contracts that the city has given to Asian serving organizations and we only receive about 1.4 percent of the city dollars and that's a... that's a, a tragedy and we've been fighting City Hall to make sure that our members have more access to, to resources. One of the biggest challenges, challenges, we recently saw a huge panic in our community it was around public charge and I

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2 will tell you that so many.. you know the story from
3 our member agencies was that the.. those who are
4 eligible, perfectly within their right to apply, came
5 and asked to be disenrolled because they were so
6 panicked and I think.. you know one of the challenges
7 of New Yorkers being intimidated into believing that
8 they have to choose between citizenship and survival
9 is a travesty. The thing that we want to ask you as
10 we are starting to see, you know rules from D.C.
11 coming.. you know coming and hitting our.. hitting our
12 cities is to ensure that there's adequate support for
13 the nonprofit organizations that serve the front line
14 communities. We ask that the City Council fully fund
15 HRA and ACS to implement language access and I know
16 that Council Member you had talked about the new
17 minimum wage, we want to.. so many of the member
18 agencies and the Asian American Federation are
19 subcontractors which means that they don't even get
20 to get to the.. that level of asking for minimum wage
21 so we ask for parody with that issue and for a
22 continued request for you to support the nonprofit
23 organizations that serve the most vulnerable in our
24 city. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you JoAnn.

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Thank you to this entire panel, we look forward to

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continuing to work with you all in the... in the days

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and, and weeks and months to come. Thank you. The

6

next panel Ruth O'Sullivan; Chris Durosini; Clarke

7

Wheeler; Louie Sawi; Rachel Aicher; Andrea Louie.

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RUTH O'SULLIVAN: Thank you. Good

9

afternoon... good evening Chair Levin and Chair King,

10

thank you for having us here today. My name is Ruth

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O'Sullivan, I'm a Clinician at the Center for Court

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Innovations Brooklyn Mental Health Court. I'm here to

13

request the Council to support the Center for Court

14

Innovation as it seeks to renew and strengthen the

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work that we do with over 75,000 New Yorkers

16

annually, many of whom are children and young people

17

in early diversion, alternatives to incarceration,

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and receiving mental health support. Populations that

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we serve include children who are victims of crime or

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involved in neglect cases where they are or are at

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risk of being placed in child protective custody. Our

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programs have been shown to be effective. Researchers

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have documented that our operating programs

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throughout the city have decreased violence, aided

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victims and reduced the use of jail. Our City Council

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funded work has provided individuals with meaningful off ramps from a cycle of poverty recidivism to real integration back into their communities. To continue to accomplish this work, we seek continuation funding for our core citywide speaker request, our youth focused supervised release programming that divert defendants from lengthy and costly pretrial detention and our pre-court project reset programming. Project Reset permits New Yorkers to resolve low level misdemeanors without ever setting foot in a court and the case disappears from the criminal justice system as a decline to prosecute. This avoids many of the collateral consequences associated with a prosecuted case. Reset cases have been evaluated to be resolved significantly more quickly than traditional criminal court cases. Participants, many of whom are youth, have a lower likelihood and frequency for new arrests. Council provided midyear fiscal year 19 support to begin borough wide implementation of project reset in Brooklyn. We seek Council's support for an application to continue this implementation in fiscal year 2020. We also request that Council expand funding available under the mental health initiatives for vulnerable populations and for court

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2 involved youth. We have submitted several
3 applications to permit us to increase mental health
4 access in the outer boroughs where demand outstrips
5 our current capacity. Through Council support we
6 could provide enhanced mental health services and
7 community supervision to diverted youth and their
8 families. For example, our strong starts initiatives
9 have resolved neglect cases in as few as six months
10 compared to 17 months in the traditional system.
11 That's the difference between a child returning home
12 as an infant as opposed to a toddler. But currently,
13 demand outstrips capacity for this program. We only
14 have four strong starts case workers citywide and
15 there are over 3,000 qualified neglect petitions
16 filed annually. These children... in the Bronx we are
17 seeking to expand the number of child crime victims'
18 survivors we can serve. These children receive
19 ongoing therapy following their victimization from
20 violent crimes such as sexual and physical abuse. A
21 summary of our applications has been submitted with
22 our testimony. The City Council's support has been
23 invaluable to our work in improving the welfare and
24 expanding fairer justice for New Yorkers. We

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respectfully urge you to continue to support our work
and thank you again for the opportunity to speak.

