

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON AGING

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JANUARY 21, 2020  
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: DANIEL DROMM  
CHAIRPERSON

MARGARET S. CHIN  
CHAIRPERSON

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FRANCISCO P. MOYA  
KEITH POWERS  
HELEN K. ROSENTHAL  
JAMES G. VAN BRAMER

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

Michael Hyman, First Deputy Commissioner, New York City Department of Finance

Bibi Parmar, Senior Director of Senior and Disabled Programs, NYC Department of Finance

Sheila Voyard, Director of Outreach, NYC Department of Finance

Carl Laske, Director of Real Property and Legal Council Unit, Legal Affairs Division, NYC Department of Finance

Rocky Chin, Member of AARP Executive Council, New York

Kim Lerner, Program Director Benefits Outreach Program, Live On New York

Peter Kempner, Legal Director and Elderly Project Director, Volunteers of Legal Service

Alex Riley, Director, Elder Law Practice of the Civil Practice, Legal Aid Society

Christopher Evans, Legal Aid Society

Larry Wood, Director or Organizing, Goddard Riverside Community House, Upper West Side

Provati Devi

Alex Brandis, Policy and Advocacy Manager,  
Medics Home Neighborhood House

2 (sound check) (pause) (gavel)

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Alright folks, if you  
4 can, please find seats. If not doing so, once again  
5 private conversations please take outside of the  
6 Chambers. We ask you to please silence all electronic  
7 devices. Any questions, please get the attention of  
8 one of the sergeant-at-arm who will be more than  
9 happy to help you. Thank you. (pause) (gavel)

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, good morning.  
11 I'm Council Member Daniel Dromm, Chair of the  
12 Committee on Finance. Today's hearing is being held  
13 jointly with the Committee on Aging, which is chaired  
14 by Council Member Margaret Chin. I apologize for  
15 being late. We had a vote across the street, and  
16 that was what kept me there. We have been joined by  
17 my colleague Council Member Adrienne Adams, Council  
18 Member Karen Koslowitz, Minority Leader Steve Matteo,  
19 Council Member Ruben Diaz, Sr., Council Member Barry  
20 Grodenchik, Council Member Barry Grodenchik, and  
21 that's it. Okay, good. Today the committees will  
22 conduct an oversight hearing on the Department of  
23 Finance's administration of the Senior Citizen Rent  
24 Increase Exemption Program and the Disabled Rent  
25 Increase Exemption, which together make the New York

2 City Rent Freeze Program. More specifically, the  
3 committees will examine DOF's progress in increasing  
4 overall annual enrollment and outreach for the  
5 program, as well as recent legislative policy changes  
6 that impact the program's benefits and issues raised  
7 in various government reports. Under the Rent Freeze  
8 Program, senior citizens over the age of 62 and  
9 individuals with disabilities are protected from  
10 future rent increases when freezing their rents while  
11 providing landlords with tax abatement credits equal  
12 to the dollar value of the rent increases they are  
13 entitled to. According to DOF's 2028 Rent Freeze  
14 Program Report approximately 73,299 eligible  
15 households were enrolled in the program in 2016 and  
16 receiving SCRIE or DRIE benefits citywide. We  
17 commend the agency for its increased efforts to  
18 target under-enrolled neighborhoods. However, even by  
19 the agency's own reporting there remains at least  
20 57,000 eligible households that are not yet enrolled  
21 in the program even though neighborhood level data  
22 was not included in the 2018 report as it was in the  
23 2014 report, the Council hopes that DOF is using this  
24 data to target its outreach for maximum  
25 effectiveness. Until all eligible households are

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2 enrolled more work needs to be done to ensure that  
3 seniors and people with disabilities are receiving  
4 the rental assistance they need to remain in their  
5 homes. At a time where escalating costs of rent and  
6 income-income inequality continues to grow in the  
7 city, SCRIE and DRIE become even more critical  
8 housing preservation programs. In addition, at the  
9 end of 2019 State Legislative Session the Legislature  
10 passed the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection  
11 Act, which caused several changes to the  
12 Administration of the Rent Freeze Program. Notably  
13 the state legislation allows the city to freeze rents  
14 at a preferential rent level rather than at the legal  
15 rent for the length of the tenancy. This is a  
16 welcome change particularly because DOF noted in its  
17 2018 report that preferential rent was one of the  
18 primary reasons that program enrollment was not  
19 higher. We look forward to learning about how DOF  
20 intends on utilizing this shift in policy to increase  
21 enrollment. Before we hear from the Administration,  
22 I would like to hand it over to Chair Chin for her  
23 statement. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Chair  
25 Dromm. Good morning.

2 CROWD: Good morning.

3 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I'm Margaret Chin,  
4 Chair of the Committee on Aging. Thank you to Chair  
5 Dromm for his leadership in calling this important  
6 hearing on rental assistance programs for seniors and  
7 people with disability. We have also been joined by  
8 Council Member Louis. Today, we will hear testimony  
9 from the Mayoral Administration on the Senior Citizen  
10 Rent Increase Exemption or SCRIE programs and the  
11 Disabled Rent Increase Exemption or DRIE program,  
12 which are collectively referred to as the New York  
13 City Rent Freeze Program. As Chair of the Committee  
14 on Aging, and a representative of many low-income and  
15 rent burdened New Yorkers, I fully understand how  
16 essential the New York City Rent Freeze Program is.  
17 I was proud to support the Council's law authorizing  
18 an increase in the household income threshold to the  
19 Rent Freeze Program to 50,000 in March of 2014. That  
20 represents an increase of over \$20,000 for both  
21 programs and make thousand more seniors and people  
22 with disabilities eligible. However, we know that  
23 the program can still do more for more people. The  
24 statistics are so great. On average the SCRIE  
25 participant is 73 years old and has an average

2 household income just under \$18,600. Meanwhile, the  
3 average DRIE participant is 57 years old and has an  
4 average household income around \$15,200. These are  
5 some of our most low-income neighbors. These  
6 neighbors rely on the Rent Freeze Programs to stay  
7 stably housed out of shelter and rooted in the  
8 communities they helped to build. We have been—we  
9 have seen enrollment in the Rent Freeze Program  
10 increase between 2014 and 2017. The data show an  
11 increase of nearly 11% growing from 67,000 to 74,300  
12 participants. Department of Finance deserves credit  
13 for this increase. Still, DOF's 2018 Rent Freeze  
14 Program Report estimates that only 50% of eligible  
15 households are enrolled in the program. That mean  
16 that our there are over 57,000 households who are  
17 eligible for the Rent Freeze Program, but aren't  
18 enrolled. Today, I would like to hear a clear  
19 strategy from DOF on how to reach these vulnerable  
20 New Yorkers. In addition, we need greater  
21 accountability regarding the effectiveness of  
22 existing outreach to severely under-enrolled  
23 neighborhoods. These neighborhoods criss-cross all  
24 five boroughs, and include immigrant rich areas like  
25 Flushing, Flatbush, and Highbridge where language and



2 cultural barriers may create obstacles that the city  
3 must overcome. Another issue to discuss is the role  
4 of the DOF Ombudsperson. The ombudsperson is a recent  
5 innovation designed to help tenants resolve issues  
6 when applying or renewing rent free--Rent Freeze  
7 Program benefits. The two major categories addressed  
8 by the ombudsperson are related to application  
9 processing, and tax abatement credits. I am  
10 particularly concerned about the large volumes, some  
11 69% of increased dealing with application processing.  
12 We need the Rent Freeze application and renewal  
13 process to be seamless, and streamlined so that our  
14 older New Yorkers and people with disability can  
15 access their benefit with ease. I look forward to  
16 hear how DOF and its sister agencies are working to  
17 improve and streamline this process. Finally, there  
18 is an important gender and disability equity lens to  
19 this work. In November 2018, the Council heard from  
20 advocates who correctly identified that the DRIE  
21 program excludes caregivers of people with  
22 disability. Most of the time these caregivers are  
23 women. Caregiving responsibility significantly impact  
24 the ability of caregivers to maintain full-time  
25 employment, which can result in a struggle to make

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2 ends meet and pay rent. Let lift up our caregivers  
3 and honor their essential work. I look forward to  
4 hearing how DOF treats caregivers and possible action  
5 the Council and our state partner may take to extend  
6 this benefit to caregivers and promote equity. I'd  
7 like to thank the Committee on Aging staff for their  
8 hard work in preparing for this hearing: Daniel  
9 Coupe, our Senior Financial Analyst, our counsel  
10 Nusrat Tadari and Senior Policy Analyst Calima  
11 Johnson. I now turn it back to Chair Dromm. Thank  
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you Chair  
14 Chin. Before we hear testimony I'd like to thank the  
15 Finance Committee staff. (coughs) Excuse me, who  
16 worked on today's hearing: Rebecca Chasen, Stephanie  
17 Ruiz, Emre Edev, Andrew Wilbur and Luke Zangerle. We  
18 will now begin testimony from Michael Hyman, First  
19 Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Finance  
20 joined by Bibi Parmar, Senior Director of Senior-of  
21 Senior and Disabled Programs; Sheila Voyard, Director  
22 of Outreach, and Carl Laske, Director of Real  
23 Property and Legal Council Unit in DOF's Legal  
24 Affairs Division; representatives from the Department  
25 for the Aging and the Mayor's Office for People with

2 Disabilities are also here to answer any questions we  
3 may have for their agency. So, we will begin as soon  
4 as you are sworn in by counsel.

5 LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you affirm that your  
6 testimony will be truthful to the best of your  
7 knowledge, information and belief?

8 MICHAEL HYMAN: I do.

9 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

10 MICHAEL HYMAN: Good morning. Thank you,  
11 Chair Dromm and Chair Chin and members of the Finance  
12 and Aging Committees for the opportunity to testify  
13 today. My name is Michael Hyman. I am the First  
14 Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department  
15 of Finance. As the Chair mentioned, I'm joined today  
16 by Bibi Parmar, our Senior Director of Senior and  
17 Disabled Programs; Sheila Voyar, our Director of  
18 Outreach and Carl Laske, Chief of the Real Property  
19 and Legal Counsel Unit in our Legal Affairs Division.  
20 With us today are representatives of the Department  
21 for the Aging, and the Mayor's Office for People with  
22 Disabilities. The Department of Finance administers  
23 the tax and revenue laws of the city including  
24 property and business taxes and parking summonses. We  
25 value close to 1.1 million properties worth a

2 combined market value of \$1.4 trillion, and we are  
3 responsible for recording deeds and other documents  
4 associated with those properties. We also administer  
5 dozens of exemptions and abatement programs that  
6 provide billions of dollars in property tax relief to  
7 property owners and renters. One of the most  
8 important and most well known of these programs is  
9 the Rent Freeze Program, which provides rent relief  
10 to low-income seniors, and people with disabilities.  
11 The Rent Freeze Program freezes recipients' rents and  
12 protect them from future increases. Landlords  
13 receive tax credits to cover the differences between  
14 their tenants' frozen rent amount the amount of rent  
15 that would be permitted by the Rent Guidelines Board.  
16 The Rent Freeze Program is comprised of two benefits:  
17 the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption known as  
18 SCRIE, which was created in 1970 and the Disability  
19 Rent Increase Exemption known as DRIE created in  
20 2005. As housing costs continue to rise—continue to  
21 rise citywide, the SCRIE and DRIE benefits help New  
22 Yorkers remain in their homes. Each benefit has  
23 specific eligibility requirements, but both SCRIE and  
24 DRIE recipients must have a combined annual household  
25 income of \$50,000 or less, and more than one-third of

2 their monthly income must be spent on rent. To be  
3 eligible for SCRIE a tenant must be 62 or older. To be  
4 eligible for DRIE, the tenant must be 18 or older and  
5 receive one of several disability related benefits.  
6 To be approved for the Rent Freeze Program,  
7 applicants must reside in rent regulated apartments.  
8 Currently there are 63,018 tenants enrolled in SCRIE,  
9 and 12,088 tenants enrolled in DRIE. Over the past  
10 several years the Department of Finance has worked  
11 with the State Legislature and the City Council to  
12 introduce and pass legislation to make critical  
13 improvements to the Rent Freeze Program for current  
14 and future recipients. We were able to increase the  
15 program's income ceiling to \$50,000 from its prior  
16 ceiling of less than \$30,000. Recipients can now  
17 return to their previous frozen rent amount if a one-  
18 time income increase such as a pension payout causes  
19 them to be ineligible for the benefit for one year.  
20 We introduced a policy and promulgated rules  
21 providing for reasonable accommodation when a tenant  
22 did not file a timely renewal application. We have  
23 implemented a short form renewal application  
24 available to participants who have received SCRIE and  
25 DRIE for five consecutive benefit periods, and

2 finally, we worked with the state to pass legislation  
3 allowing eligible household members a reasonable  
4 amount of time to submit a benefit take over  
5 application in the event that the head of household  
6 dies or leaves the property. In addition to these  
7 changes, the Department of Finance implemented a  
8 number of improvements to how we administer the Rent  
9 Freeze Program. We have redesigned and simplified the  
10 renewal process resulting in a 94% approval rate  
11 during our most recently completed renewal cycle in  
12 2018. We have introduced, are in the process of  
13 introducing online platforms that allow new an  
14 renewing rent freeze program participants to review  
15 their benefits and improve their—upload their  
16 documents—documentation electronically rather than  
17 know a packet of information or visited a Department  
18 of Finance Business Center. The online DOF Landlord  
19 Express Access Portal known and LEAP, allows property  
20 owners to submit documents necessary for the  
21 processing of rent freeze applications. This year,  
22 DOF will be introducing an Online Tenant Access  
23 Portal known as New York City TAP. It will provide a  
24 one stop shop for forms, information and resources,  
25 for the SCRIE and DRIE benefits. The public will be

2 able to renew as well as submit initial applications  
3 for Rent Freeze Program benefits. Our customers will  
4 be able to upload required documentation  
5 electronically rather than having to mail a packet of  
6 information or visit a Department of Finance business  
7 center, and they will also be able to check on their  
8 application status. In addition, a tenant will be  
9 able to authorize a family member or another  
10 individual to apply for the benefits on his or her  
11 behalf. We plan to deploy the renewal function in  
12 the third quarter of calendar year 2020 followed by  
13 the initial application function by the end of the  
14 year. Customers who have further questions about  
15 their rent freeze benefits are now able to speak  
16 directly with the Department of Finance employee to  
17 resolve their issues and concerns. With the launch of  
18 the new Department of Finance Customer Call Center.  
19 rent freeze calls at 311 is unable to answer, and are  
20 routed to us for immediate response. Additionally, we  
21 have cross-trained staff so that more people are  
22 capable of processing applications thereby reducing  
23 wait times. We have also created the offices of the  
24 SCRIE and DRIE ombudspersons to help tenants resolve  
25 any issues when applying for or renewing benefits.

2 The most recent updates to the Rent Freeze Program  
3 resulted in—results from the passage of the Housing  
4 Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019. The  
5 state law includes several changes that impact the  
6 program. First, the capital and rent increases for  
7 major capital improvements or MCIs decreased from 6%  
8 to 2%. Allowable rent increases to MCIs are covered  
9 by a tax abatement credit to the landlord. While this  
10 change affects the amount of the credit available to  
11 landlords, as the maximum amount they can receive for  
12 major capital improvements has decreased, it does not  
13 affect the rent of tenants receiving SCRIE or DRIE.  
14 Another change enacted by the Housing Stability and  
15 Tenant Protection Act was the elimination of fuel  
16 cost charges for tenants' rents. In the past  
17 landlords could add these charges to the rent amount  
18 and receive a credit. Again, while this will not  
19 affect rent freeze tenants, it will affect the amount  
20 of the tax abatement credits received by landlords.  
21 Mostly differently for renters enrolled in or  
22 eligible for the programs, the new law stipulates  
23 that the new rent freeze applicants who have an  
24 existing preferential rent agreement in the all  
25 program eligibility requirements can have their rent



2 frozen at their preferential rent amount. In the  
3 past tenants with preferential rent agreements may  
4 have not seen the benefit of applying for the program  
5 as they were already paying below market or below  
6 legal rent. With the change in law, these tenants  
7 will now be able to lock in their preferential rent  
8 amounts, which were previously subject to changes  
9 with the expiration of the lease. We expect that  
10 over the next several years this will result in more  
11 households participating in the Rent Freeze Program,  
12 and we'll continue—and we will continue to encourage  
13 tenants with preferential rent agreements to enroll.  
14 I will discuss our outreach efforts shortly. The  
15 Department of Finance is currently in the process of  
16 promulgating a number of rules for the Rent Freeze  
17 Program. These proposed rules will provide more  
18 guidance to the public on how the program works and  
19 who is eligible. The rules would do the following:  
20 Establish the eligibility requirements for SCRIE and  
21 DRIE benefits based on applicant's status, household  
22 income, and who is to be considered a member of the  
23 household; set for the application process, and  
24 applicable deadlines for rent freeze applications as  
25 well as who may sign such applications; establish the

2 mechanics to determine the effective date, as well as  
3 with those who rent for approved applications; set  
4 forth the types of rent increases that are the  
5 responsibility of the landlords, and the rent  
6 increases to be paid by the tenants; define who is  
7 the head of household eligible for such benefits as  
8 well as the succession rights when the head of  
9 household permanently leaves an apartment; and set  
10 forth the procedures for the transfer of benefits if a  
11 SCRIE or DRIE benefit share moves from one eligible  
12 apartment to another eligible apartment. As part of  
13 this rule development in the information process, we  
14 continue to receive and review feedback from  
15 residents and advocates. We held a public hearing on  
16 December 3, 2019, and we'll be scheduling another  
17 hearing after gathering feedback on the rules at the  
18 next meeting of the SCRIE and DRIE Task Force on  
19 January 29<sup>th</sup>. The Task Force members include senior  
20 and disability advocacy groups, neighborhood  
21 organizations and other stakeholders who share our  
22 goal of improving and increasing participation in the  
23 Rent Freeze Program. Since 2016, enrollment in the  
24 Rent Freeze Program including the Mitchell-Lama SCRIE  
25 benefits administered by the Department of Housing,

2 Preservation and Development has increased from  
3 73,299 to 75,106. It is important to note that the  
4 role that attrition plays in these figures. For  
5 example since 2014 we have actually seen a nearly 40%  
6 increase in the number of households receiving rent  
7 freeze benefits administered by the Department of  
8 Finance. At the same time, however, many households  
9 lost their benefits due to moving, death, or increase  
10 to their income. Others failed to renew their  
11 benefits likely for the same reasons. We do our best  
12 to counteract this attrition by enrolling and  
13 renewing as many people in the Rent Freeze Program as  
14 we can. One of the ways we do that is with the  
15 robust and year round outreach effort to enroll and  
16 re-enroll New Yorkers. Our outreach efforts focus on  
17 the communities where the data suggests we are most  
18 likely to find eligible rent freeze households. At  
19 the Council district level, the largest rent freeze  
20 program enrollment is in Council Member Rodriguez's  
21 Council District 10 with approximately 6,200  
22 enrollees, nearly twice as many as any other  
23 district. District 40 represented by Council Member  
24 Eugene and District 7 represented by Council Member  
25 Levine each have more than 3,000 rent freeze

2 households. Districts with more than 2,000 enrolled  
3 households include Districts 1, 3, 6, 14, 25, 29 and  
4 48, which are represented by Chair Chin, Speaker  
5 Johnson, Council Member Rosenthal, Council Member  
6 Cabrera, Council Member, Chair Dromm, Council Member  
7 Koslowitz, and Council Member Deutsch. In addition to  
8 getting the word out about the SCRIE and DRIE  
9 benefits in these and other communities, DOF's  
10 outreach team provides a full range of case  
11 management service. Staff work closely with  
12 potential applicants throughout the application and  
13 enrollment process. Much of this work is done in and  
14 at-it's done in person at in-person events. In  
15 Fiscal Year 2019 we hosted or attended 471 events an  
16 average of nine per week nearly all of which were  
17 held in partnership with the Council. We met with  
18 community in recreation centers, churches,  
19 restaurants, public buildings and anywhere else we  
20 can find space. Outreach staff even make home visits  
21 for customers who are not able to leave their homes  
22 to attend an event. All Rent Freeze applicants have  
23 the right to a reasonable accommodation, and the  
24 agency approved 93 reasonable accommodation requests  
25 for SCRIE and DRIE applicants last year. We would

2 not cover so much ground or serve so many people  
3 without help from our partners in government and the  
4 community. Our partners include our sister agencies  
5 such as DFTA and MOPD, members of the New York City  
6 Council, the community boards, the borough presidents  
7 and the New York City Service Bureau. We also work  
8 very closely with the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit.  
9 We meet monthly with PEU to discuss enrollment events  
10 and activities, and we rely on the support of Public  
11 Engagement Team, as well as our partners at Live On  
12 New York to help us staff and manage our larger  
13 events. Together we have trained 167 community  
14 organizations to assist tenants with applying for  
15 rent freeze benefits, and providing the necessary  
16 documentation. We also work with PEU and our other  
17 partners to knock on doors, make calls, and send  
18 mailings to eligible rent freeze households. We are  
19 grate—really grateful to the Mayor's Public  
20 Engagement Unit and our sister agencies for their on  
21 the ground support. In closing, I noted earlier that  
22 more than 75,000 households currently benefit from  
23 the protections afforded by the Rent Freeze Program.  
24 Our goal is to increase that number, and we look  
25 forward to continuing to work with the Council to

2 reach the New Yorkers who would benefit from  
3 receiving SCRIE and DRIE. We thank you for your  
4 continued support and for the opportunity to testify  
5 and any questions you may have. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you very  
7 much and before we go to questions, I just want to  
8 say we were joined by Council Member Ayala and we are  
9 now joined also by Council Member Keith Powers. So,  
10 thank you so much for your testimony. In your  
11 testimony you discussed the SCRIE and DRIE Task  
12 Force. So, can you just tell us how many members are  
13 on the Task Force and how often does the Task Force  
14 meet?

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: I'm going to let Sheila  
16 Voyard who is centered (sic) about our outreach, the  
17 details.

18 SHEILA VOYARD: We have about, um, 25 to  
19 30 members in the Task Force and we meet quarterly.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and what's the  
21 role of the Task Force?

22 SHEILA: So, the Task Force was, um,  
23 instituted as a—to provide a platform and opportunity  
24 for advocacy groups, industry groups and also the  
25 community based organizations to provide feedback to

2 the, um, agency on issues that they may be facing.

3 So, we recognize these as important partners in the  
4 communities because they serve underground and so we  
5 wanted to give them an opportunity to bring issues to  
6 us so that we can provide policy challenges, and make  
7 improvements to our processes so that we can continue  
8 to get people to apply into the programs.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, were some of the,  
10 um, partners that the Deputy Commissioner mentioned  
11 also included on the Task Force?

12 SHEILA VOYARD: Yes, do Live On New York  
13 is part of our task force, MOPD is part of our task  
14 force, and we have a number of other industry and  
15 advocacy groups in the task force.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Great. If you can get  
17 us a list of that of those members later on, please.

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: Sure, definitely.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. When DOF  
20 issued its first Rent Cree-Rent Freeze report in  
21 2014, the report, um, focused on the enrollment  
22 issues of neighborhoods across the city. DOF said it  
23 was going to utilize that data to, um, create a  
24 targeted outreach campaign specifically for the top  
25 10 under-enrolled neighborhoods, and those

2 neighborhoods were the Upper East Side, the Upper  
3 West Side, Stuyvesant Town, Turtle Bay, and  
4 Manhattan, Kings Bridge Heights, High Bridge, South  
5 Concourse, Throggs Neck, Co-op City and Riverdale,  
6 Kings Bridge in the Bronx, Coney Island and Central  
7 Flatbush, Crown Heights and Brooklyn and Flushing  
8 Whitestone and Kew Gardens Park, and Woodhaven in  
9 Queens. So, what specific strategies did you use to  
10 target your outreach in these areas?

11 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, there's several-  
12 several aspects that we did to-first is using data to  
13 try to figure out where the potentially eligible and  
14 under-utilized population exists, but I think a big  
15 part of it is just expanding not only the outreach  
16 for education, but for case management strategies.  
17 Actually working with sister agencies and other  
18 organizations making sure that tenants who are  
19 eligible for the-for the benefit can be kind of  
20 assisted through the process of applying for the  
21 benefit and dealing with any documentation that might  
22 be required. So on the one hand it was trying to get  
23 a better target population that we could focus  
24 efforts on and also provide better a full array of  
25 customer services to help them in the process.



2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you attribute  
3 those outreach efforts to, um, the high enrollments  
4 in neighborhoods, um, and, um, how do those  
5 enrollment rates then compared to what we see today?

6 MICHAEL HYMAN: I can get you information  
7 on specific neighborhoods. Overall, as I mentioned  
8 in my testimony the number of-of-of recipients of the  
9 benefits is up 40%. You know, part of what we're-you  
10 know, part of it on the other side there is attrition  
11 in the program, but we are trying to reach out to  
12 communities where we think there is significant  
13 under-utilized populations, and focus the efforts  
14 there. We think it has been successful. We continue  
15 to expand our outreach efforts. We're now partnering  
16 with AARP on efforts to get additional data to try to  
17 target potentially eligible populations. So, we  
18 think it-there's obviously more work to be done, but  
19 we believe they have been successful.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, Local Law 40 of  
21 2015 required the DOF to report, um, the  
22 neighborhoods level eligibility enrollment data, and  
23 this-this information was not included in the report  
24 though the latter was provided to the Council upon  
25 request. So did DOF ever issue and post and amended

2 version of the 2018 report that included the data by  
3 neighborhood as required?

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: Did we? I'll have to  
5 check, but if not, we could look into it.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Um, okay. Based on  
7 the neighborhood, um, based on the data that was  
8 latter provided to the City Council, the following 10  
9 neighborhoods were identified as having the lowest  
10 enrollment: Williams Bridge, Baychester, Morrisania,  
11 East Tremont, Mott Haven, Hunts Point, Kingsbridge  
12 Heights, Moshulu, Pellham Parkway, Riverdale, Kings  
13 Bridge in the Bronx, Howard Beach, South Ozone Park  
14 and the Rockaways in Queens, North Shore in Staten  
15 Island, and Brownsville, Oceanville, Ocean Hill in  
16 Brooklyn. Does DOF have an outreach plan to target  
17 these under-enrolled neighborhoods, and if so, um,  
18 can you distribute that to us, and please describe  
19 the data that you've used instead to develop your  
20 outreach strategies.

21 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, the data we use is  
22 based upon—and we do have access to income data since  
23 we do administer taxes and we do have also  
24 information to certain housing and community renewal  
25 data on, um, rent stabilized apartments. So, we try

2 to look at the population that would be eligible.

3 It's an estimate and, you know, while we have  
4 outreach efforts citywide, I think I mentioned in my  
5 testimony I think every Council district has had an  
6 outreach event, and we're always open to doing more.

7 We are trying to focus special efforts on the  
8 communities you mentioned and part of that is by  
9 having more direct case management services available  
10 to potential applicants, and also more targeted  
11 outreach events to, um, to try to get as many people  
12 as possible enrolled.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, like a  
14 neighborhood like Howard Beach and South Ozone Park  
15 has 65 recipients out of a total eligible estimated  
16 number of about 187. What do you attribute to low  
17 number to?

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: I can't speak to that  
19 particular neighborhoods, but as—as somebody  
20 mentioned, I think Chair Chin at the beginning and as  
21 I mentioned in my testimony we do think that the  
22 changes in the State Stabilization Laws with  
23 preferential rent will be a boost to enrollment in  
24 the programs that previously even though there was a  
25 reason to enroll even prior to the change in the law

2 because the preferential rent went away, we still  
3 have a freeze on you legal rent, but now given that  
4 the preferential rent is the legal rent, we think  
5 there is going to be an enhanced incentive for—and  
6 that's one thing we're also doing in our outreach and  
7 trying to encourage people to enroll to make sure  
8 that their rents are frozen at the preferential rent  
9 level. The other factor I should say with this is  
10 that, you know, when we do these estimates of  
11 potential populations, we try to be as expansive as  
12 possible, and it could be that in certain neighborhoods  
13 we are over-estimating the potential eligible  
14 population because we don't have the complete  
15 information on household income or other factors, but  
16 we're taking the strategy that we should be as  
17 expansive as possible so that the outreach is  
18 targeted even if, you know, we're overstating  
19 potential populations that might be eligible.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. In the 2018  
21 report, DOF used a new approach to estimate the  
22 program's eligible populations for rent stabilized  
23 apartment units. Rather than using data from the  
24 Housing and Vacancy Survey as previously done in the  
25 2014 report, the agency instead used administrative

2 data sources such as HCR rent stabilized apartment  
3 data and IRS income data. Why did you make this  
4 change in methodology for rent stabilized apartments?

5 MICHAEL HYMAN: It's a more precise  
6 method to try to get to the population that's under-  
7 served. The Housing Vacancy Survey data is kind of  
8 summary data. It is a survey. So, especially when you  
9 start getting to the community level the reliability  
10 becomes a little more suspicious. Using direct  
11 administrative data like income tax data and HCR data  
12 that you mentioned, allows us to do little more  
13 precise estimates of the top-populations. And, in  
14 fact, we did revise some of our numbers from the  
15 earlier report based on, you know, the greater  
16 accuracy of the—a new source.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So in that report I  
18 think DOF said that this is still a progress—a work  
19 in progress. What did you mean by that?

20 MICHAEL HYMAN: We're trying to look for  
21 more additional data sources. I mentioned we're now  
22 working with AARP who has information on income of,  
23 you know, their membership. So, it's really trying  
24 to refine the data to be a little more accurate. You  
25 know, we think we're making improvements. We think

2 the methodology of using the administrative data is  
3 an improvement over using HVS data, but we're still  
4 looking for other data sources that will make it more  
5 accurate.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Are you considering  
7 any new approaches for people living in rent  
8 controlled and Mitchell-Lama apartment units?

9 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, it's a combination  
10 of having the data try to, you know, again we do  
11 outreach citywide, but to look in particular  
12 neighborhoods where the underutilization may be most  
13 significant, but then I think it really comes down to  
14 new kind of processes that we're putting in place to  
15 help people apply and to learn about the program. So,  
16 we do extensive outreach. I mentioned a few, which  
17 are only a tip of the iceberg, and we do believe that  
18 this summer when we launch this new Tenant Access  
19 Portal it will be a valuable tool. It will be a tool  
20 that can—people can electronically upload  
21 applications and documentations with assistance of  
22 advocates and relatives. We believe that will be  
23 helpful and due in some part it's just streamlining  
24 and making the process easier.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, DOF reported that  
3 the tenants with existing preferential rent  
4 agreements saw little incentive to enroll in the  
5 programs as their rent amounts were lower than the  
6 amount they would pay if their rent were frozen at  
7 the legal regulated rent. At the time of the report  
8 only 4.1% of current SCRIE and DRIE recipients had a  
9 preferential rent agreement. How did DOF determine  
10 that only 4.1% of SCRIE and SCRIE recipients had a  
11 preferential rent agreement, and is D-O-DOF  
12 collecting preferential rent data?

13 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, I believe the data  
14 came from the HCR data that we have access to, which  
15 has building and—and excuse me—apartment specific  
16 information. You know, as I mentioned, the big  
17 effort now is to try to encourage people with the new  
18 change in the Rent Stabilization Law to enroll in the  
19 programs so we do expect over time that's going to go  
20 up.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you do any  
22 outreach on the change with regard to the  
23 preferential rent change in the law?

24 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, the first step is we  
25 have issued bulletins to educate people as to what

2 the benefit is. I think it's really more just it's  
3 incorporated into the outreach strategy. As we go out  
4 into communities we make sure it's known to the  
5 populations that even if you have a rent preferential  
6 agreement you're now stepping your self interest to  
7 enroll the program.

8 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, what type of  
9 documentation would those who are receiving  
10 preferential rents need to supply to you in order to  
11 get the benefit of the program?

12 MICHAEL HYMAN: Um, I believe now under  
13 the rent stabilized system the rent—I should rate  
14 that time table, but the preferential rent is now  
15 their legal rent. So, as they do the applications,  
16 they should be stating what their legal rent is,  
17 which can be the preferential rent.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Would that be  
19 included on the lease?

20 MICHAEL HYMAN: I think. I'm sure how is  
21 really?

22 SHIELA VOYARD: (off mic) Yes.

23 MICHAEL HYMAN: Yes, yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And when they, before  
25 the law went into effect somebody who had a



2 preferential rent would have that in a lease as well  
3 or would it stay also the preferential and then the  
4 legally allowed or you know how that worked in the  
5 past?

6 MICHAEL HYMAN: It would be true to your  
7 system. You would have your legally allowed rent,  
8 which have additional increase on top of it and the  
9 preferential rent was an agreement between the  
10 landlord and the tenant.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, so with this  
12 change do you think that DOF is going to need to  
13 update any of its systems or how would that work  
14 internally with DOF?

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, we're incorporating  
16 the changes into our current systems and as we-I  
17 think a lot of it is just in updating the outreach  
18 strategies to make sure the populations that are  
19 eligible are fully aware of it and take advantage of  
20 it, but I think our system should be able to handle  
21 it.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, alright. I'm  
23 going to turn it over to Council Member Chin. She  
24 has additional questions, and then if we have time,  
25 I'll do a second round.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Chair  
3 Dromm. We've also been joined by Council Member  
4 Gjonaj. Oh, and Council Member Rosenthal. Um, DOF  
5 stated in its 2018 report that it attended or hosted  
6 429 events in Fiscal Year 2018. It also states that  
7 the city purchased digital advertisement on Google  
8 and Facebook and then to go with print advertisement  
9 in AM New York, El Diario and Metro New York.  
10 Additionally, DOF said that it used the agency's  
11 website and social media platform to build public  
12 awareness of the rent freeze program. So, how does--  
13 how did DOE determine which publication or print  
14 advertisement to publicize the Rent Freeze Program?

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, I-I don't--

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: You only focused on  
17 those few.

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: Okay, I'll have our  
19 outreach person.

20 SHEILA VOYARD: Um, I don't have all the  
21 details for that, but I know that we try to look at  
22 local newspapers because we understand that a lot of  
23 the population that's not coming forward to apply  
24 into the programs there may be some other reasons  
25 like a language barrier or they may not fully

2 understand what the requirements of the programs are.

3 So, we looked at local newspapers that, you know,  
4 could help us spread the word in those communities.

5 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But also did you—I  
6 mean across the city we have so many immigrant  
7 neighborhoods, and we have so many ethnic newspapers,  
8 and radio stations and TV stations. A lot of them are  
9 free, and if you buy an advertisement you might be  
10 able to also access some of their free program. Did  
11 you utilize any of these ethnic newspapers?

12 SHEILA VOYARD: So, the—the marketing  
13 campaign was done at the City Hall level. So, we—we  
14 had some input in terms of where it could—where we  
15 could advertise these, and—and ethnic and local  
16 newspapers were definitely part of the—the  
17 recommendations made, but again, I don't have the  
18 full details about, you know, the—the actual approach  
19 of how we reached those particular neighborhoods, but  
20 on a consistent basis, we reach out to ethnics and—  
21 ethnic and local newspapers to advertise our  
22 enrollment events when we're doing them in  
23 partnership with elected officials in certain  
24 communities that we have a partnership with them.

2 MICHAEL HYMAN: And with that we're happy  
3 to take any of your ideas so--

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I-I don't think  
5 it's enough just to publicize the outreach events. I  
6 mean you talked about at least 427 events attended or  
7 hosted by DOF. Do you have an idea what the number  
8 of attendees or the people who show up to those  
9 events?

10 SHEILA VOYARD: So, for Fiscal Year 2018,  
11 we had over 34,000 attendees that we touch at these  
12 events.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And how many like on  
14 average when--when you go to some of these events?  
15 What is the largest one and what is the smallest one?

16 SHEILA VOYARD: Um, well, it varies a lot  
17 depending on the neighborhood and the type of  
18 promotion that is done to promote the events, but the  
19 largest events I would say, over 150 people we had in  
20 Fiscal Year 2018 in Central Brooklyn. We'll do  
21 outreach events there at the Central Library and that  
22 event was attended by well over 150 people.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think that, um, you  
24 know my suggestion in terms of for a lot of the  
25 immigrant populations or seniors that do read the

2 local paper or the ethnic paper that really take  
3 advantage of it. If you do—you publicize the event  
4 and then when the event happens you take a lot of  
5 pictures and you could write about it and that's  
6 another coverage, but even just on a regular basis to  
7 engage them because it's--a lot of it is also free  
8 publicity, and especially when it's such an important  
9 government program that you should be able to take  
10 advantage of it, and really next time show some  
11 clippings, you know, some of the results that you  
12 were able to get. I've seen the Rent Freeze Program  
13 advertisement on the subway in the past, but we  
14 haven't, you know, haven't seen it any more. So  
15 sometimes the-the advertising or the program has to  
16 continue so that people can continue to be aware  
17 especially their new, you know, new guidelines or  
18 determination. There is one issue that I wanted to  
19 go at. It's this whole redetermination. It was at  
20 another hearing that for the first time I heard, um,  
21 from—from one, you know, the panel. He's going to  
22 testify later about that people can get a  
23 redetermination, you know, if their situation changes  
24 in terms of their income. So like in fiscal year 2019  
25 how many applications did DOF receive for SCRIE and

2 DRIE redetermination application? How many were  
3 granted and how many were rejected and why?

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: I'm going to ask Bibi  
5 Parmar, who's the head of our Operations.

6 BIBI PARMAR: Good morning. Um, I think  
7 we'll have to take that question back and look at our  
8 applications data, but it's definitely readily  
9 available and we can provide that after the hearing.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, this is the—this  
11 is an example: If a recipient has a permanent loss  
12 of 20% or more of their combined household income as  
13 compared to the income reported in their last  
14 approved SCRIE or DRIE application, they may apply  
15 for a redetermination of their frozen rent by filing  
16 a redetermination application with DOF.

17 BIBI PARMAR: Right. That's correct and  
18 so to make the process a little bit easier, we also  
19 combined our Benefit Takeover Application because by  
20 and large, um, the redetermination—it happens in  
21 parallel with benefit takeover applications when one  
22 of the primary applicants passes away. So, on the  
23 Benefit Takeover Applications there is simply a check  
24 box so there was—we eliminated the need to file a  
25 separate application and addition to the—in addition

2 to the Benefit Takeover Application. So, we're just  
3 trying to make it a little bit easier for the process  
4 to be seamless.

5 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, that's one  
6 example but if someone actually, you know, full time  
7 like a caregiver, working full time and now they have  
8 to work part-time or someone whose income has gone  
9 down, do you publicize this redetermination because  
10 I—that was the first time I heard that people can do  
11 that, and I think that makes a difference if some of  
12 the recipients if their income went down I mean went  
13 up or whatever, if they can get a redetermination  
14 that would make a difference.

15 BIBI PARMAR: Yes. A part of our  
16 Application Redesign process that we undertook in  
17 2016 added a lot of additional information to our  
18 applications, and so there's a frequently asked  
19 questions section, which addresses redeterminations  
20 and the criteria if there's a 20% permanent loss in  
21 income.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. Well, I hope  
23 that—I mean that should be something that should be  
24 publicized more. In the renewal process in Fiscal  
25 Year 2019 how many applications did DOF receive and

2 process for initial and renewal for the SCRIE and  
3 DRIE benefits? How many were granted, and how many  
4 were rejected and what are some of the reasons for  
5 the rejection?

6 BIBI PARMAR: Okay. For SCRIE initial  
7 applications in Fiscal Year 19 we received 7,392  
8 initial SCRIE applications, and sorry, 1,700–1,786  
9 DRIE applications, and roughly 60% of those  
10 applications are approved. Part of the reason for  
11 the denials are failure to submit documentation or  
12 just simply not eligible for the program. Um, one-  
13 third of the income criteria we see as probably our  
14 largest reason for denial followed by income of  
15 \$50,000. Some of the things that applicants perhaps  
16 overlook is that household income is—is part of the  
17 income calculation. So, while the senior or persons  
18 with disability may have lower income, but other  
19 household members and may have income that put them  
20 over that put them over the threshold. Um, for—you  
21 asked for renewal applications. So, we processed  
22 over 25 almost 26,000 SCRIE renewal applications, and  
23 over 6,000 DRIE renewal applications, and the  
24 application approval rate is over 95%.



2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, do you have a  
3 breakdown of the long and short form Renewal  
4 Application receive by DOF in Fiscal 2019?

5 BIBI PARMAR: Yes. Roughly about 40% of  
6 renewal applicants are qualified for-to use the short  
7 form renewal.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: 40% are using the short  
9 form?

10 BIBI PARMAR: Correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: In your testimony, um,  
12 Deputy Commissioner, you talked about-you mentioned  
13 that, and you talk about they have to have five  
14 consecutive applications. I mean if the short form  
15 is easier is somebody already applied, was approved  
16 and how they're renewing it, why couldn't they just  
17 all use the short form?

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, the point of the  
19 short form is really to easily the documentation part  
20 of the process so that that the idea is once you're  
21 in the program for that many periods your income is  
22 relatively stable, your situation is relatively  
23 stable so that, you know, we can comply with the law  
24 without requiring documentation that really is not  
25 going to have much value. Whereas, if somebody in

2 the program for a shorter period of time, it can—the  
3 documentation is what's legally required. So, part  
4 of this was part of a law change to make it a simpler  
5 process for people who are in relatively stable  
6 situations to have the short form.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, consider moving  
8 that.

9 MICHAEL HYMAN: I do.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Think about shorter,  
11 right--

12 MICHAEL HYMAN: That is.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: --so that doesn't have  
14 to wait five years or--or to make it as simple as  
15 possible so that more—I mean seniors most of their  
16 incomes are pretty stable. So, I think it—it really—  
17 we should definitely make the process easier. Now,  
18 HPD also do the SCRIE program for Mitchell-Lama and  
19 HDFC. So, what is the—how do you work with HPD in  
20 terms of doing the outreach? Do you also do outreach  
21 to Mitchell-Lama programs and--or you just leave that  
22 to HPD or you work together?

23 SHEILA VOYARD: No, we do as well because  
24 we also manage the DRIE program for disabled  
25 individuals in those buildings. So to the extent that

2 we have an enrollment event in one of these  
3 buildings, we would invited HPD to partner with us so  
4 that they can take on the SCRIE applications and then  
5 we can manage the DRIE applications. So, we work  
6 with them to staff the outreach events to these  
7 buildings.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, do you have any  
9 data from HPD in terms of how effective their  
10 outreach or the number of applications that they—they  
11 process?

12 SHEILA VOYARD: No, I don't.

13 MICHAEL HYMAN: We can contact them and  
14 request details. We have the number of enrollees, but  
15 the, um, I don't know if we have details on all their  
16 outreach events.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But do you have the—  
18 Okay, so, you can help us get that. Do you have the  
19 enrollee for the HPD program or is that part of your  
20 total program?

21 MICHAEL HYMAN: It is part of the total.  
22 I think we have the count. Do you have that Bibi

23 BIBI PARMAR: I do. Here.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member, have a  
25 question?

2 MICHAEL HYMAN: So, what's the, um,  
3 what's the total?

4 BIBI PARMAR: That's the total and we  
5 don't have the total.

6 MICHAEL HYMAN: We, um, we can find it  
7 now or we can get it to you?

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Hm?

9 MICHAEL HYMAN: I can't—I don't see it  
10 right off hand. We do have that number. I will get  
11 you the total. I believe it's— I don't want to guess.  
12 Do you have it?

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: If not, you can get it  
14 to back--

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: I will get back to you.

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: --to us because I  
17 assume you work together on the same Rent Freeze  
18 Program.

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: We do. As Sheila  
20 mentioned and especially where we're promoting DRIE  
21 and SCRIE as part of the one event, we do work with  
22 HPD. They do administer the Mitchell-Lama part of  
23 it, but we do have the data. I just don't have it at  
24 my fingertips. We'll get back to you with the  
25 specific numbers.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes, you're the one  
3 that administers the tax.

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, we administer the,  
5 you know--

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Abatement.

7 MICHAEL HYMAN: --about the Mitchell-  
8 Lama, but what we can do is get you the--we can  
9 contact HPD about more details on their outreach  
10 events, but we can get you the pure enrollment  
11 number.

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, our colleague  
13 also have questions?

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you,  
15 Chair Chin. We are now going to go to Council Member  
16 Powers followed by Council Member Rosenthal who have  
17 questions, and I want to say we also were joined by  
18 Council Member Moya, and now we are also joined by  
19 Council Member Gibson.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [off mic] And me,  
21 too. Okay, sorry about that.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, and we also  
23 have questions by Council Member Louis after  
24 Rosenthal.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: My apologies.  
3 Um, nice to see everyone. Thank you for coming and  
4 testifying on this incredibly important topic. I  
5 guess I want to start by just sort of making sure I  
6 understand what's happening with DRIE and SCRIE. Am  
7 I right in understanding that the state will have to  
8 renew July—in July 2020 the current increase to  
9 \$50,000?

10 MICHAEL HYMAN: That's correct.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And, um, will—  
12 I guess I have two questions with that. Will the  
13 city be—do you have any concerns that the state might  
14 not renew?

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: I mean it's on our  
16 legislative agenda. I think we should all be pushing  
17 for it. I don't have any reason to believe the state  
18 would not extend it. I mean a lot—a part of the tax  
19 law has sunset, and the state likes to thrill of  
20 extending our laws, but I think since it's a city  
21 funded program, we just need to be active and make  
22 sure they do it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, when did  
24 it become a city funding program? Wasn't it state?

25

2 Didn't the state cover the increase for one moment in  
3 time?

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: Hey did for one moment in  
5 time. So, basically when it was first increased to  
6 \$50,000 and the legislation that did that it did have  
7 a provision that the state would cover the, um, costs  
8 for the, um, increase, and--and city costs or  
9 increased program costs, but the--in the subsequent  
10 year as part of their budget they included a one-time  
11 dollar amount they gave the city, and then they  
12 discontinued funding, and that dollar amount I  
13 believe was much lower than the actual cost to the  
14 city, but now it's--it's no longer any state  
15 reimbursement.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And do you  
17 have a sense if the money is in the budget, well,  
18 would the--

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: I think the baseline  
20 expectation is that the--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yes.

22 MICHAEL HYMAN: -\$50,000 ceiling will  
23 continue.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yep, and I  
25 think this question was already asked, but if you

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2 could just remind us how much does the city spend in  
3 the increment?

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: On the increment. That I  
5 will have to get you. I have the total program costs  
6 from our tax expenditure report, but let me get back  
7 to you to the components.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank  
9 you. What's--what's the total cost again?

10 MICHAEL HYMAN: Let's find the document.  
11 Um, I think it--I don't want to guess. Let me--let get  
12 back to you. I do want to give you a precise number.  
13 I do have the tax expenditure estimate with me. I'll  
14 find it.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank  
16 you.

17 MICHAEL HYMAN: Oh, here it is.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: So, the SCRIE costs in  
20 Fiscal 19 was \$142 million and DRIE was \$25 million.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Hm. Okay, um,  
22 so I'm wondering about the Tenant Access Portal.

23 MICHAEL HYMAN: Uh-hm.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Is that  
25 currently accessible to people with disabilities?



2 MICHAEL HYMAN: It, um, well it's going  
3 to be launched in the summer--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Sorry, yes.

5 MICHAEL HYMAN: --but it will be ADA  
6 compliant. Um, so, we're--we're and we're reviewing  
7 issues now to make sure that it is. So, when it's  
8 launched in the summer we expect it to be ADA  
9 compliant as well just generally available to the  
10 public.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So, as I've  
12 learned about compliant that bar is really low. Um,  
13 so what I'm wondering is if you're going to be--what  
14 your interaction is going to be with the Mayor's  
15 Office for People with Disabilities whether or not  
16 you're going to be, you know, having people with a  
17 range of disabilities come in and beta test it. I'm--  
18 I'm wondering is your commitment to the ADA level or  
19 is your commitment to actually making it work for  
20 people with all different kinds of disabilities?

21 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, we're going to be  
22 working with MOPD to go through the issues. I don't  
23 have specific answers, but we are going to go  
24 through. I mean it could be one of those issues that  
25 we're going to talk to them about what they see as

2 the main needs so that we can launch, you know, in  
3 the summer and then we can also enhance a little bit  
4 over time, but the first step is just to get their  
5 feedback.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Right. So,  
7 right now for—for me that's an inadequate answer. Um,  
8 I think what I'd like to see and if—if we could  
9 include this in our questions and assume you can get  
10 back to us with the, um, your road map for how you  
11 are going to beta test this for people with all  
12 different kinds of disabilities, and a commitment to  
13 go above and beyond the very low bar of ADA  
14 requirements.

15 MICHAEL HYMAN: I—I think I should  
16 mention if you give us the question, we'll consult  
17 with MOPD and we'll get back to you, and show you our  
18 plan.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Uh-hm. I guess  
20 I'm looking for a little bit more than consulting  
21 with MOPD. I'm looking for taking their advice and  
22 running with exactly what they're asking for--

23 MICHAEL HYMAN: Uh-hm.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: --and I would  
25 like to see the road map of how you're doing that

2 before the summer's implementation. This is just too  
3 important for people with disabilities.

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: You make a very good  
5 point, and I, you know, at this point, like I say is  
6 we understand that. The commitment needs to be  
7 there, but we also do need to go through the  
8 mechanics and understand the specifics. So, I think  
9 as you suggested if you give us the question, we'll  
10 give you back and then you could respond to our  
11 comments.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Have I  
13 sufficiently give you the question?

14 MICHAEL HYMAN: I mean as you said that  
15 you wanted a road map of what we're doing. I need to  
16 go back and consult with MOPD --

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Sure.

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: --or other people.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Sure. Is it--is  
20 that sufficient? Do you need to get a letter from me  
21 or this is good?

22 MICHAEL HYMAN: I think it's okay if we  
23 use it. I just know we usually get questions  
24 afterwards, but I hear you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: This is the  
3 question.

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: Got you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

6 MICHAEL HYMAN: We'll transcribe it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you, um  
8 and then I just want to confirm for people with  
9 disabilities the current amount or if we were—if the—  
10 if the \$50,000 number were to sunset, what would it  
11 go back to for people with disabilities? (background  
12 comments) What was the old amount?

13 MICHAEL HYMAN: I'm must going to give  
14 you the specific amounts.

15 CARL LASKE: Do have the--? It was round  
16 20 and 29 estimate, though (off mic)

17 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] 29 is based on  
18 But that was based on—I was told it goes up from  
19 there. (sic)

20 MICHAEL HYMAN: Right.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Based on the  
22 eligibility for Social Security? Um, which I think  
23 is \$9,000 maybe. Okay. Um, so I'm just—I just want to  
24 double down on the critical importance for people  
25 with disabilities that we maintain the minimum income

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2 at \$50,000, um, in order to make sure that they're  
3 getting the—the rent coverage they need.

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: Yeah, we agree totally.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank  
6 you very much. Thank you, Chairs.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Council  
8 Member Louis followed by Council Member Gibson.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Good morning  
10 everyone. I have two quick questions. Um, we—you  
11 spoke a lot about the Tenant Portal and the Customer  
12 Service Center. So I wanted to know if you could  
13 describe the particular forms of outreach that will  
14 be used to inform residents of those two programs,  
15 and if they would be provided in different languages?

16 SHEILA VOYARD: So our enrollment events  
17 are all service enrollments. So when we meet with  
18 applicants we try to let them know about all of the  
19 programs and/or—yeah, all the programs that we have  
20 available for them. So, the enrollment events are  
21 definitely one way that we're doing that. We also  
22 will be putting that on our website. We also do  
23 social media promotion for these initiatives once we  
24 launch, and also in partnership with the elected  
25 officials we run a program called the Train-the

2 Trainer Program where we, um, we train Council staff  
3 and other elected officials staff so that they could—  
4 they could be aware of these changes in new programs  
5 that we implement. So, we are also—we'll also be  
6 counting on the Council and other elected officials  
7 to help us spread the word, and we'll be getting them  
8 up to speed at the Train the Trainer initiatives that  
9 we have.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: So, there's no  
11 other form of marketing campaign that will be done  
12 for the programs starting later in the year?

13 SHEILA VOYARD: So, the—the, um, Tenant  
14 Access Portal as mentioned, is going to launch in—in  
15 the summer. So, between now and then we are still  
16 working out the details of the program and also how  
17 we are going to outreach to promote this to the  
18 tenants. We also have inserts and/or letters that we  
19 send out to the SCRIE and DRIE recipients on a  
20 monthly basis. We will also be including information  
21 about this new program or this new system for them  
22 and these inserts so that the current applicants will  
23 have knowledge of it, but we are still working out  
24 the, um, details on how—what other ways we are going  
25 to promote this to the population that perhaps it's

2 not in the—in the program just yet, but we expect  
3 that again outreach events are going to be a big part  
4 of it our Train the Trainer initiatives. We also  
5 have a network of about 167 community based  
6 organizations that we work with. So we would also  
7 get them involved in this process, and we'll be  
8 counting on these partners to help us get the word  
9 out for these programs as well.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, and  
11 were you able to implement the recommendation of the  
12 Ombudsperson from the 2018 report and if so, what  
13 were the issues with implementing any of those  
14 recommendations?

15 SHEILA VOYARD: Do you have the specifics  
16 of the recommendations?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: No, I'm asking  
18 because that was what was presented to us so there  
19 were recommendations that they provided. I wanted to  
20 know if you guys ever implemented those  
21 recommendations, and if so, did you have any issues  
22 with that?

23 MICHAEL HYMAN: I think we are going to  
24 have to get back to you with a response to your  
25 question.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Okay, thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you. We  
4 have questions now from Council Member or I should  
5 say Chair of the Subcommittee on Finance, Chair  
6 Gibson followed by Council Member Vallone.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you, thank  
8 you to our chair of Finance. Thank you Chair Dromm  
9 and Chair Chin who is always a champion for our  
10 elders and seniors. Thank you so much for being here  
11 today and I represent Bronx County, and so I-I  
12 certainly have to ask the question looking through  
13 your testimony in terms of the four of the five  
14 boroughs that saw an increase in enrollment from 2014  
15 to 2016. I wanted to understand a little bit more of  
16 the root causes of why the enrollment for both SCRIE  
17 and DRIE decreased for Bronx County, and many of my  
18 colleagues asked about the ongoing outreach efforts  
19 and my office has certainly been a partner with the  
20 Department of Finance and the Department of Aging.  
21 And certain I offer as Bronx Council Member to help  
22 in making sure that residents in the borough of the  
23 Bronx, seniors and those who have a disability are  
24 applying for SCRIE and DRIE. And so I certainly  
25 encourage you, as many of us do we visit senior



2 centers all the time. Seniors are out there and many  
3 of them know about SCRIE and DRIE but some of them  
4 just don't apply, and so I want to understand the  
5 outreach efforts. How can we get them to apply? I  
6 would love to see the Department of Finance  
7 physically in senior centers more. I think that would  
8 be great. Seniors are also at churches a lot. We go  
9 to church all the time, and that's another outlet  
10 where you can find many residents as well as  
11 community centers. I think for all of us we have to  
12 be creative. We have to meet seniors where they are,  
13 and if we can do that, I think you would see the  
14 numbers turn around. So, I just wanted your thoughts  
15 on why you thought and believe that there was a  
16 decrease in the Bronx in SCRIE and DRIE.

17 MICHAEL HYMAN: I don't know  
18 specifically, but you are raising a lot of good  
19 points. I mean I do think that part of it is reaching  
20 people where they are most likely to be located and I  
21 think one of the big changes—not changes, but  
22 enhancements to outreach in recent years has been  
23 more of a case management approach. So, people are  
24 confused by the process of all that they need  
25 information. They have more of a person who will walk

2 them through the steps in the process rather than  
3 just giving them some cold education. Um, so I think  
4 we—we just need to consult more and—and, you have  
5 great ideas about to expand outreach, but I don't  
6 know specifically. I don't know. Does anyone have  
7 any ideas on the Bronx per se? I don't know if we  
8 have a specific answer to why a Bronx decline other  
9 than as you said, the more important issue is  
10 strategies to reverse that and to increase  
11 enrollment.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, so I have a  
13 suggestion. Many of our senior providers all have  
14 contracts with DFTA. We could try to form a working  
15 group in the Bronx. We can work with organizations  
16 like RAIN, Neighborhood Shop, Presbyterian senior  
17 services, Mid-Bronx, Hope of Israel. These are all  
18 senior centers that really encompass the Bronx. They  
19 have multiple locations all throughout the borough,  
20 and across all communities, and working with those  
21 senior center directors on more outreach efforts in  
22 the centers I think that would be a great place to  
23 start, and then secondly, um, working with  
24 organizations like AARP, and many others, Live On New  
25 York. They have members that come from the Bronx and

2 they make their presence known here during budget  
3 time every year, and I think if they understood that  
4 there was a challenge that we faced in the Bronx, and  
5 we needed to get more clients enrolled in the program  
6 I think you would see a more robust effort, but I  
7 think what we would appreciate as elected officials  
8 is we're happy to work with you, but certainly we  
9 would expect the Administration to take the lead and  
10 the City Council will partner with you. And then  
11 also, on the other angle, I served as an Assembly  
12 Member so I certainly know how Albany works, and as  
13 you prepare your advocacy in Albany to make sure that  
14 the legislation, the law rather is reauthorized.  
15 Certainly the earlier the better. I do not want this  
16 languishing until June. I understand that the  
17 Legislature is going to leave earlier this year.  
18 They're not working the third week of June. They're  
19 going to leave the first week of June, and so I don't  
20 want us to wait until the last minute because this is  
21 important and it has to be on the radar of our  
22 legislators in Albany, and certainly the City Council  
23 will work with you. We're putting together our  
24 Council priorities as it relates to the state agenda,  
25 and I certainly think that this will be one of those

2 items on it because I think we were very, very happy  
3 when we raised the threshold to \$50,000 because it  
4 does recognize for many seniors particularly a couple  
5 that has a substantial retirement and pension,  
6 they're not rich, and we need to recognize that. As  
7 the cost of living increases we have to adjust that  
8 eligibility as such so that many of those clients  
9 that are right at the cusp or a little bit over  
10 remain eligible for the program. What I would also  
11 love to see—I'm full of ideas—I would love to see as  
12 the Administration does around Universal Pre-K, 3-K,  
13 Vision Zero, and Thrive NYC. These are major  
14 signatures, and you see them in public service  
15 announcements, subways, bus stations, bus shelters.  
16 You see them on the NYC kiosks. So, we should also  
17 be making sure that we promote SCRIE and DRIE on the  
18 kiosks. Everyone uses kiosks, young people, everyone  
19 and I think if we continue to promote it then people  
20 will start to understand that the program is  
21 available to them. I think a lot of seniors don't  
22 necessarily think they're eligible, and there's a  
23 hesitancy on—on applying for it, but I always say  
24 even if you think you're not eligible apply anyway  
25 because you never know, and that's been my message

2 and the message of my colleagues. So, I would love to  
3 work with you, the Department of Finance and DFTA on  
4 how we can get the enrollment numbers up particularly  
5 in Bronx County.

6 MICHAEL HYMAN: Okay.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, thank you.

8 MICHAEL HYMAN: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: I'm full of ideas  
10 today.

11 MICHAEL HYMAN: Great.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much.  
13 Looking forward to working with you, and thank you to  
14 all of the advocacy groups who always make sure that  
15 the City Council understands the importance of  
16 programs like SCRIE and DRIE that would really not  
17 only freeze their rent, but continue to provide them  
18 with affordable housing as we know is so desperately  
19 needed in the city. So, I thank you all and I thank  
20 you to our chairs. Thank you Chair Dromm and Chair  
21 Chin. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, Chair  
23 Gibson, and before you got here today we had a little  
24 bit of a discussion around the SCRIE and DRIE Task  
25

2 Force. Would you be able to tell us how many members  
3 of the Task Force might come from the Bronx?

4 SHEILA VOYARD: I don't have the details  
5 on that right now, but we can get you that.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, so that would  
7 be really important to the discussion, and I think  
8 that having some representation there for those  
9 under-served communities is really very important so  
10 we'll follow up with that. We have questions now-  
11 well before I say that, let me just say we've been  
12 joined by Council Members Deutsch and Treyger, and  
13 now we have questions from Council Member Vallone and  
14 then if we have a second round followed by Council  
15 Member Rosenthal.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you very  
17 much to both of our chairs and good morning to our  
18 amazing advocates. It's always the best in the city  
19 when we fight for our seniors. So, I see in the  
20 testimony, Commissioner, so really important  
21 information. One of my rallying cries for almost 30  
22 years of doing elder law is making sure my seniors  
23 have the person able to represent them, and most do  
24 not. So, with a simple document a power of attorney  
25 or something, but you put in your testimony an

2 interesting comment when you're going to release to  
3 Tenant Access Portal that a family member or another  
4 individual to apply for benefits will be able to do  
5 so on his or her behalf. How is that going to  
6 happen?

7 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well we though it was  
8 also important that a senior citizen has assistance  
9 when they need it in order to—to navigate the  
10 process. I think as part of the Portal there will be  
11 an—I don't think it needs a power of attorney. I  
12 think it's going to be an authorization for someone  
13 to allow someone to, um, fill out information or  
14 submit information on their behalf, but I have to—of  
15 course I'm not sure. Do you know—can you recall the  
16 legal aspects?

17 CARL LASKE: I don't think—I think you're  
18 right.

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: We'll have to get back to  
20 you with the actual legal parts of it, but basically  
21 as a mechanical thing, when you sign up on the form  
22 you can authorize someone to be your—the person that  
23 will submit information for you, and also receive  
24 information back from us maybe follow-up questions.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well that—that  
3 would be a tremendous benefit, but—but understanding  
4 that process also has to be done correctly so we can  
5 get the information correctly out on how to do that,  
6 how to designate someone. Will that person be in  
7 conflict with the power of attorney? Will the power  
8 of attorney trump the person whose authorization?  
9 Obviously one of the lawyers remaining on the Council  
10 these are the things that pop into my head. So, we  
11 have to flesh that out. I also want to make sure that  
12 we utilize that. That's a wonderful tool if it's  
13 done correctly, if we can get that authorization for  
14 someone to help them with the portal and be that  
15 designated person so that we can go into the centers,  
16 we can be the voice and explain: Okay, all you have  
17 to do is fill out this authorization, and I as your  
18 son or you as the spouse or you as the guardian can  
19 now assist a senior. But we—we definitely have to be  
20 clear on that process--

21 MICHAEL HYMAN: Right.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --so we can get  
23 that, so we can flush that out and work on it.

24 MICHAEL HYMAN: Yes and we can also, um,  
25 walk you through the process before it's actually



2 released so we can get feedback on it. So, maybe it  
3 might be useful to have like a session where your  
4 staff was to kind of go through issues, and walk  
5 through the mechanics of the process and give you a  
6 demo of the new system.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, the  
8 process is one thing, but my question to you was  
9 whether the authorization is going to be online of  
10 it's power of attorney.

11 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, the-

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Once you get the  
13 answer to that then, I'll--

14 MICHAEL HYMAN: Right and I'll get you  
15 back those when we answer that question.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Perfect and then  
17 I have just two quick question on Intro 397. So, um,  
18 the co-chairs and I we have a bill. We're trying to  
19 make it a little easier. So, Intro 397 requires that  
20 the administration of SCRIE and DRIE including for  
21 the Mitchell-Lama and HDFC apartment units, which are  
22 currently administered by HPD be transferred to the  
23 Department of Finance. Does the Department of  
24 Finance support that change?

2 MICHAEL HYMAN: We have no current plans  
3 to do that. I think that's something that will have  
4 to be analyzed both from an operational point of view  
5 and for what best serves the customers. So, um, we  
6 can look into it, but we don't have a position in  
7 that. There's nothing on the table at our end to try  
8 to move the, um, Mitchell-Lama SCRIE into DOF, but  
9 it's something that can be analyzed and looked at for  
10 cost benefit analysis and also most importantly, what  
11 will serve the, um, recipients the best.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, clearly  
13 that's the plan, and I think we're going to have to  
14 come up with a plan because the bill is moving. So  
15 the bill is going to require it one way or another.  
16 So, I would suggest that we get our position so that  
17 we can better tailor the bill so that it's not  
18 creating an unduly burdensome. We want to make this  
19 as always more streamlined and a better process. So,  
20 um, with the bill being-taken out to the hearing, you  
21 can expect it to move forward. So, we should get an  
22 answer on that. Any word from HPD on what they may  
23 take a position on that?

2 MICHAEL HYMAN: I don't have that. I  
3 don't know right now, but that's something we'll have  
4 to consult with them.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay, thank you  
6 to both my co-chairs. Thank you to Chair Dromm.(sic)

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
8 Council Member Rosenthal.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I just want to  
10 circle back to something to make sure I really  
11 understand what's going on. So, it's my  
12 understanding that the current DOF proposed rules as  
13 currently written go back to—to back to the original  
14 SSI limits below the \$50,000, and I—I just want to  
15 know is DOF prepared to amend those rules as soon as  
16 when, if hopefully they will, the state renews the  
17 legislation July 1<sup>st</sup>.

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: Our legal person.

19 CARL LAKSE: Yes, absolutely we'll amend  
20 it depending on what the state does. I believe  
21 currently the rules do provide for the \$50,000  
22 threshold at this point, though.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Let's go back  
24 and double check that. It's my understanding that as  
25 currently drafted they go back to the old limits at

2 that date so it's just worth triple checking if  
3 that's okay?

4 CARL LASKE: Alright, absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Um, so and  
6 then just to triple check about what you're planning  
7 to do to make sure these laws are renewed. In  
8 addition to it being part of your legislative agenda,  
9 do you have specific actions that the Department of  
10 Finance or the Administration is planning to do to  
11 engage the State Legislature, and how can the City  
12 Council be helpful getting back to Council Member  
13 Gibson's question?

14 MICHAEL HYMAN: I think we're all  
15 supportive of the extension. As far as strategy,  
16 we're going to defer to our Intergovernmental Affairs  
17 Office for the best that any part of it is working  
18 with the Council to make sure to show the State  
19 Legislature that there's a united city effort. But,  
20 um, we'll have to defer to IGA people.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That's great  
22 and I mean I think the reason—I think those two  
23 questions go hand in hand in the sense that if our  
24 language currently reverts it back it sort of shows a  
25 willingness to go back, and so my hope is—is that the

2 way the language is written it assumes that it will  
3 go forward.

4 MICHAEL HYMAN: We're triple checking.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you very  
6 much. Appreciate it. Thank you Chairs.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you.  
8 We're going to go back to Chair Chin.

9 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, thank you, Chair.

10 I have a question in terms of the, um—in Fiscal Year  
11 2019 the Mayor's Management Report the MMR it was  
12 reported that the average time to process SCRIE and  
13 DRIE applications increased in three categories.  
14 SCRIE initial application processing increased by two  
15 days. DRIE initial application processing increased  
16 by 1.3 days, DRIE renewal application process  
17 increased by .7 days. So, according to DOF, the  
18 increase in application processing was attributed to  
19 the merging of the SCRIE and DRIE with the Senior  
20 Citizen Homeowners Exemption Program, the SHE Program  
21 and the Disability Homeowner Exemption Processing  
22 Unit. So, how many staff member are currently  
23 working in the Processing Unit?

24 SHEILA VOYARD: So currently we have 20—  
25 20, um, processors that have been cross-trained, um,

2 in processing all senior and disabled programs, and  
3 so what has allowed us to do is to in peak periods be  
4 able to—to have a team that would be able to handle  
5 increases in volumes of applications.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So do you anticipate  
7 the application processing time to improve for Fiscal  
8 Year 2020?

9 BIBI PARMAR: Absolutely. They already  
10 have.

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Already have. That  
12 sounds good so it means that seniors don't have to  
13 wait three days and people with disabilities don't  
14 have to wait extra days to get processing.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, you think we could  
16 push that back?

17 BIBI PARMAR: It's actually very back. So  
18 right now currently for initial and renewal  
19 applications we're at about five days to receive a  
20 first determination.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So before in the last  
22 report it was increased by three days. So people had  
23 to wait eight days?

24 BIBI PARMAR: Right, so it's—it's--  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Now you're back to the  
3 regular

4 BIBI PARMAR: It's—it's showing a  
5 downward trend, yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay, that—that sounds  
7 good because otherwise you would have to advocate for  
8 more staff for you during the budget process. Okay,  
9 um, so also how many in your—how much are you  
10 spending on developing the Tenant Access Portal?  
11 What's—what's the budget for that?

12 MICHAEL HYMAN: Well, it is an in-house  
13 effort so we would have to look to see. It's not like  
14 there's additional budget funding for it. It's done  
15 by our current IT and Operational staff. I can get  
16 you more specifics, but it's not like an additional  
17 budget cost.

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: That sounds good. Okay.

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: One of those rare items.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: (laughs) And then  
21 lastly, since I chair the Committee on Aging, of your  
22 427 events, how many of those are done in senior  
23 centers or NORCs Naturally Occurring Retirement  
24 Community?

2 BIBI PARMAR: I don't have the exact  
3 numbers, but do a number of them at NORCs. The  
4 senior centers the prior fiscal years we used to do  
5 lot of senior centers, but found that, you know that  
6 population is highly saturated already. They already  
7 have knowledge of the program, and then DFTA also  
8 contracts with our service providers at those centers  
9 to provide information and enrollment assistance to  
10 those folks. So, in terms of best utilizing our  
11 resources, we have been working with the NORCs and at  
12 other locations as mentioned in the testimony earlier  
13 to find those eligible populations that need  
14 additional help, but don't have that help as the  
15 senior centers have.

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Great. Thank you. Thank  
17 you, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you. Just  
19 a few more follow-up questions. You mentioned earlier  
20 that you have access to income information because  
21 you administer income taxes. To what extent are you  
22 permitted to use that data for SCRIE AND DRIE or for  
23 other programs outside of the Income Tax  
24 Administration?  
25



2                   MICHAEL HYMAN: That's a very good  
3 question. With our--real restrictions especially  
4 when we're using IRS data because we don't want to  
5 lose access to our IRS data. So, we can use it for  
6 general summary data level analysis. We're not able  
7 to use it directly to say if the income of this  
8 person is X, we can go to that person and say we  
9 looked at the IRS data. So, we basically use it to  
10 try to target neighborhoods and smaller geographical  
11 areas, but there are restrictions on the use of the  
12 data.

13                   CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. According to  
14 DOF's website, the agency will open a temporary  
15 assistance center in Queens, and one in Brooklyn from  
16 January to March 2020 to provide assistance to  
17 individuals looking to learn and apply to the Rent  
18 Freeze Program. What led DOF to decide to open these  
19 centers?

20                   MICHAEL HYMAN: I'll give the general.  
21 Generally, we're trying to target the period of  
22 greatest utilization and the areas where we see the  
23 need for the resources. It's somewhat also like  
24 pilot. We'll see how it works, but I think it's  
25 really because that is a key period for not only

2 SCRIE but applying for SHEHE (sic) So, part of it was  
3 to have resources available in the peak periods.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you have  
5 translation services available at those locations?  
6 [applause]

7 SHEILA VOYARD: Yes, we have a number of  
8 staff members that speak other languages, and then we  
9 also use Language Line to provide language services  
10 to anyone that that doesn't, um, that's not able to  
11 speak English, but also understanding that they—they  
12 need the services in their language so we do.

13 MICHAEL HYMAN: And what about opening  
14 centers in other boroughs like the Bronx, Brooklyn  
15 and I guess Manhattan?

16 SHEILA VOYARD: So, we currently already  
17 have services year-round in Manhattan, and also in  
18 Staten Island. The satellite offices are opened in  
19 Queens and Brooklyn during the peak periods like  
20 Michael mentioned, and so the other, um, areas are  
21 highly supported by the outreach events that we—we  
22 host to bring the services locally to the applicants.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. According to  
24 the 2019 Annual Report of the SCRIE and DRIE  
25 Ombudsperson—Ombudsperson, in July 2019, DOF launched

2 a Customer Contract Center for SCRIE and DRIE  
3 participants to speak to live representative  
4 regarding their benefit and application status  
5 inquiries. How many inquiries has DOF received to  
6 date at the Contract Center?

7 MICHAEL HYMAN: It has been a highly  
8 successful vehicle for resolving issues that 311  
9 can't resolve. Unless—does somebody have that data  
10 readily available or we can get back to you. You  
11 have it Bibi.

12 BIBI PARMAR: No. Yeah, we'll get back to  
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay and do you have  
15 any idea what types of inquiries are coming in and  
16 are there any trends or, you know, constant questions  
17 that you're getting about the programs?

18 MICHAEL HYMAN: I don't know off hand  
19 unless you, Sheila.

20 SHEILA VOYARD: And generally the  
21 question always is on the status of the application.  
22 If they have not heard from us they want to know  
23 where they are in the process. So, that's usually  
24 the number one question, but outside of that, um,  
25 seniors generally have particular issues going on in

2 their household. So, this avenue provides an  
3 opportunity for hem to be able to explain or let us  
4 know any household situations that are not covered in  
5 the application. So, the Customer Service Center is  
6 able to help in those regards.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, so if somebody  
8 contacts 311 in the hours between like 8:30 and 4:30  
9 are they transferred to the Contact Center? What if  
10 they contact 311 with questions about the Contact  
11 Center or for the Contact Center outside of those  
12 hours, how is that handled?

13 SHEILA VOYARD: I'm not entirely sure  
14 what happens after hours. 311 has access to our  
15 basic system for finding out case related information  
16 so they can provide basic information as to the  
17 status or any documents that we need to complete the  
18 application process, but I'm not sure what happens  
19 after hours.

20 BIBI PARMAR: [off mic] It's the voice  
21 mail.

22 SHEILA VOYARD: Huh?

23 BIBI PARMAR: [off mic] it's the  
24 voicemail service.

2 SHEILA VOYARD: Sorry, it's a voicemail  
3 service.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, we can leave a  
5 message?

6 SHEILA VOYARD: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you know how many  
8 messages it can accept?

9 SHEILA VOYARD: That I'm not sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, 'cause we'd  
11 like to know that also

12 MICHAEL HYMAN: Okay.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Well maybe you can get  
14 back to us on that as well. Okay, I actually think  
15 that's about it, and we're going to, um, thank you  
16 for coming in and giving testimony. We'll follow up  
17 with any questions later on. Thank you very much.  
18 We're going to call up our next panel.

19 MICHAEL HYMAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Rocky Chin for AARP;  
21 Kim Lessner, Live On New York; Peter Kempner,  
22 Volunteers of Legal Service; Alex Riley, Legal Aid  
23 Society; and Christopher Evans, Legal Aid Society.  
24 [pause] Okay, should we start here with Rocky Chin?

2 ROCKY CHIN: Good morning Chairpersons  
3 Chin and Dromm, and I want to also thank (coughs)  
4 City Council Member Rosenthal and Vallone for being  
5 here. I know there are other Council Members here. My  
6 name is Rocky Chin. I'm a member of AARP, New York's  
7 Executive Council and we have a good number of our  
8 members here today braving the cold weather. We  
9 always do want to show up at these events. So, thank  
10 you for having this oversight hearing. On behalf of  
11 our nearly 750,000 members age 50 and older in New  
12 York City, I want to thank you for giving us the  
13 opportunity to testify at this Rent Freeze—on the  
14 Rent Freeze Program, and as we've heard, there's a  
15 lot happening and we intend to continue to be also  
16 the voice of 50 plus in making sure these things are  
17 followed through. So, thank you. Seniors are a  
18 growing group that is extremely challenged by rising  
19 costs in a well—is a well known fact. A report  
20 commissioned by AARP with the Center for an Urban  
21 Future found the number of older adults in the New  
22 York City increased 12 times faster than the city's  
23 under 65 population, and that group is more diverse  
24 than ever. Immigrants now account for 50% of New  
25 York City's 65 plus population. Many older New

2 Yorkers are living on fixed incomes and having  
3 trouble paying their rent. Multiple AARP surveys  
4 showed that affordability is indeed a major concern  
5 for older New Yorkers. Fifty-four percent of  
6 respondents to one AARP survey reported housing  
7 affordability as a major concern. That number shot  
8 up to 67% among Hispanic respondents; 62% of Boomers  
9 and Gen X respondents expressed anxiety over their  
10 ability to afford housing in the future, and 61% of  
11 Gen X and Boomer voters said they are considering  
12 leaving New York State to retire somewhere else  
13 because of the lack of affordability. Last year AARP  
14 New York teamed with the Asian-American Federation,  
15 Hispanic Federation, NAACP, and the Urban League to  
16 release a report titled: Disrupting Racial and  
17 Ethnic Disparities? Solutions for New Yorkers 50  
18 Plus. One of the key findings was that the "cost  
19 burden" status of older African American, Black, Asia  
20 Americans, Pacific Islanders, Hispanic and Latinx New  
21 Yorkers and their vulnerability to gentrification and  
22 displacement. As the city's population continues to  
23 age, these concerns are likely to grow. We need to  
24 use all the tools we have—tools we have to ensure we  
25 have appropriate and affordable housing for older New

2 Yorkers now and in the future. So, that's why we  
3 also are thrilled when the income eligibility for  
4 SCRIE and DRIE was raised to \$50,000 making thousands  
5 of more households eligible for the program.  
6 Furthermore, the Housing Stability and Tenant  
7 Protections Act of 2019 incentivized many more  
8 individuals to apply for the program. But according  
9 to the 2018 report by DOF, the enrollments in SCRIE  
10 is just over 50% and, of course, we've heard all the  
11 questioning as to why that is so low. Clearly much  
12 more needs to be done, we'd like to add our vast  
13 number of volunteer AARP Members to join with the  
14 City Council and our elected officials in increasing  
15 that number. We'd like to express our support for  
16 measures that would allow tenants to apply for SCRIE  
17 and DRIE at any point throughout the year as opposed  
18 to waiting—awaiting the next lease renewal. That  
19 should help. However, other proposed measures  
20 concern us including limiting who could act as a  
21 tenant representative in order to assist tenants with  
22 the application process and limiting tenants to only  
23 one SCRIE/DRIE application per year. There are many  
24 people who can and need to act as tenant  
25 representatives, and many reasons why a person can be



2 denied including mistakenly submitted incomplete  
3 applications. We shouldn't penalize qualifying  
4 SCRIE/DRIE applicants for needing help or making  
5 mistakes in the application. Thank you for the  
6 opportunity to testify today.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
8 We'll go to the next person the panel, and then come  
9 back for questions. Thank you You may begin.

10 Thank you. Thank you Chairs Chin and  
11 Dromm and the full committee for the opportunity to  
12 testify today. My name is Kim Lerner and I'm the  
13 Program Director for Live On New York's Benefits  
14 Outreach Program. For over 40 years Live On New York  
15 has been supporting community-based organizations  
16 throughout the city that provide core services to  
17 older adults to allow them to thrive in their  
18 communities. With a base of more than 100 community-  
19 based organizations, Live On New York's members  
20 provide services including senior centers, congregate  
21 and home delivered meals, affordable senior housing,  
22 caregiver supports, NORCs and case management.  
23 Through policy efforts Live On New York advocates to  
24 increase funding and capacity for our members to meet  
25 the needs of older adults in their communities. To

2 better support older adults and our members Live On  
3 New York also administers a citywide benefits  
4 outreach program that assists older adults in the  
5 communities where benefits are most under-utilized.  
6 Through this program we educate thousands of older  
7 New Yorkers each year including those who are  
8 homebound and screen and enroll those who are  
9 eligible for SCRIE, DRIE and a number of other  
10 benefits. Our team works tirelessly to help older  
11 adults through the application and re-enrollment  
12 processes, and witnesses first hand the positive  
13 impacts of these programs. DOF and their wonderful  
14 staff has been an incredible partner particularly in  
15 our work with SCRIE and DRIE, and it is because of  
16 this partnership we would like to provide testimony  
17 today. First, we are grateful for the programs—for  
18 the support these programs have received from both  
19 the Administration and the City Council. In 2014,  
20 through a joint city and state effort, the income  
21 eligibility for SCRIE and DRIE, as we've talked  
22 about, was raised from \$29,000 to \$50,000. As a  
23 result, thousands of more households were eligible  
24 for the Rent Freeze Program. While the enrollment  
25 rate has increased since the eligibility increase, a

2 2018 report by DOF indicated that the overall  
3 enrollment it rated (sic) in 2016—in 2016 was only  
4 56.2%. For this reason, continued and increased  
5 outreach efforts are necessary. The importance of  
6 early awareness of the benefit cannot be over stated  
7 as the SCRIE and DRIE programs are unique in that  
8 their benefits compound over time. Said another way,  
9 the earlier an individual enrolls in the program, the  
10 more they will benefit from it. And most importantly,  
11 SCRIE plays a critical role in allowing older adults  
12 to age in place. Most recently Live On New York was  
13 thrilled to advocate for and see the passage of the  
14 new Preferential Rent Laws in the Housing Stability  
15 and Tenant Protections Act of 2019. Previously,  
16 those with preferential rent were disincentivized  
17 from enrolling in SCRIE as their rent would be frozen  
18 at the market rate, often times increasing a tenant's  
19 rent by hundreds of dollars. With this new law  
20 preferential rent amounts have been made permanent  
21 and must now be treated as the new legal base rent  
22 for that unit. This protection now incentivizes many  
23 more individuals to apply for the Rent Freeze Program  
24 and, therefore, outreach efforts must be strengthened  
25 and reinvigorated to bring awareness through this

2 beneficial change. Last fall DOD proposed a number  
3 of amendments to SCRIE and DRIE. Live On New York  
4 viewed most of these changes as positive such as  
5 improving the process of succession right and  
6 allowing tenants to apply for SCRIE or DRIE at any  
7 point throughout the year as opposed to waiting to  
8 the next lease renewal. However, there were a few—  
9 there were a number of recommendations that were  
10 cause for concern. Live On New York was particularly  
11 worried about DOF limiting those who may be deemed a  
12 tenant representative in order to assist tenants with  
13 the application process. Many of these individuals in  
14 need of the SCRIE or DRIE program already face  
15 significant barriers to the application process, and  
16 the job of advocates such as ourselves is to walk  
17 them through the process successfully. For this  
18 reason, Live On New York believes that the provisions  
19 should include anyone listed as a tenant  
20 representative as consistent with other benefit  
21 applications of the city. Another proposed amendment  
22 would limit tenants to only on one SCRIE/DRIE  
23 application per year. We believe this proposed  
24 change would be particularly harmful to the many  
25 tenants who are eligible for the program, but are

2 denied due to mistakes on the application or the  
3 inability to compile the required documentation. Our  
4 team has helped a number of individuals successfully  
5 reapply for the program after having it first been  
6 denied due to an incomplete or incorrect application.  
7 Because time is of the essence in this program as  
8 previously stated, this rule would effectively  
9 penalize tenants for making errors on applications by  
10 not allowing them—by not allowing them to re-apply  
11 for another year. Live On New York was grateful for  
12 the opportunity to provide feedback to DOF on these  
13 proposed changes to SCRIE and DRIE and we are hopeful  
14 that the recommendations outlined will be given  
15 serious consideration in advance of the final rule  
16 promulgation. Live On is committed to working with  
17 our partners at DOF, DFTA and all city agencies as  
18 well as members of the City Council to provide  
19 outreach, education and enrollment assistance to New  
20 Yorkers in need of this critical program. We look  
21 forward to our continued partnership and outreach  
22 opportunities as we ensure that every tenant who is  
23 eligible for this program receives its full benefits.  
24 Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.

3 Next, please.

4 PETER KEMPNER: Good morning. My name is  
5 Peter Kempner. I'm the Legal Director and Elderly  
6 Project Director at Volunteers of Legal Service. Our  
7 Elderly project conducts regular free legal clinics  
8 at senior centers and NORCs around the city. We  
9 provide technical support for community-based  
10 organizations serving low-income seniors by answering  
11 legal questions their clients face. We provide  
12 training to community-based organizations and seniors  
13 regarding proper end of life planning. We publish  
14 and Advocate's Guide to SCRIE, a guide to Burial  
15 Assistance and Funeral Planning for New Yorkers in  
16 need, and we access the pro bono legal services of  
17 the Private Bar by training, supervising and pairing  
18 them up with low-income seniors seeking to have their  
19 life planning documents done—drawn up and executed.  
20 This allows seniors who can't afford to hire an  
21 attorney to get powers of attorney, help their  
22 proxies, living wills, wills and other advanced  
23 directives done free of charge, and—and as Council  
24 Member Vallone pointed out, these documents  
25 especially the power of attorney are critical for

2 seniors to be able to access benefits including SCRIE  
3 and DRIE to allow them to stay in their home and be  
4 able to age in place with dignity and respect. We  
5 thank the Council Committees on Aging and Finance for  
6 holding this hearing today. Aside from needing  
7 advanced directives, which is our—our core work, the  
8 seniors who are coming to us at our—at our senior  
9 centers and our clinics the number one issue they  
10 face is housing instability, and—and SCRIE and DRIE  
11 really allows them to afford the rent after they see  
12 a huge drop in income after retirement. With SCRIE  
13 and DRIE the city would face an exacerbated  
14 homelessness crisis among the elderly and disabled,  
15 and we must do everything in our power to not only  
16 preserve and extend these—the outreach of these  
17 programs, but also to make improvements that will  
18 strengthen and advance the goals of ensuring that the  
19 elderly and disabled New Yorkers could age in their  
20 communities. One of the major limitations right now  
21 with the SCRIE and DRIE programs are that it's  
22 limited to seniors and the disabled who live in rent  
23 regulated apartments. For many who reside in smaller  
24 buildings or in newer construction the result is that  
25 the exact kind of housing instability that was trying

2 to be avoided by these programs. They're—they're not  
3 eligible to receive the rent freezes and, therefore,  
4 they're subject to the landlord's rent increases at  
5 any time. Extending the Rent Freeze Programs to  
6 tenants of unregulated units can accomplish the goals  
7 of—of—of housing stability for these populations and  
8 we could set maximum rent guidelines much along the  
9 lines of what is already being done in Section 8  
10 Voucher programs and other rental subsidy programs.  
11 And so this extension could also bring thousands more  
12 people housing stability. Another limitation is the  
13 absence of retroactivity of the applications for the  
14 programs. As pointed out by—by Live On New York,  
15 these things do compound over time and sadly we know  
16 that many seniors don't learn about their SCRIE  
17 eligibility for years if not decades after they first  
18 become eligible, and their rent has increased greatly  
19 over that period of time. To be able o retroactively  
20 apply the rent freeze to when they first became  
21 eligible for the program would greatly benefit--the  
22 ability to roll back would put money back into the  
23 pockets of low-income tenants who often live benefit  
24 check to benefit check every month. The other thing  
25 about the SCRIE and DRIE program that actually



2 differs from a lot of the other rental subsidy  
3 programs is that isn't a cap on how much rent  
4 somebody pays relative to their income. Right now  
5 what the law says is that some body will pay no less  
6 than 30% of their income or the amount of the last  
7 rent before they become approved, and so this results  
8 in many people pay 50, 60, 70, 80% of their income  
9 towards their rent instead of putting a cap, instead  
10 of a floor of 30% for these programs. It's really  
11 the opposite of what we see in other rental  
12 assistance programs like Section 8, Public Housing,  
13 HASA recipients and others where a tenant's share is  
14 capped at 30%, and so that would again make a huge  
15 difference. We have certainly seen many seniors at  
16 our clinics that say why should I bother getting  
17 SCIE, my rent is already, you know, well over what my  
18 income in, and they don't benefit from this at all.  
19 The other thing I'd like to point out is that with  
20 respect to what Council Member Chin was talking about  
21 as far as re-determinations are concerned. When for  
22 instance on member of a married couple passes away,  
23 and there's a huge loss in income, at the next  
24 recertification that household is putting their  
25 income to the Department of Finance. Department of

2 Finance should immediately flag to say this is more  
3 than a 20% drop and not require a separate form, and  
4 I understand what the Administration is say where  
5 there needs to be a transfer of head of household  
6 from the person who is deceased to another spouse who  
7 is left, but often times it's sometimes just another  
8 family member who passes away and not the head of  
9 household, and they won't be putting that form to  
10 transfer who is primary on the benefit, and-and so  
11 instead, at every reapplication, at every  
12 redetermination of every recertification if the  
13 Department of Finance flags that there's a 20% more  
14 drop in income they should make an automatic  
15 redetermination instead of putting the onus on the  
16 low-income elderly and disabled New Yorkers who are  
17 putting in applications and-and-and recertification  
18 for this application for this benefit rather to be on  
19 their shoulders. It should be on the shoulders of the  
20 agency instead. Um, and so I think with these  
21 improvements we could greatly increase the reach of  
22 these programs and the impact of these programs on  
23 the community and housing stability. Thank you for  
24 this opportunity testify. We look forward to working  
25 with the Council and the Administration to ensure

2 that New York City is best able to serve our seniors  
3 in need. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Next,  
5 pleas.

6 ALEX RILEY: Good morning Chair Dromm and  
7 Chair Chin. Thank you very much to the committees for  
8 holding this hearing. My name is Alex Riley. I'm the  
9 Director of the Elder Law Practice of the Civil  
10 Practice of Legal Aid Society. Legal Aid Society is  
11 the nation's largest non-profit law firm handling  
12 about 300,000 matters every year. I'm joined today by  
13 my colleague Chris Evans who's a retired British  
14 Solicitor--if I got that right--who volunteers out of  
15 our Brooklyn Office for the Aging, and the only work  
16 that he does with us is assisting clients, applying  
17 for and--and renewing their SCRIE and DRIE benefits.  
18 He's done many hundreds of these, and in a moment I  
19 hope he'll--hope he'll share a couple of thoughts that  
20 he has had having been on the front lines for several  
21 years with us. So, I agree with everything my--my  
22 colleague Peter Kempner just said including with  
23 respect to his last point about redeterminations, and  
24 I will mention that in a moment. Um, one thing I  
25 should say is that the--the packet of materials that I

2 prepared for the committees, I shouldn't worry that  
3 this is all testimony. It's actually just a few  
4 pages of testimony, but the--the attachments are a  
5 couple of the SCRIE forms at issue because in my  
6 testimony I make reference to particular aspects of  
7 them and also a copy of the comments that I submitted  
8 to Department of Finance last month with respect to  
9 their proposed rules. So, generally speaking we have  
10 been fairly pleased with the way the Department of  
11 Finance has administered these programs over the last  
12 several years. We're very pleased to hear that they--  
13 they developed this portal that's going to be coming  
14 out I guess in several months. They created a print  
15 guide. They've been generally responsive to us when  
16 we make specific requests n behalf of clients to sort  
17 to fix problems. I mean generally speaking we've been  
18 pleased with the work that they have done, but we--we  
19 do have some areas in which we recommend improvement.  
20 The first thing I'll mention is what Mr. Kempner  
21 mentioned with respect to redeterminations and that  
22 Council Member Chin brought up before it appears the  
23 Department of Finance has the ability to identify  
24 cases where the SCRIE beneficiary or DRIE beneficiary  
25 is entitled to a redetermination. So, why the onus

2 is on the older disabled person to apply for this is  
3 a mystery and that's not the only problem. In  
4 addition as Council Member-Chair Chin mentioned  
5 before, there's virtually no publicity about this. I  
6 mean Chair Chin herself didn't even know that this  
7 option existed until quite recently, and-and this is  
8 not surprising because if you look at for example one  
9 of the representatives of the Department of Finance  
10 earlier mentioned that I believe that the  
11 redetermination concept is mentioned in the FAQ  
12 section. Well, first of all, the initial Rent Freeze  
13 Program application doesn't mention redeterminations  
14 at all. So, when you first apply for the program you  
15 have no idea, if you read the application and all of  
16 its information that if your income reduces by 20% or  
17 more in the future, that redetermination is an  
18 option. So, the redetermination is discussed in the  
19 long form renewal application, but it occurs on the  
20 very last page o the 13-page application packet, and  
21 the question-the FAQ that appears there does not What  
22 if my household income drops? And that should be the  
23 question. What is says is: What are my options if I  
24 have a permanent loss of income. The rule says that  
25 you get a redetermination if your household income

2 drops. So, the—the frequently asked questions the way  
3 it's phrased is totally misleading. So, the—the  
4 information should be included in the initial  
5 application prominently. It should be more—much more  
6 prominently placed in the renewals and the frequently  
7 asked questions should be rephrased. By the way the  
8 short form renewal application, which applaud DOF for  
9 having created does not mention redeterminations at  
10 all. So, if you don't know about it, how on earth  
11 would you know, to apply? In any event, as Pete  
12 Kempner mentioned really, you know, it shouldn't be  
13 no matter how much publicity is done the  
14 redetermination should not be required as an  
15 application by the beneficiary. The Department of  
16 Finance should be able to handle this without  
17 initiation by the applicant of beneficiary. Council  
18 Member Chin had a number of queries I believe for the  
19 Department of Finance, some of which are included in  
20 my written testimony around this. We'd be interested  
21 to know how many determinative—redeterminations  
22 applications did the agency receive? How many did  
23 they approve of those that were rejected? What were  
24 the reasons? What was the average reduction in  
25 tenant to pay amount that occurred following

2 successful redeterminations? And why is it that the  
3 Department of Finance does not take the initiative on  
4 it's own to-to process these without an application.  
5 Next we think the Department of Finance should do a  
6 better job educating SCRIE and DRIE beneficiaries and  
7 applicants about the definition of household. The  
8 household includes anyone relative-related to the  
9 tenant who lives in the apartment. It dose not  
10 include a boarder, somebody who is paying rent to the  
11 primary tenant, and as we know, housing is so  
12 expensive in the city. In order in their apartments  
13 many older people bring in a-a boarder or room mate,  
14 but the-there's a lot of confusion around this, and  
15 you'll notice that the definition of household does  
16 not appear anywhere in the application itself. It  
17 does appear in the frequently asked questions  
18 section, but if you just look at the application the  
19 definition is not there at all. In addition if you  
20 look at the first page of the application, the  
21 question-the-the reference to-sort of implied  
22 reference to household is the following: This  
23 question appears at the very beginning. Was the  
24 combined income for everyone living in your apartment  
25 less than \$50,000? That's the wrong question because

2 if you have a roommate in your apartment who makes  
3 \$100,000 a year, but only pays you \$300 a month in  
4 rent DOF only counts that \$300. DOF doesn't care how  
5 much the roommate makes in income, but this question  
6 would lead you to believe that it does. So, that is a  
7 question that really ought to be revised. In a  
8 moment I believe Chris Evans will talk about, um, the  
9 renewal process and challenges that older and  
10 disabled people have even with using the short form.  
11 So, I won't steal his thunder on that. I will make  
12 one very minor point, which appears as a footnote in  
13 my testimony to Council Member Vallone's point about  
14 powers of attorney, the—the SCRIE documents all the  
15 forms actually get the terminology wrong. They keep  
16 referring to a person as a power of attorney, but  
17 there's no such thing as a person who's a power or  
18 attorney. It's an agent. So, the DOF if it's going  
19 to revise its forms, they might as well actually get  
20 the—the terms rights. Um, finally with respect to  
21 the proposed rules that were—were—there was a hearing  
22 about this at DOF a couple of month ago. I won't go  
23 into all those details, but the last attachment to  
24 the written testimony that I've submitted includes  
25 the comments that we submitted to the DOF on that.



2 One of the most concerning aspects of those proposed  
3 rules is that whereas for many years the SCRIE and  
4 DRIE beneficiaries' rent would be frozen at the  
5 amount in effect prior to the time of application.  
6 What the DOF has proposed is that the—that rule be  
7 eliminated and that the rent be frozen at the rent  
8 currently in effect. We have no idea why they did  
9 this, but this would make over time a substantial  
10 difference in the actual amount of benefits that an  
11 applicant would receive from the program because the  
12 frozen rent would actually be higher. So, if I could  
13 ask, um, Mr. Evans to talk a little bit about his  
14 front line experience with applications and renewals.

15 CHRISTOPHER EVANS: Thank you to the  
16 committee and Chair Dromm and Chair Chin for allowing  
17 me to speak. I would say that I endorse all the  
18 comments made by Alex Riley. My first experience  
19 being involved as an outreach worker with Community  
20 Service Society, and more recently I've spent now six  
21 years assisting through the Legal Aid Society and  
22 more recently as Camber Legal Services in Flatbush.  
23 So, I have quite a wide range of clients come and see  
24 us, and I handled over 700 applications in Brooklyn  
25 alone. So, and for a number of those people English

2 is not their first language. So, my experience is  
3 like I would say about renewals in particular. I  
4 think on first applications people tend to have  
5 assistance, legal advice or assistance. A lot of  
6 people when they do renewals do not have any  
7 assistance unless they're--they're fortunate enough  
8 to find their way to one of the advice centers such  
9 as the ones I assist at. But we were given some  
10 evidence by the Department of Finance personnel area  
11 and although the numbers of people receiving the  
12 benefits are increasing--I think it was 20%--they  
13 pointed out that there was obviously people are  
14 dropping out of this scheme also, and I think that's  
15 my main concern. They said people dropped out for  
16 reasons of death, moving, accommodation and increased  
17 income, and I'm sure those are all true. I would say  
18 my experience is the failure to provide documents is  
19 the single largest reason why people are coming off  
20 the scheme because if they--if they aren't helped  
21 (coughs) with advice to explain to them what they  
22 need to provide, and to understand that and to  
23 interpret the questions sent by the SCRIE and DRIE  
24 office of the Department of Finance, and sometimes  
25 they just can't cope with the process, and they're

2 not receiving any other legal assistance from anyone  
3 else. Some of the questions raised by the Department  
4 of Finance are formulated in a way that are frankly  
5 challenging. They are—they are standard response  
6 text included in the forms, difficult to read and  
7 often they say things like: Produce all the IRS  
8 returns for all members of your household and this—  
9 these questions are sent to people who don't file  
10 IRS returns regularly or at all because they are not  
11 obliged to. So they don't know what to do. They  
12 commit saying they are going to do an IRS return or  
13 whatever, and I find a lot of people need hand-  
14 holding through that process on this very basic  
15 level, and as a result of people being denied SCRIE  
16 coming off the SCRIE for failure to provide  
17 documents, I'm now handling more and more appeals to  
18 the Department of Finance to get people back onto the  
19 SCRIE and DRIE system, and because they've been timed  
20 out literally for failure to provide something that  
21 they didn't know what they had to provide or how to  
22 do it. So, I would simply say that in practice there  
23 are quite a lot of problems despite overall as I say  
24 we do consider the Department of Finance has made  
25 useful changes in the format of its forms and its

2 process, but it is still very much a time critical  
3 process. You apply, they send a letter. You have to  
4 reply to it. If you don't they send another letter,  
5 and they turn you out, and it just says: You have  
6 failed to comply with the process. It doesn't  
7 actually say what you failed to do. So, it is quite  
8 a challenging process for seniors particularly as  
9 they get older, less able to read, less able to even  
10 open and deal with mail. As I say, particularly for  
11 those who English is not their first language and I  
12 would invite the committee to make a point of  
13 addressing in these editions (sic) Thank you very  
14 much.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Hey. Council Member  
16 Vallone has some questions.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you to  
18 the panel. We always appreciate your comments and  
19 look to those for future clarification bills. I think  
20 we have some really good ideas there, and I'm happy  
21 we all work with you to do that making the forms as-  
22 as clear as possible it can only help. I think we all  
23 struggle with just about any form that comes out of a  
24 city agency. So, we thank that aid. Although I would  
25 give you as a point of reference not to mention that

2 Chair Chin doesn't know something. There is not  
3 anyone in this Council that knows more about it than  
4 Chair Chin knows about on aging. So, I always defend  
5 you to that Margaret. If she doesn't know it then  
6 it's the agency's fault for screwing us up in the  
7 first place. That's what I say, but I also Peter love  
8 the idea of extending the protections to the  
9 unregulated apartments. I believe that's the unsung  
10 story of what's happening to our seniors and pretty  
11 much everyone that is struggling to remain in an  
12 apartment if we truly want to make a dent and stop  
13 homelessness and stop the senior crisis, then we need  
14 to extend these protections of SCRIE and DRIE to  
15 everyone, and if we're going to look at budget  
16 priorities, this is one that will have an impact, and  
17 a lasting impact on the city, and I think that's  
18 something we should really take a look at. So, I  
19 just wanted to make those couple of comments and  
20 support our chairs. Thank you very much.

21 PETER KEMPNER: And can I say in response  
22 to that if you look at some of these neighborhoods  
23 that were talked about that were being under-served  
24 by SCRIE and DRIE a lot of these are neighborhoods  
25

2 with two and three-family homes that wouldn't  
3 otherwise be covered.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Exactly. Thank  
5 you Peter.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Council Member Chin or  
7 Chair Chin.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Council  
9 Member Vallone, I really did not know. (laughter)  
10 Because I don't think it was in the outreach  
11 materials. So, I'm glad that now we all know that  
12 there is a redetermination process, and I thank you  
13 all for you advocacy and your great work. I think  
14 that some of the points that you raised about how we  
15 can really simplify, you know, the application and  
16 making sure people understand. And even the whole  
17 about the household income, and roommates, and I  
18 think we really have to work together to make sure  
19 that that correct information get out there so people  
20 know that they can qualify and they should apply, and  
21 really getting the assistance that they need because  
22 every year all the Council Members we get a list from  
23 the Council, which is—comes from the Department of  
24 Finance to tell us who of our constituents didn't  
25 renew, and we spend time calling them to find out yes

2 some passed away and some, you know, didn't fill out  
3 applications or they didn't have the documentation  
4 that they need, but we got to make sure that the renew  
5 process is easier so that people can continue to get  
6 their benefits, and one thing we will advocate with  
7 the DOF is like why do you have to wait, you know, to  
8 be in the program for so long to entitle you to a  
9 short renewal form. So, we should really get them to  
10 kind of shorten that time that once you renew then  
11 you should be able to continue to use the short form,  
12 and to get the, um, the explanation clearer. I think  
13 that's something that we can definitely continue to  
14 advocate for, and thank you all for your great work.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes, and we'll follow  
16 up with the questions about redetermination as well  
17 when we write to the Administration after to the  
18 hearing. So, thank you all for coming in, and we're  
19 going to bring up our next panel.

20 PETER KEMPNER: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Okay.

23 Provati Devi (sp?) and Larry Wood. (background  
24 comments/pause) okay, okay. I want to get started. I  
25 know there's going to be a third panelist and we'll

2 introduce her after she fills out the form, but we  
3 might as well just get started now. (background  
4 comments/pause) okay.

5 LARRY WOOD: God after-good afternoon.  
6 Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is  
7 Larry Wood. I'm the Director or Organizing at  
8 Goddard Riverside Community House. It's a settlement  
9 house on the Upper Wes Side and we operate in several  
10 senior centers in all programs and home delivered  
11 meals a variety of senior services, and a lot of  
12 other services to our community as well. As you know  
13 as was reference earlier today the Housing Justice  
14 through out Coalition fought and we won significantly  
15 strong rent laws last year, which was great to help  
16 preserve affordable housing, stop inordinate rent  
17 increases, vacancy allowances, but if you currently  
18 have a rent-high rent burden nothing last year  
19 changed for you. You're still in danger of  
20 homelessness, a medical crisis, an emergency of some  
21 sort, and has been referenced earlier by others,  
22 seniors who enter the SCIRE or disabled men and women  
23 who enter the DRIE program, have their rents frozen  
24 at the level they enter the program. Many of them  
25 entered at really high rent burdens. Provati who's a



2 senior active on the Upper West Side in her packet  
3 there's a New York Times article in there profiling  
4 five tenants who have really high rent burdens.  
5 Provati is one of them. Kay is another. They are  
6 both seniors I've worked with. Kay is now homeless.  
7 She was spending more on her rent than her income.  
8 Her rent was frozen, but it was just a matter of time  
9 before she lost her home, and now she's in the  
10 shelter system. This is something that has to change  
11 with SCRIE. You talked a little about  
12 recalculations, but there's been examinations that  
13 are looking at new legislation that would roll back  
14 the rent so seniors were not paying more than a third  
15 of their income toward, their rent. It's critically  
16 needed. It needs to be priced out. I understand it  
17 would be an increase of expenses to the program, but  
18 it could be cost effective at keeping people out of  
19 the shelter system. Provati will tell you about her  
20 own particular circumstances. It's there in the Times  
21 article, but a senior who's living on \$20,000 a year  
22 paying 50% of their income means they have \$10,000 a  
23 year to live on. A senior making \$50,000 or at least  
24 having that household income if they're paying 50% at  
25 least they have \$25,000 to live on. So, I think we

2 really have look at the lowest income seniors those  
3 with the highest rent burdens to get this type of  
4 reform enacted first, and then to see really price it  
5 out to see if we can make it uniform across the board  
6 so everybody's rent can be rolled back to an  
7 affordable level and keep those seniors in their  
8 homes. So, I just urge a costing out of what this  
9 reform could make, and Daniel Donnell, Assembly  
10 Member Daniel Donnell, has legislation on the state  
11 level that he's introduced this year. It's Assembly  
12 8749. We've been in touch with Senator Liz Krueger's  
13 office and we'd love to talk to some Council members  
14 about sponsoring something on the local level. Thank  
15 you.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Please your name for  
17 the record. Can you just do that for me.

18 LARRY WOOD: Sure, it's Larry Wood,  
19 Director or Organizing at Goddard Riverside Community  
20 House.

21 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you,  
22 Larry. Next, please.

23 Okay, alright. I hope you hear. You can  
24 hear it?

25 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yep.

2 PROVATI DEVI: Okay. I'm Provati

3 Devi(sp?) and as a recipient of this program I thank  
4 you for the opportunity to testify. First and  
5 foremost the rent freeze of this program is not  
6 enough to keep us in our homes. See the attached New  
7 York Times article for details of my own impoverished  
8 circumstances. This program needs to roll back the  
9 rent to a third or better 30% of a person's income.  
10 Other rent subsidy programs work this way and are  
11 effective in reducing rent burdens and providing  
12 affordable housing. Reforming Ree (sp?), which I'll  
13 explain that in this manner would be cost-effective  
14 in keeping recipients with very high rent burdens in  
15 their homes and out of the shelter system. Now, we  
16 need legislation to reform these programs  
17 accordingly. To this end copies of petitions and  
18 hundreds of signatures have been collect-collected  
19 for your perusal. However, not to ignore the way the  
20 Department of Finance operates. The DRIE/SCRIE  
21 application does not contain a box below address,  
22 mailing address if different from above. That needs  
23 to be added. Every time I renew I have to deal with  
24 this, and it's a simple thing that can be replaced.  
25 My second point is RE should really the name of this.

2 It is all that is needed for the heading. Why you  
3 qualify should be inside the application. Disabled  
4 people can be highly discriminated against. About 13  
5 years ago a judge inappropriately asked about my  
6 invisible disabilities in court. These labels are  
7 something to think about. All you need is RE and the  
8 reasons for it within. Thank. You.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very much.  
10 Next, please. I'm sorry for the confusion over your—

11 No, that's okay. I think it was before we  
12 switched rooms.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes.

14 I should have checked.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay, thank you.

16 ALEXIS BRANDIS: Thank you. Thank you,  
17 Chairs Chin and Dromm. My name is Alex Brandis. I am  
18 a Policy and Advocacy Manager at Medics Home  
19 Neighborhood House. Thank you again for the  
20 opportunity to testify today at this oversight  
21 hearing examining the administration of the Rent  
22 Freeze Program. The Legal Advocacy Department at the  
23 Neighborhood House has helped thousand of people from  
24 78 different zip codes receive Rent Freeze Program  
25 benefits. As advocates we have concerns about the

2 recently issued proposed rule for the Rent Freeze  
3 Program and adopting the program to ensure people  
4 remain eligible in light of changes in state and  
5 federal law. Regarding the proposed rule while we  
6 were encouraged by DOF's attempts to make the Rent  
7 Freeze Program more accessible in a few respects we  
8 noted several instances where the proposed rule would  
9 be more restrictive than current practice. Our  
10 principal concern include requiring documentation  
11 that is unnecessary and difficult for clients to  
12 obtain, limiting the number of applications a client  
13 can submit in a calendar year, financially punishing  
14 tenants for problems created by their landlord  
15 and DOF, prohibiting clients from receiving city FEPS  
16 and SCRIE simultaneously, increasing the tenant's  
17 rent and incentivizing the landlord to act against  
18 the tenant's ability to maintain SCRIE. A full  
19 description is included in our written comments.  
20 Additionally, we are concerned about DOF's failure to  
21 provide sufficient notice about the proposed rules to  
22 advocates. Regarding recent legislation at the state  
23 and federal level, the Housing Stability and Tenant  
24 Protection Act of 2019 made several changes that have  
25 implications for Rent Freeze Program recipients. DOF

2 needs to make changes to ensure tenants have the  
3 correct rent, landlords are not receiving excess tax  
4 abatement credit and tenant who qualify based on  
5 their legal regulated rent are grandfathered into the  
6 program. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 caused a  
7 revision of several tax forms including Form 1040.  
8 The new Form 1040 has IRA distributions combined with  
9 pensions and annuities. While IRA earnings, pensions  
10 and annuities are accountable income for the Rent  
11 Freeze Program, IRA distributions are not. In two  
12 cases we are aware of DOF wrongfully denied clients  
13 because of IRA distributions. DOF failed to realize  
14 this was not a countable source of income because of  
15 the new Form 1040. As there are likely many more of  
16 than these two clients who have been wrongfully  
17 denied DOF needs to determine which clients were  
18 denied based on IRA distributions and retroactively  
19 restore benefits. We appreciate the Council's  
20 investigation of these pressing matters and are  
21 hopeful that with action by the Council the concerns  
22 described can be addressed. Thank you again for the  
23 opportunity to testify.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you for your  
25 testimony. I think we agree with you about the rent

2 rollback. I mean Live On has been advocating for  
3 this. So there state legislation. We can see how we  
4 can coordinate, and to make that happen, and then we  
5 heard other testimony

6 PROVATI DEVI: Can I just go back in your  
7 office?

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, we'll talk  
9 afterwards. Definitely. We can work on it together  
10 with our state elected.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Uh-hm, and thank you  
12 for the list of recommendations as well. I was  
13 reading through it as you were speaking and I'm still  
14 reading and we'll take it into consideration. Thank  
15 you.

16 ALEXIS BRANDIS: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yeah, okay, thank you  
18 everybody. Okay, we've been joined by Council Member  
19 Eugene, and I believe this hearing is adjourned at  
20 12:37 in the afternoon. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date January 25, 2020