



New York City Council
Committee on Finance Hearing
New York City Department of Finance

Testimony of Michael Hyman
First Deputy Commissioner

September 17, 2019

Good morning, Chair Dromm and members of the Committee on Finance. I am Michael Hyman, First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City Department of Finance. I am joined by Leslie Zimmerman, Assistant Commissioner for Payment Operations and Sheelah Feinberg, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

DOF's mission is to administer the tax and revenue laws of the City fairly, efficiently, and transparently to instill public confidence and encourage compliance while providing exceptional customer service. This package of bills is in alignment with our mission, and we appreciate the Council's desire to help us improve our service and provide more New Yorkers with the support and the benefits they need.

We would like to discuss opportunities to achieve some of the bills' objectives by building on recent DOF initiatives, including the launch of DOF's new property tax system and the expansion of its customer relationship management program. These initiatives have helped us do a better job serving the hundreds of thousands of homeowners, entrepreneurs, motorists, and others who interact with our agency. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to refine these bills and leverage existing customer service programs and initiatives at the Department of Finance.

I will now address each bill before the committee today.

Intro 1225

This bill will require the Department of Finance to make its “best efforts” to collect contact information for all owners of real property and ensure that the information is housed in a computer database to administer the real property tax. The bill further stipulates that these “best efforts shall include, at a minimum, a field soliciting the above-listed contact information on all hard copy and online forms, applications, and other documents related to the recording of any deed-related or mortgage-related document...or the administration of the real property tax” and on forms for other property-owner interactions with the Department.

In compliance with Local Law 26 of 2018, DOF currently mails new homeowners “welcome packages” which include information about property taxation, assessment, and the exemptions available to eligible homeowners. This mailing also includes an invitation to sign up for an electronic DOF customer service account. Property owners provide e-mail addresses and telephone numbers as part of registration, and owners can use the account to update mailing address information. Approximately 10,000 new homeowners receive this mailing each month.

The customer relationship management system was established to allow DOF to better serve and satisfy its customers. The nearly 60,000 customers who have created customer service accounts are now able to submit questions and requests to DOF online, upload documents relevant to their inquiries, and track the

status of their cases twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Once we have resolved a customer's inquiry, DOF works to update our system based on information provided by the customer to ensure that his or her record is up to date. We are open to exploring new ways to encourage property owners to update their contact information, but we want to steer owners to our customer service portal.

Intro 952

This bill will require the Department of Finance to provide notice of SCHE and DHE renewal by telephone no later than November 15 of each year. DOF already conducts a very robust outreach effort to help homeowners renew these benefits, and this, combined with a redesign and simplification of our renewal application mailings, helped us achieve a 94% renewal rate last year. We regularly partner with elected officials and community organizations to host enrollment events, and we share lists with Council staff so that you can help us reach constituents who still need to renew. In addition, with the launch of the Department of Finance's new property tax system, homeowners can now apply for or renew their tax exemptions online.

DOF believes that adding a robo-call will present operational challenges for the agency without producing commensurate benefits for the customer. Most importantly, DOF is concerned that some homeowners may be alarmed by the calls if they are perceived as scams, as many robo-call scammers prey on seniors and

people with disabilities. As such, DOF is opposed to this bill, but we hope to continue to work with the Council increasing the renewal rate even beyond its current 94% rate, so that no homeowners entitled to property tax exemptions are left behind.

Intro 1702

This legislation requires the Department of Finance to send property owners a statement of account with new language making clear on the July 1 bill that the taxes due are based on a calculation using the tax rate from the prior fiscal year, when prior-year rates are used -- which is frequently the case -- that the taxes are subject to adjustment upon the adoption of the tax rate for the new fiscal year, and that a subsequent bill issued during the course of the new tax year may reflect the adjusted amount of tax due and the new tax rate. DOF supports this bill and believes that it will increase transparency for taxpayers. We will need to work with Council on language that can be included on the bill so that we do not overwhelm customers with information or add additional pages to the bill.