CHRIS DUROSINMI: Good evening and thank
you Chairman Levin and Chairman King. My name is
Chris Durosinmi, I'm Assistant Director for
Government and Community Affairs for the Wildlife
Conservation Society. I'm here to testify today on
behalf of the Cultural Institutions Group, a
coalition of 33 culture organizations who share a
public-private partnership with the City of New York
that spans across the five boroughs. Collectively we
demonstrate a portfolio of work that illustrates our
service and connection to the diverse communities
that are supported by the city agencies covered
through these respective committees. The CIG operates
on an understanding that we are owned by the people
of New York and as a community partner we work
diligently to provide greater access to our
facilities by working hand in hand with city
agencies. One such example is the Wildlife
Conversation Society's community access program.
Since 2006, the community access program provided
free access to thousands of individuals, mainly
children and families and seniors to our WCS parks.

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2 Through partnering with agencies such as DHS and ACS
3 along with organizations such as the Cauyga Center
4 and Catholic Charities, who house unaccompanied
5 minors, we provided over 3,000 families access to the
6 Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium this past summer
7 along. In addition, Carnegie Hall provides song
8 writing workshops that reach court involved young
9 people in secure detention facilities, Horizons
10 Juvenile Center in the Bronx and Crossroads Juvenile
11 Center in Brownsville. Participants develop and
12 express their musical skills, work closely with peers
13 and build connections to other young people, adult
14 mentors and artists around their shared interests,
15 giving them an increased sense of agency and personal
16 motivation, while reinforcing positive decision
17 making. These examples and more highlighted in my
18 full testimony demonstrate that the cultural
19 community is the city's staunch partner in delivering
20 its services and achieving its vision. Each CIG
21 integrates the communities they live, serve as
22 examples of accessibility and remain the go to entity
23 that the city relies on to pilot programs such as
24 IDNYC and PlanNYC both of which have been major
25 successes. Therefore, as the Council determines its

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2 budget priorities for fiscal year 2020, we ask that
3 we are held at 20 million dollars and consideration
4 be given to additional funding for both the CIG and
5 our program group partners. We ask that the ten
6 million total that culture has previously received be
7 baselined, inclusive of the 2.25 million that was
8 baselined for CIGs in the budget the last year. Both
9 CIG and program groups are supportive of using the
10 same distribution model for that ten million that's
11 been used over the last three years. It is our hope
12 that this Committee and the City Council understand
13 what we offer to New Yorkers and that the CIG is
14 responsive to the needs of the people of the city of
15 New York. But in the end, we need the city's and
16 Council's full support. Thank you for this
17 opportunity to testify today and we appreciate the
18 Council's unwavering support.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

20 LOUIE SAWI: Good evening. My name is
21 Louie Sawi and I am the Policy Coordinator for CACF,
22 the Coalition for Asian American Children and
23 Families. I thank you Chairperson Levin and
24 Chairperson King and members of the General Welfare
25 Committee for holding this important oversight

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2 hearing on the city's fiscal year 2020 preliminary
3 budget. Since 1985 CACF is the nation's only pan-
4 Asian Children and families advocacy organization and
5 leads the fight for improved and equitable policies,
6 systems, funding and services to support those in
7 need. Earlier in the last panel you had someone from
8 Asian American Federation that talked about the APA
9 background, well I'm going to add a little more to
10 that. In data collection efforts across the city
11 including city agencies such as ACS, our communities
12 are many times mistaken and our ethnic or language
13 backgrounds and needs are relegated to the category
14 other. This lack of accurately collected data and
15 information on the community coupled with a lack of
16 accessible information and entry points for APA
17 children and families who require resources and
18 services is often erroneously equated to a lack of
19 need or risk within our communities. The barriers
20 that Asian Pacific American, also known as APA,
21 families face in navigating the child welfare system
22 are significant. First, many APA and other immigrant
23 families who come into contact with the child welfare
24 system struggle with limited English proficiency. In
25 its own language access and policy implementation

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2 plan, ACS recognized nine priority languages based
3 primarily on the high frequency of requests for child
4 welfare and child care services in these languages.

5 Five of these priority languages were Asian, Chinese,
6 Arabic, Korean, Bengali and Urdu. Second, APA

7 families may engage in child rearing and disciplinary
8 practices that reflect the cultural norms of their

9 countries of origin but are... but are considered

10 potentially harmful here. Third, APA families are

11 often misinformed about child welfare laws, the role

12 of ACS or the availability of resources for at risk

13 families. For undocumented families, this lack of

14 familiarity is exacerbated by the fact... by the fear

15 that interacting with government agencies will result

16 in punitive action or even deportation. As a result

17 of these barriers, APAs experience great difficulty

18 in communicating with ACS and other child, child

19 welfare staff, understanding and exercising their

20 rights and accessing critical support services that

21 strengthen families and improve child safety.

22 Unfortunately for many of the APA community,

23 including those most disenfranchised and struggling

24 such as many South Asian and Southeast Asian

25 communities, there are still no culturally competent

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1
2 and language accessible preventative service options.
3 APAs struggle not only with a lack of culturally
4 competent options for services, but also struggle
5 with a cultural stigma regarding receiving government
6 services. The recent federal proposals and mandates
7 such as changes in the public charge serve to
8 alienate and punish immigrants, especially those who
9 are undocumented that access needs services. This has
10 only increased the amount of misunderstanding and
11 fear among our communities regarding accessing city,
12 city services, and driven those who require services
13 to remain in isolation. As reported by many of our
14 APA organizational members, language and cultural
15 barriers that persist within the child welfare system
16 in New York City it includes a mismatch in
17 interpretation services with, with requested language
18 dialect, lack of quality interpretation and
19 interpreter bias, delays in interpretation and poor-
20 quality translations of written materials. CACF has
21 been working with organizations including the ACS to
22 improve child welfare services to immigrant and APA
23 communities for over 15 years but most recently CACF
24 has been meeting along with various member
25 organization with a number of divisions within ACS to

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2 develop collaborative strategies to better serve
3 NYC's APA communities. Additionally, CACF was
4 actively involved in CW 20/21 process over the past
5 many months through which we participated in a series
6 of meetings convened by ACS and also helped to
7 convene an APA CBO focus group with ACS. Still there
8 remains much to be done and multiple families are
9 languishing without enough data and understanding of
10 our community needs and without appropriate
11 preventative services. So, our recommendations today
12 are to ensure salary parity for all childhood
13 educators, to restore 5.355 million dollars to
14 discretionary child care centers, expand preventative
15 services and child care programs for the APA
16 community by improving contracting processes with
17 Asian led serving organizations, improve language
18 access and cultural competence for APA families,
19 increase education and outreach to the APA community
20 on services and programs available through ACS, and
21 lastly to increase capacity and partnerships with APA
22 community based organizations. Thank you.

23 ANDREA LOUIE: Thank you, I'm pleased to
24 testify this evening along with my Asian American
25 colleagues and those in culture. So, my name is

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1
2 Andrea Louie and I'm a Founding Board Member of New
3 Yorkers for Culture and Arts, a citywide cultural
4 advocacy organization. We are a coalition of groups
5 and individuals across the five boroughs working to
6 ensure that every New Yorker has the right and
7 opportunity to engage in culture, express their
8 humanity and strengthen their community. Arts and
9 culture can powerfully advance the work to support
10 all New Yorkers and I'd like to share just one
11 example from my colleagues at the Children's Museum
12 of Manhattan. Crafting Family Connections is
13 spearheaded by First Lady Chirlane McCray and was
14 lost... launched last April for mothers at Rikers who
15 demonstrate good behavior. Once a month these women
16 shed their tan jumpsuits and shackles, put on street
17 clothes and spend a... spend a few precious hours with
18 their kids engaged in arts activities. In the safe
19 space of the museum, these mothers and children can
20 play, explore their creativity and bond together away
21 from prison walls. One mother, Amanda Martinez, 32
22 has visited the museum twice to spend time with her
23 daughter, Ananda, who is 12. Quote, "I would have
24 never thought in a million years I would be able to
25 see my daughter without shackles" she said, "without

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2 a uniform and without these bars, its already changed
3 my train of thought", end quote. Important programs
4 like Crafting Family Connections cannot succeed
5 without support from the city. Therefore, we join our
6 colleagues in requesting that ten million be
7 baselined for culture from last year inclusive of
8 2.25 million that was baselined for the cultural
9 institution Groups as my colleague mentioned earlier
10 in this panel. We also request an additional ten
11 million be added to the cultural budget to be evenly
12 divided between the CIGs and the program groups. All
13 of us in the cultural sector are eager to work with
14 you during this budget season to help make sure that
15 the wellbeing of all New Yorkers is fully resourced
16 and supported. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you and I want
18 to thank this panel for all the great work that you
19 and your organizations do, and we look forward to
20 working with you in this budget and for many years in
21 the future, thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: The next panel up
23 Ricardo Vasquez; Kim Alysha and I'm... Seligmiller and
24 if I messed it up Sister Queen Dawn Project; Chanel
25 Staggers, I'm sorry Sister Chanel Staggers, I

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2 apologize. Manny Keane, Manny T. Keane; Ashley C.
3 Sawyer; Eva Santiago. I'll read them again Ricardo
4 Vasquez, you're Ricardo. who's Kim? Hi, Kim. Who's
5 Chanel? Her last name... is it Stags, Stagis, Sagis,
6 Sister Staggers. Manny, is Manny here? Manny, there's
7 no Manny? Oh, Mary, I'm sorry, it looks like a N, my
8 bad, who's Mary?

9 MARY KEANE: It's not your bad it's my
10 writing.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Who's Mary?

12 MARY KEANE: I am.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Oh, hi Mary, I knew
14 there was something about Mary. Okay, Ashley and
15 Ashley is right there, how you doing? Good to see you
16 and Eva, alright. So, let the testimony begin.

17 MARY KEANE: I'll start because everyone
18 is hesitating. So, hi Chair King, thank you for
19 having us. My name is Mary Keane, I'm the Executive
20 Director of You Gotta Believe, Chair Levin and City
21 Council. You Gotta Believe has been around for 24
22 years and the only thing that we do in all that time
23 is trying to find families for kids before they age
24 out of care so that they can have a relatively normal
25 life. I, myself have been a parent for over 19 years

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2 to youth from the foster care system far too many
3 than I'd care to admit to. But I started out just as
4 a foster parent until my kids taught me, they needed
5 much more than that, they needed a permanent loving
6 family forever. So, they're the reason I joined You
7 Gotta Believe because through them I saw that all
8 kids who have not been able to return to their birth
9 families need a new family to begin the healing that
10 is essential if they're to live safe and productive
11 lives with healthy relationships and the skills and
12 supports to raise healthy children who will never
13 experience the lives their parents did and who will
14 not become part of the generational pattern of foster
15 care. In over 14 years with You Gotta Believe I've
16 learned its possible for all kids even the most
17 resistant to open up to a family even when they're
18 terrified of getting hurt again. Its not our kids who
19 do not believe in family, it is everyone around who
20 do not think they can get a family, or they are too
21 old. We've worked with youth from broken adoptions
22 giving family another chance. I've seen them blossom
23 when they finally get someone who genuinely cares
24 about their wellbeing and are not just being paid to
25 do things for them. I've never met a kid or adult for

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2 that matter who does not want to be loved even when
3 they show it in the most lovable ways. Most people
4 acknowledge their families and what they've done for
5 them. Speaker Johnson at his state of the city
6 address recently thanked his mother when he started,
7 when he ended, and he went out into the audience to
8 thank her again after she had introduced him. Chair
9 Levin you just acknowledged that you still ask your
10 parents for advice on the New York One interview. My
11 apologies for going over a little bit. You went on to
12 say though that youth aging out of foster care don't
13 have that resource and we have an obligation as a
14 city to provide them with that resource but the
15 resource you were referring to was parents. My
16 question as always, why should our kids not have the
17 same? Federal law says to provide permanency which
18 means a legally permanent nurturing family for every
19 child involved in the system. You Gotta Believe
20 believes this, we do it, we've proven it now for 24
21 years and because it's so challenging easier paths
22 are always taken to provide youth with substitutes
23 for family. We have requested funding, funding from
24 the City Council discretionary funds, we've begun to
25 work with Children's Village, and we ask your support

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2 of this so that our kids can heal with a family. Over
3 a year ago families first federal legislation passed,
4 I just love the name, families first, which sums it
5 up, everything else is gravy but without a family
6 everything else is not enough. Thank you again for
7 your consideration and my team will use much less
8 time than they were allocated so they'll make up for
9 this.

10 RICARDO VASQUEZ: Yes. Hello everyone, my
11 name is Ricardo Vasquez and I'm a Speaker and a Youth
12 Advocate for You Better Believe. So, I'm here to
13 speak on... meanwhile, meanwhile mentoring and coaching
14 is extremely important for... in a youth's life, a
15 family is the main core of the youth's... for the youth
16 to be able to heal. Throughout my experiences in
17 foster care I faced a lot of adversities until my
18 social worker made a decision to become my mom, had
19 it not been for her becoming my mom I wouldn't be
20 sitting here today nor do I know what direction my
21 life would, would have gone and due to the mentality
22 and behaviors and the people that I was around at, at
23 that point in time. She was the one who actually
24 taught me to... how to develop a new thinking process,
25 she taught me how to develop different ways of self-

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2 care. She also was very supportive of everything I
3 wanted to accomplish in my life so no matter what it
4 was she was backing me. She... my mom was able to look
5 past the behaviors that I had... past the behaviors
6 that I was displaying on a regular basis and was able
7 to see the real person that I was in... the real person
8 that was in me, she was able to steer me in the right
9 direction and help me to heal. If I didn't have a
10 family I... you know I think my life would have turned
11 out to be a lot more difficult than what it already
12 was. I've been homeless, I've slept on the train and
13 because of a family I was able to come out of a bad
14 situation very quickly. There were some situations
15 that I have gotten into and at the end of it all I
16 was able to go home to a family. Had I not had a
17 family thing would have just maybe continued or I
18 would have just kept falling deeper and deeper down
19 to the point where I may, maybe lose my mind and need
20 some sort of mental health service because at times
21 things can get very difficult.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can keep going.

23 RICARDO VASQUEZ: Services are great but
24 family who pushes youth that's where the core and the
25 support is, the family... serve... families is what

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2 really help the youth utilize these services. If a...
3 if the youth has a family to back him any service...
4 all the services that were speaking of... spoken on
5 today, all the services that may get funding for the
6 youth, coaching, mentors just all of these services
7 are effective but when the youth has someone to
8 direct him to make sure that he knows about these
9 services and makes sure that he or she, excuse me,
10 utilizes these services then we would see more
11 success. The family encourages youth with love, and
12 we all need that to be able to move forward in life
13 no matter what. Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

15 KIMALYSHA SELIGMILLER: My name is
16 KimAlysha...

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For the... it's for the
18 official record so...

19 KIMALYSHA SELIGMILLER: Okay, okay. My
20 name is KimAlysha Seligmiller, I'm currently a youth
21 in foster care. I am a 19-year-old college freshman
22 pursuing my degree in biology. I am currently dorming
23 at Queens College through the dorm project which is a
24 way foster children can experience the full college
25 life while staying in the city. I've been in care

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2 since I was around two or three and both of my
3 parents' rights have been taken before I turned six.
4 So, ten plus years of legally not having any parents
5 can be very overwhelming especially being in care
6 when staff do things they shouldn't do and you have
7 no one to speak up for you, just yourself. I
8 appreciate the staff in YGB, You Gotta Believe,
9 they've kept me confident in the hopes of me finding
10 a family. Crazy how old I am and yet I still have to
11 go to family court for my case since I'm a free child
12 of the state which basically... which basically means
13 New York State is my legal guardian. I stopped going
14 for a while when two years back when my 17... when I
15 was 17 the judge told me that at my age, I wouldn't
16 find a family. It hurt me, I wouldn't lie about that
17 and what made it worse was that my previous case
18 planner also agreed saying that maybe I should just
19 start doing supportive housing until my NYCHA comes
20 through. I don't see how people could just be okay
21 with not giving a child something that we all deserve
22 and that's a family.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

24 MARY KEANE: Chanel.

25

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2 EVA SANTIAGO: Yeah, I think... yeah, hi.

3 Hi Councilman Levin, we know each other pretty well
4 and... how are you doing Councilman King and, and the
5 Committee. Thank you so much for allowing me to, to
6 talk about these issues that I hold very close
7 because I have a child who's on the autism spectrum.
8 I work at the child welfare organizing project as the
9 Director of Programming and parent advocate. I've
10 been a parent advocate for three years for families
11 who have involvement with ACS. I go to court
12 regularly, initial safety conference meetings, family
13 team conference meetings, supervised visits, wellness
14 checks, you name it I pretty much do it. I truly
15 believe in preserving families. We educate our
16 parents on systemic racism, we talk about
17 disproportionality, we talk about the high percentage
18 of removals of children in poor communities of color,
19 we empower, empower parents so that they can advocate
20 for themselves, we definitely intervene when
21 necessary, when a parent is hitting a roadblock and
22 they're unable to speak to their attorney or their
23 case worker and knowing what's going on with their
24 case. I am a parent affected, I had a case in 2011, I
25 have a child who's on the autism spectrum who has

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1
2 several diagnoses. The fear for a lot of parents who
3 have children who are either on the spectrum or who
4 have several diagnoses is that they'll enter another
5 system and that is a real fear for myself, that my
6 son will enter the juvenile justice system because of
7 lack of supports. It was ironic to me that ACS had
8 discussed today that they were having difficulty in
9 placing children with, with behavioral diagnosis and
10 that they had to stay in children centers for a
11 lengthy amount of time because they did not have the
12 qualifications or expertise in addressing the issues
13 that these children have who have diagnosis. They
14 also talked about OPWDD. My son and many children who
15 are high functioning do not qualify for certain
16 services because they're high functioning, so they
17 fall through the cracks. Their behavioral issues come
18 into play when we talk about their future successes
19 even though a lot of these children are high
20 functioning and they academically excel to the point
21 where you... my son can comprehend 12th grade and he's
22 13 years old so... but they don't take into
23 consideration that these children who are high
24 functioning academically are emotionally delayed and
25 so they need the proper supports that are needed for

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2 them to excel. I have two cases right now that I'm
3 working on that I'm going to court for, for parents
4 who have children with, with diagnosis who ACS has
5 told to bring to the agency because of educational
6 neglect because they are unable to get their children
7 to go to school because of their behavioral issues
8 and then we come to find out in court that the agency
9 that they had advised these parents to take their
10 children have lost their children and so now the
11 judge has told this particular family that if your
12 child gets in contact with you your child can stay
13 with you for the time that we find appropriate
14 placement. So, now the parent is adequate in taking
15 care of that child because the agency cannot find
16 adequate appropriate supports. So, I am here, and
17 this is my plight for children and all children who
18 are affected by the child welfare system because of
19 poverty. It's all about lack of supports and I truly
20 believe that if ACS or any other agency because it
21 happens to be ACS when ACS is no longer here it will
22 be another agency but it's about approaching these
23 families with a restorative lens, they approached
24 these families with a punitive lens and then they're
25 not able to thoroughly assess the situation correctly

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2 and they're not able to know what is going on in
3 these homes. So, thank you again for allowing me to
4 speak today.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

6 ASHLEY SAWYER: Good evening Chairperson
7 Levin and Chairperson King and Council Staff. My name
8 is Ashley Sawyer, I am the director of Policy at
9 Girls for Gender Equity and I'm also an attorney. I...
10 be... in lieu of time... because of time I won't go into
11 the background about Girls for Gender Equity but as
12 you know we are committed to supporting the needs of
13 cisgender, transgender, girls, and gender
14 nonconforming youth of color in New York and now
15 obviously nationally. Our conversation today is
16 specifically related to issues related to the
17 juvenile justice system. Recently the administration
18 for family services reached out to Girls for Gender
19 Equity along with steps to end family violence to
20 pilot an alternative to placement program
21 specifically designed to meet the needs of girls and
22 gender nonconforming youth in New York City. As you
23 know there was a task force across the city led by
24 the Vera Institute for Justice to end the
25 incarceration of girls in New York. As an outgrowth

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1
2 of that process, we are committed to creating close..
3 excuse me, creating programing in communities where
4 young people are still able to live with their
5 families, live in their communities but receive the
6 social work services, economic empowerment and what
7 we specialize in at GGE is political organizing
8 skills and helping young people learn what it means
9 to be political organizers, to drive policy work.
10 That program has the potential to transform the lives
11 of young people, we understand that there's a growing
12 body of research that says that when people who have
13 been affected by criminalization and systems are able
14 to use their voice to change those systems, they have
15 remarkable outcomes and we want to make sure that the
16 council is aware of what's happening and aware of the
17 potential for this program and also the critical need
18 for resources. As you may know before I came to Girls
19 for Gender Equity I was an attorney representing
20 young people who were in the system in New York, I
21 spent once a week in the housing areas on Rikers
22 working with young people 16 to 24 particularly girls
23 and in the city, I will try to briefly conclude but
24 in the city there were no reentry programs that
25 specifically met the needs of girls and gender

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2 nonconforming people, there were no juvenile justice
3 services that specifically spoke to their needs, the
4 data is really clear now that 90 percent, I'm going
5 to repeat that, 90 percent of the girls who end up in
6 the juvenile justice system have experienced some
7 form of sexual violence. There's no other system
8 where you'll find a higher concentration of sexual
9 assault survivors than if you go to a girls juvenile
10 prison and so we cannot expect young people to have
11 great outcomes if they're going to programs that have
12 no idea what they're experiencing or what their needs
13 are so GGE along with steps and, and the Vera
14 Institute are working together to develop a program
15 that can meet the needs of young people particularly
16 girls and queer and trans young people. As you'll see
17 in my comments there are specific... there's data and
18 specific details about what the needs are but we
19 cannot use a one size fits all model when we talk
20 about reentry and prevention services. And so this is
21 an opportunity for the city to invest in the
22 prevention work, making sure that there are no young
23 people sent up state, making sure that young people
24 have access to the services and the supports that
25 they need and doing this work with fidelity and

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2 integrity is going to require resources and a
3 financial commitment from this body so we hope that
4 there will be an investment in the young people that
5 deserve our care. These are young people who did not
6 make a choice to end up in these systems but because
7 they are in the care of our... of ACS and other systems
8 we have an obligation to provide them with the
9 supports and the services that they need. So, I look
10 forward to continuing to engage in this conversation
11 with both of you as well as Council staff and moving
12 forward hoping that there will be a commitment made
13 to the girls and the gender nonconforming young
14 people of New York City. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

16 CHANEL STAGGERS: Hi, my name is Chanel,
17 I wrote something... I put good afternoon, it's not
18 even afternoon anymore but... and I said I hope you all
19 enjoying your morning, it's obviously... like its over
20 evening but my name is Chanel Staggars. I'm currently
21 18 years old pursuing my ACSE and working with Good
22 Call. I'm residing at Marian Hall which is a group
23 home that I've been staying at for two years. Being
24 that I struck good with choosing whether or not if
25 school was more important than staying in school, I

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2 said school if... if working was more important than
3 staying in school, yeah. I've been in foster care
4 since I was 11/12. In the beginning I started off
5 living with my brother, but it didn't work out which
6 led me into like the eight other foster homes I've
7 been in. The last one I thought would be my big
8 break. I was 16 when I got adopted. I stayed with her
9 for like two years and... however I was happy, but
10 things change, and people change, it did not work
11 out. To this day I remain adopted but me and my
12 adopted mother have not... we don't have no contact
13 whatsoever. I'll be 19 next month, I face challenges
14 that I never imagined. I've also overcame more than I
15 can tell you. I've been doing it by myself, but I can
16 never be more proud, still there's more work to be
17 done. I was once resistant to starting over and
18 having a new family until I met Yari from You Gotta
19 Believe. She enlightened me in explaining her story
20 and why she's helping young adults like myself that's
21 looking for family or family resources even if I
22 already aged out of foster care. It's a blessing to
23 know there's families willing to adopt young adults...
24 young adults with traumatic experiences and I want to
25 be... because it starts with the policies that's what I

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2 feel like and that's, that's, that's where it could
3 start to bread down and things could start to get
4 fixed.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright, well I look
6 forward to you being on this side of the table some
7 time very soon. And just... I just want to say really
8 quickly Y, YGB, GGE and CWOP are, are three of the..
9 my favorite organizations that I get the opportunity
10 to work with, you all do amazing work and its, it's,
11 it's really an honor to be able to, to, to support
12 that work and this Council takes that very seriously
13 and, and, and you're out there doing it and, and we
14 want... we want to be supportive.

15 MARY KEANE: Thank you.

16 RICARDO VASQUEZ: Thank you.

17 EVA SANTIAGO: Thank you very much, thank
18 you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, looks like last
20 call. Jesse Laymon, New York City Employment and
21 Training Coalition, I think Jesse left.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Going once, going
23 twice...

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I don't see
25 Jesse, he was here before I saw him before. Julia

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2 Duranti-Martinez, New Economy Project, okay and then

3 people we've called before but might not be here.

4 Michael Leake... Michael Ottley; Joel Berg, I know Joel

5 is not here; Vernon Jones; Victoria Wolf; Rachel

6 Aicher and Clarke Wheeler, going once, going twice.

7 Okay..

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: You got the stage.

9 JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Floor, yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Miss Duranti-Martinez

11 you are our last... [cross-talk]

12 JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Panelist..

13 [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...member of the public

15 to testify.

16 JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Thank you, yes.

17 Good, good evening Committee Chair Levin and Council

18 Member King. My name is Julia Duranti-Martinez and

19 I'm the Community Land Trust Coordinator at New

20 Economy Project. Along with Picture the Homeless and

21 other advocates, the New Economy Project co-founded

22 and co-convenes the New York City Community Land

23 Initiative which is the coalition of more than two

24 dozen housing and social justice organizations

25 advocating for community land trusts to address the

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2 root causes of homelessness and displacement. As a
3 outgrowth of this work, New Economy Project and 14
4 partner organizations are proposing a new citywide
5 CLT initiative that would incubate and expand CLTs in
6 all five boroughs of New York City in fiscal year
7 2020. So, just a little bit of CLT... a little bit on
8 CLT's, they are a proven mechanism to preserve vital
9 affordable housing stock, prevent the extraction of
10 public subsidies and combat displacement. The CLT is
11 a nonprofit that owns and stewards land in the
12 community's interest and leases use of the land for
13 affordable housing development and other community
14 needs. And CLTs issue renewable 99-year ground leases
15 that establish resale and rental restrictions which
16 helps protect public investment in CLTs from being
17 lost to the market over time. CLTs also engage
18 community members in meaningful decision making over
19 neighborhood development. The boards are typically
20 composed of equal parts residents, community members
21 and public stakeholders and they engage in ongoing
22 community organizing and partnership to carry out
23 their work and both the longstanding Cooper Square
24 Community Land Trust here in New York and the new
25 pilot East Harlem/El Barrio CLT as well as emerging

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2 CLTs citywide have grown out of sustained community
3 led planning and organizing processes. So, the CLT
4 model has sparked the citywide movement that has
5 achieved tremendous gains in recent years and that
6 includes the passage of the city's first Local Law,
7 defining and entering CLTs into the administrative
8 code, increased support from HPD, expended training
9 and legal assistance networks and investment of New
10 York State Attorney General Settlement funds into
11 local CLTs. And now there are more than a dozen
12 community-based organizations from the Northwest
13 Bronx to Brownsville that are working to develop
14 local leadership and deepen community partnerships,
15 organize tenants and homeowners and identify
16 properties suitable for the... for their CLTs. So, the
17 proposed initiative would allow groups to build upon
18 this exciting progress at a really critical moment of
19 opportunity. The initiative will support essential
20 CLT community education and organizing, board and
21 member training, build capacity through legal,
22 financial, and technical assistance and promote
23 coordination among CLTs so they reach a sustainable
24 scale. So, we ask the committee to include the CLT

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2 initiative in its budget recommendations for 2020.

3 And thank you so much for the opportunity to testify.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you very
5 much.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And we love the work
8 that the New Economy Project does. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Alright.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, does anyone
11 else wish to testify? Chair King do you have anything
12 else you want to add?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Just thank you,
14 it's been a delight. As Carol Burnett would say I'm
15 so glad we had this time together but I learned a lot
16 and I appreciate what all, all... everyone who services
17 the City of New York and understand the challenges
18 that we have, however, they are equal or unequal if
19 we could recognize and we could uncover to recover
20 and I think that's what today's conversation was all
21 about so thank you, it was an honor being with you
22 today.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, thank you
24 and I want to thank all the staff; Julia Haramis,
25 Daniel Kroop, Aminta Kilowan, Tanya Cyrus, Regina

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COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

Poreda Ryan, Latonia McKinney, Council Member...
Council Member King do you want to... the staff of
Juvenile Justice... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Dohini and Josh
Kingsley and of course Daniel again because it's a
double billing here today but everybody in this
budget process from the head of... Latonia McKinney and
the whole team here that help us get this right, day
one, day two.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I forgot Dohini
Sompura. Frank, Frank Sarno and our... Crystal Pond,
Crystal Pond and... okay, Crystal, Crystal's not here,
okay and our amazing Sergeant at Arms...

COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Yes...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Who have kept this
show running. Thank you very much gentlemen and thank
you all. With that I adjourn this hearing.

[gavel]

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 April 20, 2019