

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

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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

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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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[gavel]

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

[off mic dialogue]

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

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

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

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1 numbers of foster youth have gone down so
2 significantly in New York City that's in part because
3 of the... our success with both the preventative and
4 Raise the Age programs. We want to continue to see
5 the funding that we're getting for those programs
6 exist so that we can continue to successfully work
7 with the youth in those programs. So, I want to thank
8 you for allowing me to testify, I need to excuse
9 myself because I do as you mentioned earlier have a
10 child at home that's sick and texting me
11 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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erode our own progress. This moment calls on us to come together as a city and commit to the principle that all New Yorkers should have access to an affordable nutritious diet. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

[audio recording]

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

[audio recording]

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

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

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

TOWAKI KOMATSU: That's not the issue, he's... HRA is making proposed contracts available for drafting... for inspection at... trade to every other member of the public, when I make that request to go there to see those contracts their position is, we're not going to let you in the building to our offices to see those with your own two eyes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And certainly, if you could send over the FOIL request to me as well, I'll, I'll do what I can to ensure that it is... it's a public document that would be made public.

TOWAKI KOMATSU: The court hearing is in three days; can you get that turned around within three days?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't know if I can do that but send me an email tomorrow and we'll, we'll see what we can do.

TOWAKI KOMATSU: I sent one yesterday, didn't get a response.

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

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you JoAnn.

Thank you to this entire panel, we look forward to continuing to work with you all in the... in the days and, and weeks and months to come. Thank you. The next panel Ruth O'Sullivan; Chris Durosini; Clarke Wheeler; Louie Sawi; Rachel Aicher; Andrea Louie.

RUTH O'SULLIVAN: Thank you. Good afternoon... good evening Chair Levin and Chair King, thank you for having us here today. My name is Ruth O'Sullivan, I'm a Clinician at the Center for Court Innovations Brooklyn Mental Health Court. I'm here to request the Council to support the Center for Court Innovation as it seeks to renew and strengthen the work that we do with over 75,000 New Yorkers annually, many of whom are children and young people in early diversion, alternatives to incarceration, and receiving mental health support. Populations that we serve include children who are victims of crime or involved in neglect cases where they are or are at risk of being placed in child protective custody. Our programs have been shown to be effective. Researchers have documented that our operating programs throughout the city have decreased violence, aided 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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involved youth. We have submitted several applications to permit us to increase mental health access in the outer boroughs where demand outstrips our current capacity. Through Council support we could provide enhanced mental health services and community supervision to diverted youth and their families. For example, our strong starts initiatives have resolved neglect cases in as few as six months compared to 17 months in the traditional system. That's the difference between a child returning home as an infant as opposed to a toddler. But currently, demand outstrips capacity for this program. We only have four strong starts case workers citywide and there are over 3,000 qualified neglect petitions filed annually. These children... in the Bronx we are seeking to expand the number of child crime victims' survivors we can serve. These children receive ongoing therapy following their victimization from violent crimes such as sexual and physical abuse. A summary of our applications has been submitted with our testimony. The City Council's support has been invaluable to our work in improving the welfare and 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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Through partnering with agencies such as DHS and ACS along with organizations such as the Cauyga Center and Catholic Charities, who house unaccompanied minors, we provided over 3,000 families access to the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium this past summer along. In addition, Carnegie Hall provides song writing workshops that reach court involved young people in secure detention facilities, Horizons Juvenile Center in the Bronx and Crossroads Juvenile Center in Brownsville. Participants develop and express their musical skills, work closely with peers and build connections to other young people, adult mentors and artists around their shared interests, giving them an increased sense of agency and personal motivation, while reinforcing positive decision making. These examples and more highlighted in my full testimony demonstrate that the cultural community is the city's staunch partner in delivering its services and achieving its vision. Each CIG integrates the communities they live, serve as examples of accessibility and remain the go to entity that the city relies on to pilot programs such as IDNYC and PlanNYC both of which have been major successes. Therefore, as the Council determines its

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

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

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

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

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plan, ACS recognized nine priority languages based primarily on the high frequency of requests for child welfare and child care services in these languages. Five of these priority languages were Asian, Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Bengali and Urdu. Second, APA families may engage in child rearing and disciplinary practices that reflect the cultural norms of their countries of origin but are... but are considered potentially harmful here. Third, APA families are often misinformed about child welfare laws, the role of ACS or the availability of resources for at risk families. For undocumented families, this lack of familiarity is exacerbated by the fact... by the fear that interacting with government agencies will result in punitive action or even deportation. As a result of these barriers, APAs experience great difficulty in communicating with ACS and other child, child welfare staff, understanding and exercising their rights and accessing critical support services that strengthen families and improve child safety. Unfortunately for many of the APA community, including those most disenfranchised and struggling such as many South Asian and Southeast Asian communities, there are still no culturally competent

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and language accessible preventative service options.

APAs struggle not only with a lack of culturally

competent options for services, but also struggle

with a cultural stigma regarding receiving government

services. The recent federal proposals and mandates

such as changes in the public charge serve to

alienate and punish immigrants, especially those who

are undocumented that access needs services. This has

only increased the amount of misunderstanding and

fear among our communities regarding accessing city,

city services, and driven those who require services

to remain in isolation. As reported by many of our

APA organizational members, language and cultural

barriers that persist within the child welfare system

in New York City it includes a mismatch in

interpretation services with, with requested language

dialect, lack of quality interpretation and

interpreter bias, delays in interpretation and poor-

quality translations of written materials. CACF has

been working with organizations including the ACS to

improve child welfare services to immigrant and APA

communities for over 15 years but most recently CACF

has been meeting along with various member

organization with a number of divisions within ACS to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Who's Mary?

MARY KEANE: I am.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can keep going.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

KIMALYSHA SELIGMILLER: My name is
KimAlysha...

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

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

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

22
23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

24 MARY KEANE: Chanel.
25

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

Hi Councilman Levin, we know each other pretty well

and... how are you doing Councilman King and, and the

Committee. Thank you so much for allowing me to, to

talk about these issues that I hold very close

because I have a child who's on the autism spectrum.

I work at the child welfare organizing project as the

Director of Programming and parent advocate. I've

been a parent advocate for three years for families

who have involvement with ACS. I go to court

regularly, initial safety conference meetings, family

team conference meetings, supervised visits, wellness

checks, you name it I pretty much do it. I truly

believe in preserving families. We educate our

parents on systemic racism, we talk about

disproportionality, we talk about the high percentage

of removals of children in poor communities of color,

we empower, empower parents so that they can advocate

for themselves, we definitely intervene when

necessary, when a parent is hitting a roadblock and

they're unable to speak to their attorney or their

case worker and knowing what's going on with their

case. I am a parent affected, I had a case in 2011, I

have a child who's on the autism spectrum who has

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

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1
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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and they're not able to know what is going on in these homes. So, thank you again for allowing me to speak today.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

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

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of that process, we are committed to creating close..

excuse me, creating programing in communities where

young people are still able to live with their

families, live in their communities but receive the

social work services, economic empowerment and what

we specialize in at GGE is political organizing

skills and helping young people learn what it means

to be political organizers, to drive policy work.

That program has the potential to transform the lives

of young people, we understand that there's a growing

body of research that says that when people who have

been affected by criminalization and systems are able

to use their voice to change those systems, they have

remarkable outcomes and we want to make sure that the

council is aware of what's happening and aware of the

potential for this program and also the critical need

for resources. As you may know before I came to Girls

for Gender Equity I was an attorney representing

young people who were in the system in New York, I

spent once a week in the housing areas on Rikers

working with young people 16 to 24 particularly girls

and in the city, I will try to briefly conclude but

in the city there were no reentry programs that

specifically met the needs of girls and gender

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

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

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

MARY KEANE: Thank you.

RICARDO VASQUEZ: Thank you.

EVA SANTIAGO: Thank you very much, thank you.

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

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

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

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Duranti-Martinez, New Economy Project, okay and then

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

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

is not here; Vernon Jones; Victoria Wolf; Rachel

Aicher and Clarke Wheeler, going once, going twice.

Okay...

COUNCIL MEMBER KING: You got the stage.

JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Floor, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Miss Duranti-Martinez

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

JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Panelist...

[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...member of the public

to testify.

JULIA DURANTI-MARTINEZ: Thank you, yes.

Good, good evening Committee Chair Levin and Council

Member King. My name is Julia Duranti-Martinez and

I'm the Community Land Trust Coordinator at New

Economy Project. Along with Picture the Homeless and

other advocates, the New Economy Project co-founded

and co-convenes the New York City Community Land

Initiative which is the coalition of more than two

dozen housing and social justice organizations

advocating for community land trusts to address the

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

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