Intro 1705

This legislation would require the Department of Finance to provide email or print receipts when customers pay their property tax bills. DOF would also be required to notify owners of the availability of the receipt on the statement of account.

I would like to share with the Council what we currently do to notify taxpayers that their payments have been received. Currently, if anyone makes a payment at a DOF business center, the customer will receive a receipt with detailed information about the amount of the payment and the BBL associated with the payment. If a taxpayer chooses to make a payment online, he or she will receive an email receipt of the payment. Furthermore, customers can view their payments and account history online, via the department's new property tax system, at www.nyc.gov/nycproperty. DOF is working on ways to make it easier for property owners to view and download info on property tax payments made.

Finally, DOF is working to enhance the customer service portal that I referenced earlier. We are working to give customers the option to receive ongoing updates from the department of subjects of interest to them in the areas of property tax exemptions, business taxes, and more. We also plan to introduce a chat feature to answer customers' questions in real time. We believe that this system provides the tools that we need to communicate important information with customers, and we can develop ways to give property owners user-friendly access to information on their property tax payments through the system. We will be continuing to market and improve the portal so that more customers create accounts and build relationships with the department in this way.

In summary, the Department of Finance shares the Council's goal to provide better, more efficient, and more transparent service to our customers. Many of these bills build upon the work we have already done to enhance our service, and we look forward to partnering with the Council to improve and implement them.

Thank you for your continued commitment and partnership, and for the opportunity to testify today. I'll be happy to take any questions you might have.



**New York City Council
Committee on Finance, Chair, Council Member Dromm
September 17, 2019**

Thank you, Chair Dromm, and the full Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify today. LiveOn NY would also like to express our sincere appreciation for the Council's ongoing commitment to older New Yorkers.

For forty years, LiveOn NY has been supporting community-based organizations throughout the City that provide core services to older adults to allow them to thrive in their communities. To better support older adults and our base of more than 100 members, LiveOn NY administers a citywide outreach program that educates, screens, and enrolls older New Yorkers in critical benefits and entitlements such as SNAP, SCRIE, and SCHE. Our team works tirelessly to help older adults through the application and re-enrollment processes, and witnesses firsthand the positive impacts of these programs.

Due to this work, LiveOn NY would like to specifically provide comment on Intro 0952-2018.

We applaud Council Member Vallone for introducing legislation to help ensure that all older adults who are eligible for SCHE are able to more easily re-enroll in the program. We recognize that this is a goal that is shared by the Administration, **as efforts to ensure older adults retain benefits such as SCHE continue in earnest by many city officials**, including the Department of Finance's outreach team. LiveOn NY is proud to work closely with this team, as well as our numerous partners in City Council, to ensure a client-centered approach to outreach to combat the historic underutilization of benefits experienced by older adults.

Unfortunately, our work faces significant challenges. In today's digital age, many (if not all) of us are all too familiar with receiving calls from scammers and identity thieves. As a result of the spike in cyber crimes in recent years, many government agencies, businesses, and community-based organizations now offer education on how to protect oneself from identity theft and scams – directing much of this education toward older adults, who are viewed by scammers as particularly vulnerable. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the primary method by which scammers initiate contact is by phone, according to 69% of fraud reports submitted in 2018.¹ Because of this, LiveOn NY has found through our outreach work that many older adults are now hesitant to answer their phones unless they immediately recognize the number. Further, many are wary to trust the information left in voicemail messages due to the high number of government imposter scams.

LiveOn NY is happy to support increased outreach to older New Yorkers, especially around such critical benefits; however, recognizing the city's limited resources, we thought it important to share the reluctance many older adults have to answer or discuss finances matters on the phone, as a point of consideration around the proposal.

¹ Federal Trade Commission, *Consumer Sentinel Data Book 2018*.



Making New York a better place to age

LiveOn NY is proud to work with City Council and the Department of Finance to continue to combat barriers to re-enrollment in critical benefits among older adults, and we are happy to support the outreach methods determined successful and appropriate by both the Council and the Department of Finance.

LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.

LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.

Glen Bolofsky, CPA

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Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
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Written Testimony Submission

Attention: Committee on Finance
The New York City Council
Chairman: Daniel Dromm

September 17, 2019

RE: 17467 A Committee on Finance 19-09-17 Committee Green Sheet

Thanking the Committee and Committee Chair for accepting this written document into evidence before the Committee.

Int 0952-2018 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring notice of renewal of the senior citizen homeowner exemption and disabled homeowner exemption by phone.

Position: we support this bill as it provides much needed assistance to seniors and the disabled.

Int 1225-2018 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the collection and maintenance of contact information of real property owners.

Position: we support this bill as it provides much needed assistance to improve communication – which is fundamental to our democracy.

Int 1702-2019 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to notice regarding property tax rates.

Position: we support this bill as it provides key information regarding notice.

Int 1705-2019 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the department of finance providing a receipt of payment.

Position: we support this bill as receipt of payment is essential to good record-keeping.

Respectfully Submitted,



Biography

Glen Bolofsky, CPA has 30 years of finance experience in NYC government operations concerning the City of New York Department of Finance and the City of New York Department of Transportation. He is credited as the publisher of the first NYC Alternate Side of the Street Suspended Parking Calendar which is a standard of all elected official's offices – and which assists the public in avoiding unnecessary motor vehicle activity – and unnecessary tickets. He is recognized nationally for his revolutionary website, parkingticket.com that aids the public in avoiding the payment of unfairly issued parking ticket fines.

He has been invited by the Committee on Finance and Committee on Transportation to appear countless times during his career, offering input and assistance in parking rules and the efficient use of the city streets.

He is President of parkingticket.com, a registered Court Broker – and his organization appears daily before the NYC DOF adjudicating tickets.

In multiple legal actions against the DOF he has proven to the satisfaction of the New York State Supreme Court that:

- DOF has illegally charged the public penalties on parking tickets resulting in \$50k in refunds to the public
- DOF has illegally altered parking tickets – creating two (2) versions of the same ticket - resulting in \$250k in refunds to the public
- DOF has illegally upheld parking tickets and has been ordered to refund more than \$883k to the public
- DOF has illegally upheld parking tickets and has been ordered to provide dismissals on more than \$4 million in parking ticket dismissals to the public

Featured

The Encyclopedia of the City of New York – Yale University Press – First Edition

For publishing the first listing of days when Alternate Side Parking Rules are Suspended, in 1983

The Wall Street Journal

The Washington Post

The New York Law Journal

The Queens Courier

The New York Times

The Bronx Times

Crains NY Business

NPR

The New York Post

Gotham Gazette

The New York Daily News

Streetsblog

The Queens Courier

Canarsie Courier

Greenpoint Gazette

Chelsea Clinton News



The New York City Council

City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Committee Green Sheet

Committee on Finance

Daniel Dromm, Chair

*Members: Adrienne E. Adams, Robert E. Cornegy, Jr., Laurie A. Cumbo,
Vanessa L. Gibson, Mark Gjonaj, Barry S. Grodenchik, Rory I. Lancman,
Farah N. Louis, Steven Matteo, Francisco P. Moya, Keith Powers,
Helen K. Rosenthal and James G. Van Bramer*

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

10:00 AM

Committee Room - City Hall

- Int 0952-2018** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring notice of renewal of the senior citizen homeowner exemption and disabled homeowner exemption by phone
- Int 1225-2018** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the collection and maintenance of contact information of real property owners
- Int 1702-2019** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to notice regarding property tax rates
- Int 1705-2019** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the department of finance providing a receipt of payment

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0952 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenna Gladfelter

Address: _____

I represent: LiveOn NY

Address: 49 West 45th St NY, NY 10036

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Hynan

Address: One Centre St.

I represent: NYC DoF

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leslie Zimmerman

Address: One Centre St.

I represent: NYC DoF

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/17/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sheeloh Fenberg

Address: One Centre St.

I represent: NYC Dof

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LESLIE ZIMMERMAN

Address: 59 MAIDEN LANE

I represent: NYC Dept of Finance

Address: 59 Maiden Lane, NYC

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms