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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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March 17, 2021
Start: 9:43 a.m.
Recess: 5:43 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 2)

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Darma V. Diaz
- Vanessa L. Gibson
- Barry S. Grodenchik
- Brad S. Lander
- Antonio Reynoso
- Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
- Mark Treyger
- Helen K. Rosenthal
- Kevin C. Riley
- Chaim M. Deutsch
- Robert F. Holden

A P P E A R A N C E S

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2
3 David Hansell
4 Commissioner of the New York City Administration
for Children's Services

5 Michael Moiseyev
6 Deputy Commissioner for Finance

7 William Fletcher
8 Deputy Commissioner for Child Protection

9 Dr. Jacqueline Martin
10 Deputy Commissioner for Prevention Services

11 Julie Farber
12 Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency
Services

13 Winette Saunders
14 Soon to be First Deputy Commissioner

15 Steven Banks
16 Commissioner of DSS

17 Ralph Palladino
18 Clerical Administrative Employees Local 1549

19 Lauren Shapiro
20 Director of the Family Defense Practice at
21 Brooklyn Defender Services

22 Emma Ketteringham
23 Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice
at the Bronx Defenders

24 Zainab Akbar
25 Managing Attorney of the Neighborhood Defender
Services of Harlem's Family Defense Practice

Tehra Coles
Litigation Supervisor for the Center for Family
Representation

Kathleen Brady-Stepien
President and CEO of the Council of Family and
Child Caring Agencies or COFCCA

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Kate Wurmfeld
Director of Family Court Program with the Center
for Court Innovation

Raysa Rodriguez
Associate Executive Director for Policy and
Advocacy at CCC

Samantha Sutfin-Gray
Vice President of Performance and Quality at SCO
Family of Services

Marion White
Child Abuse Prevention Program of the New York
Foundling

Eric Lee
Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless
Services United

Tierra Labrada
Senior Policy Analyst at the Supportive Housing
Network of New York

Ted Houghton
President of Gateway Housing

Jessica Yager
Vice President of Policy and Planning at WIN

Craig Hughes
Safety Net Project

Jimmy Meagher
Policy Director at Safe Horizon

Gabriela Sandoval Requena
Senior Policy Analyst of New Destiny Housing

Amy Barasch
Executive Director at Her Justice

Amy Barasch
Executive Director at Her Justice

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Rachel Sabella
Director of No Kid Hungry New York

Molly Krakowski
Senior Director of Government Affairs at JASA

Greg Silverman
CEO of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger

MJ Okma
Human Services Council

Michelle Yanche
Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services

Nicole McVinua
Director of Policy at Urban Pathways

Marcyn Campbell
Covenant House

Darren Bloch
CEO and Executive Director at Greenwich House

Bianca Bennett
Youth Advocate and Quality Assurance Assistance
for You Gotta Believe

Jennifer Pinder
Executive Director of You Gotta Believe

Nancie Katz
Director of Seeds in the Middle

Beth Goldman
President and Attorney in charge at the New York
Legal Assistance Group

Arielle Wisbaum
Equal Justice Works Fellow in the Health Justice
Program at New York Lawyers for the Public
Interest

Raun Rasmussen
Executive Director of Legal Services NYC

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Leslie Thrope
Executive Director of Housing Conservation
Coordinators

Kevin Jones
Associate State Director of Advocacy for AARP New
York

Jin Kwak
Outreach Worker for LGBTQ People

Elaine Rita
Community Member of the New York City
Antiviolence Project

Yaszmin Harris
Community Member of New York City Antiviolence
Project

Bill Baccaglioni
President and CEO of the New York Foundling

Lakshmi Sanmuganathan
Policy Fellow from the Coalition of Asian
American Children and Families CACF

Becca Asaki
New York City Organizer for NAPAWF, the National
Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

Mon Yuck Yu
Executive Vice President at the Academy of
Medical and Public Health Services AMPHS

Terry Lawson
Executive Director of UnLocal

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2 SERGEANT PEREZ: If you can just pause for one
3 second please, thank you. Please, go ahead you're
4 your opening statements.

5 SERGEANT JONES: Okay, uhm, will all sergeants
6 start with their recordings.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording is underway.

8 SERGEANT JONES: Okay, Cloud has started.

9 SERGEANT PEREZ: Back up is rolling.

10 SERGEANT JONES: And Sergeant Pedro, would you
11 start with the opening statement please.

12 SERGEANT LUGO: Good morning everyone. Welcome
13 to today's Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget
14 Hearing of the Committee on General Welfare. At this
15 time would all panelists please turn on your video.

16 To minimize disruption, please place electronic
17 devices to vibrate or silent. If you wish to submit
18 testimony, you may do so at

19 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's

20 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your

21 cooperation. Chair Levin, we are ready to begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, good morning everybody.

23 [GAVEL] Gaveling in. Top of the morning to

24 everybody. Happy St. Patrick's Day and I want to

25 thank you all for joining the Committee on General

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Welfare's Preliminary Budget hearing today. I am going to acknowledge my colleagues who are here this morning. Council Members Salamanca, Rosenthal and Grodenchik. Uhm and I will read my opening statement right now for the ACS portion of this hearing. As you all know, there will be three agencies testifying today. ACS will be going first, then we will be joined by HRA and DHS as combined testimony as DSS. And then we will have testimony from the public.

So, I am going to begin this morning with the statement, opening statement on the ACS portion and I apologize, I have pulled over to the side of the road to do this and then I will then set myself up during Commissioner Hansell's testimony.

Good morning everybody. I am Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the Committee on General Welfare. I will begin today's hearing on the Fiscal '22 Preliminary Budget and the 2021 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report or PMMR with the Administration for Children's Services or ACS. After ACS, we will hear from the Department of Social Services then finish with public testimony around one o'clock.

1
2 I want to welcome all the advocates and community
3 members watching this livestream and I want to
4 welcome back Commissioner Hansell, Commissioner of
5 ACS. It is a pleasure to continue to work with you
6 sir and your staff.

7 We have a relatively short amount of time today
8 to review ACS's operations during COVID-19 and its
9 budget plans for the future of Children's Services.
10 According, I will keep my comments here brief and
11 request the Commissioner keep his oral testimony to
12 around ten minutes so that we can move on to Council
13 Member questions.

14 ACS's Fiscal 2022 Preliminary Budget is \$2.65
15 billion, which does not reflect anticipated federal
16 stimulus from the American Rescue Plan. There is
17 much influx as we move toward the adopted budget and
18 in general, I look forward to hearing from ACS about
19 how they are planning for the future in the following
20 ways.

21 First, child welfare investigations, which is the
22 core of ACS's operations. The question is, is
23 staffing appropriate given the administrations three
24 out one in attrition policy and what does ACS expect
25

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2 when more of New York reopens including schools that
3 may potentially generate more calls to the SCR?

4 Second, foster care. According to the PMMR,
5 closures of family court have slowed the pace of
6 reunifications of adoptions. Additionally, there is
7 no funding for fair futures in the Preliminary
8 Budget, a key advocacy priority of mine of the many
9 young people in care seeking a fair change at
10 success.

11 I would like to know how the Administration will
12 preserve fair futures and if it will be baselined in
13 this years adopted budget.

14 Third, child care vouchers. Which ACS
15 administers. New York State expects \$1.8 billion in
16 childcare block grants or CCBG from the American
17 Rescue Plan. I want to learn about where this money
18 is going. The status of childcare providers in the
19 city and how the budget supports childcare providers
20 safe and full reopening.

21 This is a critical question as more and more New
22 Yorkers return to in person work, especially women.
23 It is a key component to our economic recovery, is
24 allowing for in-person childcare so that people can
25 get back to work.

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2 Fourth, preventive services. Which also saw
3 utilization drop during the pandemic. I would like
4 to know how ASC plans to get the preventive service
5 programs back on track and what is budgeted to meet
6 the health and financial needs of families resulting
7 from COVID-19. I hope the Fiscal 2022 Budget
8 includes more funding for family enrichment centers.

9 Finally, we will discuss general justice issues
10 which came under the jurisdiction of this Committee
11 late last year. ACS has seen its census of youth in
12 secure detention rise by 56 percent from July of 2020
13 to March of 2021. ACS cannot release these youth on
14 their own but I would expect to know what the
15 strategy is to stabilize the system and ensure trauma
16 informed community-based treatment whenever possible.

17 I also want to learn when construction will be
18 finished at the two secure detention facilities
19 horizon and crossroads. The Capital Commitment Plan
20 includes \$264.5 million between Fiscal '21 and Fiscal
21 '25. I would like to thank the Committee Staff who
22 have helped prepare for this hearing. Daniel Kroop,
23 Senior Financial Analyst, Dohini Sompura Unit Head,
24 Aminta Kilawan Senior Counsel, Chrystal Pawn and
25 Natalie Omari[SP?] Policy Analysts and my own staff,

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2 Chief of Staff Johnathan Boche[SP?] and my
3 Legislative Director Paul Hunt.

4 Again, I want to acknowledge my colleagues that
5 are here, Council Member Salamanca, Council Member
6 Rosenthal and Council Member Grodenchik. We expect
7 more Council Members to join in the first of the
8 hearing. And with that, I will turn it back over to
9 the Sergeant and Committee Counsel to swear in
10 Administration officials.

11 I want to thank you all and welcome. Nice to see
12 you all.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. Good
14 morning everyone, my name is Aminta Kilawan, Senior
15 Counsel to the Committee on General Welfare at the
16 New York City Council.

17 Today, I am going to be moderating our hearing
18 and calling on panelists to testify. Before we
19 begin, please remember to everyone on this Zoom, that
20 we will be on mute until I call on you to testify.
21 After you are called on, you will be unmuted by a
22 member of our staff. Please note that there is a
23 delay of a few seconds before you are unmuted and we
24 can actually hear you.

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2 For public testimony, I will be calling up
3 individuals in panels. At that point, please listen
4 for your name. I will periodically announce the next
5 few panelists. Once I call on your name, a member of
6 our staff will unmute you, the Sergeant at Arms will
7 set a clock and give you the go ahead to begin your
8 testimony.

9 Once we get there, all public testimony will be
10 limited to three minutes. After I call your name,
11 again, please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to
12 announce that you may begin before you start your
13 testimony.

14 Now, for today's hearing, the first panel will
15 include representatives from the Administration for
16 Children Services, followed by Council Member
17 questions and then testimony by the Department of
18 Social Services. In order of speaking, we will have
19 Commissioner David Hansell and joined for question
20 and answers Michael Moiseyev, Winette Saunders, Dr.
21 Jacqueline Martin, Julie Farber and William Fletcher.

22 I am now going to administer the oath to the
23 Administration. When you hear your name, please
24 respond once a member of staff unmutes you. Do you
25 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing

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2 but the truth before this Committee and to respond
3 honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner
4 Hansell?

5 DAVID HANSELL: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Commissioner.
7 Deputy Commissioner Moiseyev?

8 MICHAEL MOISEYEV: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy
10 Commissioner Saunders?

11 WINETTE SAUNDERS: I do.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Dr. Martin?

13 Dr. JACQUELINE MARTIN: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy
15 Commissioner Farber?

16 JULIE FARBER: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And finally, Deputy
18 Commissioner Fletcher?

19 WILLIAM FLETCHER: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I will now call
21 on Commissioner Hansell to begin testimony for ACS.

22 DAVID HANSELL: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair
23 Levin and please drive safely. Good morning members
24 of the Committee on General Welfare. As I think all
25 the members know by now, I am David Hansell,

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2 Commissioner of the New York City Administration for
3 Children's Services and I am delighted to again
4 appear before this Committee as I begin my 5th year
5 as ACS Commissioner. With me today as you heard are
6 Michael Moiseyev, who is our Deputy Commissioner for
7 Finance; William Fletcher, Deputy Commissioner for
8 Child Protection; Dr. Jacqueline Martin, Deputy
9 Commissioner for Prevention Services; and Julie
10 Farber, Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency
11 Services; and also our soon-to-be First Deputy
12 Commissioner, Winette Saunders. As you may know after
13 a 54 year career in child welfare, including seven in
14 his current tenure at ACS, Eric Brettschneider, our
15 Current First Deputy Commissioner is retiring and we
16 will all miss his wisdom his insight and support but
17 I am truly delighted that Winette will become ACS's
18 First Deputy Commissioner as of April 6th.

19 We are very grateful for the opportunity to
20 testify before the Committee to reflect on how ACS
21 has adapted over the past year to unprecedented
22 challenges. Today, I will explain how ACS has
23 continuously met the needs of children and families
24 and how we are building on the lessons learned from
25 the pandemic and from our national racial and social

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2 justice reckoning, in order to transform and improve
3 our work.

4 I am incredibly proud of the staff at ACS and our
5 partner agencies who are true first responders,
6 carrying out the essential work of strengthening and
7 supporting families, all while facing the uncertainty
8 and fear that have been a constant part of managing
9 the pandemic response. From the moment this crisis
10 hit, ACS implemented targeted public health measures
11 based on guidance from federal, state and City health
12 agencies and our own Chief Medical Officer. We have
13 provided tens of thousands of pieces of PPE to ACS
14 frontline staff, to our contracted provider agency
15 staff and to children and families. And we have
16 disseminated critical safety information to families.
17 We provided regularly updated guidance to our staff
18 and providers. We have equipped staff and provider
19 agencies and families with technology to work
20 remotely where possible. And we have ensured that
21 essential child welfare staff and foster parents are
22 eligible for emergency child care.

23 As soon as vaccines became available to New
24 Yorkers, we successfully advocated for vaccine
25 eligibility for our essential, direct service staff

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at ACS and our contracted provider agencies. We are currently operating a designated vaccine POD, for eligible ACS staff and their eligible family members. And now that youth ages 16 and older if they are either living in congregate settings or have comorbidities or underlying health conditions, are also eligible to be vaccinated. We and our provider agencies are obtaining the necessary consents and vaccine appointments for these youth.

We are continuing to advocate to the State for all foster parents to become eligible for the vaccine. I will now give a brief overview of the impact of COVID-19 on our core programs. Some updates on how we are addressing equity and racial disparities, and on major developments in our core program areas and review our current budget status.

While 2020 was a year like no other, our core mission of keeping children safe and supporting families has not wavered. When we compare our 2020 data to prior years, we can see the dramatic impact of COVID-19. Overall, as compared with Calendar 2019, ACS conducted 24 percent fewer investigations in Calendar Year 2020, and the number of children who were placed in foster care decreased by 24 percent.

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2 The foster care census continued to decline, to fewer
3 than 7,700 children in December 2020.

4 We have continued to emphasize earlier, more
5 effective and less intrusive interventions to keep
6 children safe. Throughout the pandemic, we have
7 prioritized our full continuum of successful
8 prevention efforts and we think this is where we
9 should continue to invest as we emerge from the
10 pandemic. Now more than ever, families need concrete
11 resources, access to supportive services and stronger
12 social connections.

13 Early in the pandemic, we launched child safety
14 campaigns to communicate a variety of information and
15 resources to all New Yorkers. "Coping Through COVID"
16 is aimed at supporting families through the pandemic
17 and "Teens Take on COVID," is targeted to providing
18 resources for teens. As so many families and
19 children have remained home for extended periods of
20 time, our educational safety campaigns have focused
21 on helping parents avoid tragic accidents and create
22 safer home environments. We also provided concrete
23 resources to help families in need, including food,
24 clothing, diapers, formula, pack and plays and many,
25 many more things.

1
2 In 2020, New Yorkers for Children and ACS
3 established the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to
4 address urgent family needs arising from the
5 pandemic. We have intensified our efforts to make
6 sure that families are connected with necessary
7 supports in the least intrusive way possible. While
8 ACS does not control the child abuse and neglect
9 reports to the Statewide Central Register, and we are
10 legally mandated to respond once the SCR assigns a
11 case to us, we are taking bold steps to avoid
12 unnecessary investigations.

13 We feel strongly that our Collaborative
14 Assessment Response Engagement and Support or our
15 CARES differential response, where we are diverting
16 lower risk cases from the traditional investigation
17 path, has enormous potential to provide families with
18 support without the intrusion of an investigation.
19 And despite the decrease in overall reports, ACS
20 increased the number of referrals to CARES by 6
21 percent in Calendar Year '19 to Calendar Year '20.
22 We recently expanded CARES to every borough and we
23 are now working to double the number of CARES units
24 across the city.

1
2 We must continue to do everything we can to make
3 sure that children do not linger in foster care,
4 through regular and consistent family time between
5 parents and children, through comprehensive service
6 planning, through collaboration with attorneys for
7 parents and children and by expediting legal
8 proceedings as Family Court operations more fully
9 resume.

10 While 2,482 children left foster care in Calendar
11 Year 2020 and the vast majority of these were
12 children returned home with their families, the
13 foster care RFP that we will release this spring,
14 will further our goal to have more children in foster
15 care achieve reunification more quickly.

16 ACS continues to provide community-based services
17 to youth and families that help minimize juvenile
18 justice involvement and to that end, in Calendar Year
19 2020, we served more than 900 youth through our
20 evidence-based prevention models. While again, ACS
21 is not directly involved in the court process that
22 determines when youth come to detention or how long
23 they remain with us, we are concerned about the
24 slowdown in case processing during the pandemic.
25 Overall admissions to detention declined by 40

1
2 percent from Calendar Year '19 to '20 but we have
3 seen average length of stay increase from 25 days in
4 2019 to 33 days in 2020. And so we continue to
5 advocate for accelerated movement of court
6 proceedings for youth.

7 Our national experiences over the last year have
8 brought the racial and social inequities in our
9 communities into sharper focus and they have
10 highlighted the need for urgent attention to long-
11 present disparities in child welfare and juvenile
12 justice. Something I have prioritized since becoming
13 ACS Commissioner.

14 In 2017, I created our Office of Equity
15 Strategies, which continues to drive forward our key
16 strategies to reduce racial disproportionality and
17 move forward as an anti-racist organization. The
18 Office holds every ACS division accountable to
19 achieve more equitable outcomes for the children and
20 families that serve. I will discuss these agency-
21 wide efforts in more detail shortly.

22 We have worked to support both the viability of
23 and access to the child care continuum throughout the
24 pandemic. From the very beginning, we secured
25 monthly state waivers to ensure continued payments to

1
2 child care providers while children were absent or
3 programs closed and to suspend family share fees and
4 defer recertification requirements for families.

5 More recently, we obtained a waiver from the state
6 that prevents extra income that a family might
7 receive due to COVID-19, such as hazard pay or
8 overtime hours, from counting against the family's
9 income eligibility.

10 We are maximizing our use of state and federal
11 resources to expand access to care. Specifically, we
12 are working to enroll more families who are eligible
13 for federal Child Care Block Grant supported child
14 care. While the City's FY 2021 budget did not
15 allocate the same funding levels for Special Child
16 Care Funded vouchers as in the previous year due to
17 fiscal challenges, we have been able to move many
18 families to federally-supported vouchers to maintain
19 their child care. Last year, we also coordinated with
20 the Department of Education on a plan to restructure
21 and lower fees for our lowest-income families,
22 including non-working families with no income.

23 This resulted in lowering fees for families
24 across the board. While parent fees are currently
25 waived on an emergency basis during COVID-19, we know

1
2 this will be important to families as a long-term
3 measure, as our communities and economy recover. As
4 of July 2020, we were able to restore post-
5 transitional child care, which allows eligible low-
6 income families to continue their child care once
7 other public assistance benefits have ended. And we
8 are currently working with our partners at DOE and
9 DSS to streamline the application and eligibility
10 determination process to expand access to child care
11 for families who are experiencing homelessness. We
12 have also worked closely with DOE to ensure that the
13 children of our essential workforce within ACS and
14 our provider agencies, as well as foster parents,
15 were eligible for the DOE's Regional Enrichment
16 Centers when schools were fully remote. And those
17 families are now eligible for Learning Bridges.

18 As families experienced the prolonged social
19 isolation and other challenges from COVID-19, we took
20 steps to promote community connections and make sure
21 that families knew where to turn for resources. We
22 recently announced the results of our re-procurement
23 of the three Family Enrichment Centers and all three
24 existing providers were selected: Good Shepherd in
25 East New York, Graham Windham in Hunts

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2 Point/Longwood, and Children's Village/Bridgebuilders
3 in Highbridge.

4 The FECs overlap with three of our 11 Community
5 Partnerships, which are community-based planning
6 groups that emphasize connection to local services.
7 With this strong community infrastructure in place,
8 we have continued to empower families by offering
9 support and concrete resources. For example, the
10 FECs and the Partnerships have provided food to
11 families in need. They have offered technology and
12 other assistance to support remote learning and they
13 are maintaining a strong online social presence with
14 virtual offerings. All of this keeps families
15 connected during a very challenging time and supports
16 child safety and well-being at home.

17 The over reporting of Black and Latinx families
18 to the SCR is an area of great concern to us because
19 it introduces significant racial disproportionality
20 at the front door of our child protective system.
21 The SCR is a lifeline for children at risk but all
22 New Yorkers have a collective duty to make sure child
23 protective interventions are sought and used only
24 when there is a true concern for the safety of a
25 child. The majority of SCR reports come from mandated

1
2 reporters, such as educators and health
3 professionals.

4 Since the start of the pandemic, we have
5 collaborated with DOE to develop guidance that makes
6 clear that if a family is struggling with technology
7 or other COVID-19 related challenges unrelated to
8 child safety, schools should work with the family to
9 provide the assistance necessary to facilitate the
10 child's attendance, without calling the SCR. And
11 similarly, we have been working very closely with
12 DOHMH and Health + Hospitals, so that hospital and
13 medical staff understand the impact SCR reporting has
14 on families and to clarify that reports should be
15 made only when there is a concern about a child's
16 safety.

17 We and our sister agencies have been reiterating
18 to health professionals that if a parent or child
19 tests positive for a substance when the child is
20 born, hospital staff should not call the SCR solely
21 based on a positive test, and that medical
22 professionals can and should make service referrals
23 without contacting the SCR. We are continuing to
24 advocate for additional reforms that we believe are
25 necessary to reduce unnecessary investigative

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2 involvement with families. Including a proposal that
3 our own CPS have called for. Requiring implicit
4 bias training for mandated reporters like teachers,
5 doctors and social workers. This training is already
6 in place for our staff and we are currently pursuing
7 state legislation to help make sure all mandated
8 reporters are trained to reflect on and guard against
9 implicit biases.

10 At the height of the pandemic, we completed our
11 first re-procurement of prevention services in over a
12 decade, with 119 new contracts in place on time by
13 July 1, 2020. I want to thank everyone who worked
14 tirelessly to make that happen. Prevention services
15 belong to all New York City families who may need
16 support, so we are dedicated to establishing
17 universal family access to every service model we
18 provide when they need help and wherever they live.

19 We have also infused more parent feedback into
20 the prevention service array and into services
21 themselves. The service offerings were designed with
22 input from parents and providers are expected to work
23 collaboratively with families to set goals and
24 develop service plans, so that services reflect what
25 families want and need. The new system explicitly

1
2 addresses racial equity by requiring providers to
3 incorporate efforts to address racial disparity in
4 their organization and service provision and by
5 including racial equity committees that include all
6 levels of staff representation.

7 Through the procurement of new foster care
8 contracts that will begin with the release of the RFP
9 this spring, we will scale best practices and proven
10 strategies to improve safety, permanency and well-
11 being outcomes for New York City children and
12 families. We and our foster care provider agencies
13 have continually adapted to support children and
14 families throughout the pandemic, while also
15 developing new partnerships and innovative
16 approaches.

17 For example, due to significant limitations in
18 access to the Family Courts during the pandemic, we
19 took steps outside of the normal court process to
20 move toward more family reunifications from foster
21 care. We launched proactive reviews of the cases of
22 more than 3,350 children in foster care who have a
23 goal of reunification, to determine if these cases
24 could move forward to increased visiting with birth
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2 families, pre-disposition release, trial discharge or
3 final discharge.

4 In cases that could move forward, our Division of
5 Family Court Legal Services attorneys worked with the
6 parent's and children's attorneys to secure court
7 approval as needed. In Fall 2020, we launched a new
8 parent advocate pilot called "Parents Supporting
9 Parents," to improve reunification and race equity
10 outcomes. The parent advocates will be on staff at
11 Graham Windham and Rising Ground as central members
12 of case planning teams, where they will receive
13 training, coaching and professional development from
14 both Rise and in collaboration with their foster care
15 agencies, to fully empower the parent advocates to
16 leverage their lived experience as credible
17 messengers when working with families and the
18 agencies.

19 This initiative builds on our work to incorporate
20 parent advocates into decision making processes
21 across the child welfare system. The new foster care
22 parent advocates will be crucial allies to help
23 dismantle bias, strengthen parents' self-advocacy and
24 voice within the foster care process and help foster
25 care agencies shift their organizational culture to

1
2 more authentic parent engagement approaches. The
3 pilot is supported with funds from major national and
4 local foundations and the lessons learn will lay the
5 groundwork for full implementation through the
6 forthcoming RFP, with a parent advocate assigned to
7 every parent with a goal of reunification.

8 As the Council and Chair Levin have championed,
9 we have provided funding to implement Fair Futures,
10 which includes coaches, tutors and education,
11 employment and housing specialists, among other
12 supports for older youth. Through Fair Futures, our
13 goal is to help youth prepare for major transitions,
14 including the transitions between middle school and
15 high school, as well as the transition from high
16 school to college, vocational training, and/or a
17 fulfilling career.

18 Through Fair Futures, we support young people in
19 the achievement of key milestones that put them on a
20 path to success, while we continue to work
21 aggressively towards permanency. As we testified to
22 this Committee just last month, ACS and our partners
23 in juvenile justice are fully committed to
24 strengthening New York City's ability to work with
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2 at-risk and justice involved youth in ways that are
3 trauma-informed and youth-centered.

4 Our juvenile justice system safely serves youth
5 in the community whenever possible and with
6 appropriate structure and supports in place. We
7 oversee the services and programs for youth at every
8 stage of the juvenile justice continuum, including
9 community-based services, secure and non-secure
10 detention services and Close to Home programs. We
11 are preparing to procure new Close to Home contracts,
12 starting with a concept paper to be issued this fall
13 and we look forward to input from the Council and
14 other stakeholders and partners in this work.

15 And now to our budget. Our Fiscal Year 2022
16 budget is \$2.65 billion, including \$851.8 million in
17 City Tax Levy funding. Given the City's fiscal
18 concerns, our January savings plan is \$36.3 million
19 in City Tax Levy for FY 2021 and we have an
20 additional \$9 million in savings for FY 2022.
21 Reflecting ACS's and the city's commitment to the
22 critical ACS functions that keep children safe and
23 support families, there are no program cuts to ACS in
24 the FY 2022 Preliminary Budget.

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2 We met our FY '21 January savings plan targets
3 without significant program reductions, although some
4 reductions will require modifications to program
5 operations. Our adjustments were achieved through
6 overtime savings, through the citywide hiring and
7 attrition plan, which will be implemented to minimize
8 impact on frontline staff and through the use of
9 prior year revenue.

10 While we are tremendously, tremendously heartened
11 by enactment of the federal American Rescue Plan, we
12 do remains concerned about proposed state cuts that
13 hurt the most vulnerable children and families in New
14 York City. Over the past few years ACS has seen the
15 state consistently pull back its support of the
16 children, youth and families that we serve in the
17 child welfare and juvenile justice system.

18 And on top of this previous disinvestment, the
19 proposed state budget would lead to an additional
20 annualized cut of over \$38 million to ACS, at a time
21 when children and families are already struggling.
22 The State is proposing cuts that would effectively
23 shift costs to the city for our portfolio of
24 services. The budget proposes to cut the
25 reimbursement rate for the child welfare services

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2 funding stream that supports our prevention work from
3 62 percent to 59 percent, and to cut the rates for
4 adoption subsidies and detention.

5 There is also a proposal to cut the Foster Care
6 Block Grant by \$11.2 million statewide, which would
7 be a \$5.7 million annualized cut to New York City.

8 The last year has shown that New York City and
9 New Yorkers are resilient, creative and able to adapt
10 to ever-changing conditions, while maintaining and
11 enhancing our standing as a national progressive
12 leader. At ACS, we adhere to those same values. We
13 thank the Council for the opportunity to testify and
14 we are happy to take your questions.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Commissioner
16 Hansell for your testimony. Before I turn to Chair
17 Levin for questions, I would like to remind Council
18 Members to use the raise hand function in Zoom to
19 indicate whether you have a question for this panel.
20 And please remember Council Members to keep your
21 questions and the answers to five minutes.

22 Now, I am going to turn it over to Chair Levin.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Counsel
24 Kilawan and thank you Commissioner Hansell. I
25 appreciate the thoroughness of your testimony. The

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2 first question I have is kind of a – not necessarily
3 a budget question but you could speak to it in the
4 budget context. You know, can you give us a picture
5 of child protective services during COVID,
6 particularly as it relates to the amount of SCR calls
7 that have come in? How CPS staff has been
8 functioning, doing their job, able to do
9 investigations and uhm, you know, one aspect of this
10 that I am very interested in and I think it presents
11 this question that I think a lot of wrestle with and
12 were wrestling with prior to the pandemic but now you
13 know, our experience over the last year provides a
14 different perspective on this. You know whether our
15 structure of mandated reporters calling the SCR for a
16 variety of neglect allegations or suspected abuse
17 allegations. Whether that's the most effective way
18 to keep our children safe and how this past years'
19 experience has kind of informed how we think about
20 that and you know, basically, have we been able to
21 keep our kids safe in New York City without those
22 points of contact with mandated reporters at such a
23 significant level as we have had in the past.

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2 How will we keep kids safe when they are not
3 being seen by guidance counselors and teachers every
4 day?

5 DAVID HANSELL: Yeah, Chair Levin, thank you very
6 much for the questions. That something we have been
7 giving a lot of thought to at ACS and I think as we
8 emerge from the pandemic, it's one of the most
9 important questions we need to answer about the
10 future of the child welfare system.

11 So, let me say a few things and then I will also
12 give Deputy Commissioner Fletcher an opportunity to
13 speak to the work that his division has done.

14 So, the first thing I will say is as I said in
15 the testimony, I am incredibly proud of our job
16 protective specialists. Their work is always
17 difficult but it has never been more difficult than
18 over the past year and yet they never stopped. We
19 never stopped doing investigations 24/7. We never
20 stopped doing the work we needed to do to keep
21 children safe. We never stopped doing the work we
22 needed to do to make sure that families were
23 connected with services and supports that they
24 needed.

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2 Our Child Protective Specialists have been in the
3 field consistently through the pandemic at you know,
4 as we know, while they were dealing with you know, as
5 we all were, a great deal of personal, emotional
6 turmoil. In some cases, personal tragedies.

7 So, we of course had to change the procedures
8 significantly to make sure we were protecting staff,
9 protecting parents. We implemented all the public
10 health guidance around social distancing, PPE and so
11 on to make sure everybody was safe but we continue to
12 do that work that we needed to do to keep kids safe
13 and to support families and we will of course
14 continue to do that.

15 At the beginning of the pandemic when the schools
16 closed just over a year ago, we saw initially a very
17 dramatic decline in reports to the state central
18 register, about a 51 percent decline last March.
19 That number has actually come back up again
20 significantly over the last year but not quite to
21 normal level.

22 So, we actually, if we look at sort of a longer
23 period of time, we have looked at the period between
24 July and December of last year. A six-month period
25 where we feel like probably more representative of

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2 the pandemic and what we saw during that six month
3 period is that our level of SCR reporting actually
4 was about 16 percent below what it had been the year
5 before. That is comparing 2020 to 2019. So, not
6 nearly as dramatic a drop as we had seen early in the
7 pandemic but still significant.

8 But when we actually sort of parsed that in
9 greater detail, we saw something very interesting.
10 Which was that the reports from mandated reporters
11 from 2019 to 2020 dropped by about 24 percent. But
12 the reports from nonmandated reporters, which is you
13 know include community members, family members,
14 neighbors and friends and others, actually remained
15 almost exactly level. Which actually meant
16 proportionally, we were getting more reports from
17 nonmandated reporters, community members, family
18 members and so on then we had been receiving in last
19 year in previous years.

20 So, that suggests to us, although we have
21 obviously a lot more work to do but that does suggest
22 to us that we need to look very closely at the
23 mandated reporter system and the criteria under which
24 mandated reporters do report to see what we can learn
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1
2 from that fact that it was really on the mandated
3 side of the system that we saw a significant decline.

4 And while you know, it's hard to prove a
5 negative, we you know, we have been very vigilant
6 throughout the last year to look for any indications
7 that we were missing kids who were in trouble. That
8 we were missing kids that were being abused or
9 neglected and we didn't really see them. We didn't
10 see for example, a change in the proportion of
11 reports coming in toward more serious reports of
12 physical abuse. We didn't see more you know, ER
13 visits for physical abuse. We didn't see — we didn't
14 really see anything to suggest to us that we were
15 missing a significant number of children who were at
16 serious risk.

17 So, I think that does mean we have to think about
18 closely about what this tells us and that's one of
19 the reasons why we are very focused and I mentioned a
20 few of the things that we are already advocating for
21 and have worked on, on the mandated reporter side of
22 the system to make sure that mandated reports are
23 being used when they should be. Which is when
24 children are truly at risk of safety concerns but not
25 when they should not be used. And that's why we have

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2 been working very closely as I said with DOE,
3 especially in the remote learning context because we
4 did not want technology problems fundamentally to
5 become child welfare issues for families. They
6 shouldn't and we work very closely with DOE on that.
7 And we have been working very closely with the
8 Healthcare system to make sure that issues that
9 really are about services that family may need.
10 Could be substance abuse services. Could be
11 healthcare services. Again, that they do not become
12 child welfare issues unless there are genuine
13 concerns about child safety.

14 So, I think you know we are continuing to analyze
15 the data but I think we are learning some interesting
16 things that can lead us to think about reforms,
17 especially in the mandated reporter systems as we go
18 forward.

19 And I would if I could, like to give Deputy
20 Commissioner Fletcher an opportunity to say a little
21 bit about the work that his team has done.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you Commissioner.
23 I think you are unmuted Deputy Commissioner.

24 WILLIAM FLETCHER: Now I am, thank you. Thank
25 you so much Chair Levin. So, thank you Commissioner

1
2 for highlighting a lot of the work that our CPS has
3 have endured during this pandemic. And I wanted to
4 thank you Chair Levin for raising this, you know the
5 concern around how our child protective specialists
6 have been doing their job since entering this
7 pandemic in March of 2020.

8 And it's been a challenge and as our Commissioner
9 noted in his testimony, that we are proud of our CPS.
10 You know, because they are truly first responders
11 because they pivoted quickly. Quickly based on
12 knowing what they probably were going to face going
13 out to ensure that our children, the children of New
14 York City are safe. They went out there without
15 pause, right? And it was a difficult challenge
16 because again, our Child Protective Specialists must
17 balance child safety mandates with the families we
18 serve, as well as their own physical and
19 psychological safety, right? That became a very
20 challenging thought for them as they endured but they
21 became the lifeline as the Commissioner also noted in
22 his testimony for our families that were in need of
23 houses. In need of concrete resources because as
24 they got out there to do their assessments, families

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2 because many of them were sheltering at home, you
3 know had trepidation in going out in community.

4 So, there were food issues. There were procuring
5 Pampers, Formula, our CPS were able to make that
6 connect in order to serve those needs of the
7 families.

8 The other thing that helped our CPS to be able to
9 do their job efficiently, was technology, right? And
10 we were very fortunate that prior the pandemic, this
11 was one of the Commissioners priorities in making
12 sure that our CPS frontline had smart phones, as well
13 as tablets.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I remember visiting with them
15 and them being very enthusiastic about the tablets
16 about two years ago, yeah.

17 WILLIAM FLETHCER: Exactly, so it really went a
18 long way so that as they went out in the field and
19 did their initial assessment, they were able to
20 remain connected with families through technology.
21 Because many of our families as you know do have
22 smart phones and they do have the What's APP app and
23 similar platforms. So, that has helped them
24 tremendously. But out CPS you know, they ran into
25 the communities without hesitation, as well as they

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2 were able to efficiently continue to do their work
3 because of the technology that we currently had in
4 place. We were able to quickly pivot to getting a
5 lot of the work that they have to do as it relates to
6 documentation into the system as quickly as they
7 could so they could make sound assessments in keeping
8 children safe.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely, yeah, it
10 definitely bears noting that you know they were
11 frontline workers during the most you know critical
12 points in the pandemic. They had to keep showing –
13 they couldn't work from home, they were frontline.

14 And I think, obviously, you know ACS has I think
15 a data team that is second to none and it's – I think
16 that there is a lot that we can be learning from the
17 data as you both spoke about and I think that this is
18 uhm, you know, this really amazing opportunity, just
19 one thing that jumped out at me Commissioner, what
20 you said about the proportion of nonmandated reports
21 calls coming in from nonmandated reporters. It was
22 interesting because it kind of to me shows that
23 communities kind of step in to meet those needs in a
24 way that you know kind of highlighting the
25 communities. Kind of, we know how to keep ourselves

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2 safe as communities and because these weren't calls
3 coming in you know out of fear of repercussions,
4 right? These were calls coming in - I think that
5 that's always a consideration or a challenge with the
6 mandated reporter system is that people are making
7 calls because they don't want to be blamed later on
8 if something were to go wrong.

9 So, this is something that we should continue to
10 talk about and I am eager to continue to talk about
11 further, you know the remainder of my tenure as Chair
12 of this Committee with you because I think that there
13 is a lot to delve into here. Out of the 50,000 plus
14 calls to the SCR every year. You know, really trying
15 to understand what's the best way to keep our kids
16 safe. And I do want to note that the tragic passing
17 of Ayden Wolfe in the last couple of weeks in the
18 city. And our heart goes out to that little boy and
19 his family and his loved ones.

20 I know that there is you know not that much that
21 you are able to say because there is an active
22 investigation going on. But it broke my heart to
23 read the accounts of the abuse that he suffered and
24 it I think, makes us examine what we are doing and
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2 what we can be doing, continue to do better to
3 protect children in the city.

4 DAVID HANSELL: Yeah, thank you. If I may just,
5 certainly I think all New Yorkers have mourned with
6 Ayden's family and we certainly have ACS and I think
7 you know if there is anything we learn from tragedies
8 like that is exactly what you said, which is child
9 safety is everyone's responsibility. It's the
10 responsibility of the community.

11 And so, I think you said it very well Chair
12 Levin, which is the community has really stepped up
13 during this pandemic to make sure that we are
14 collectively keeping children safe and we want to
15 encourage people to continue to do that.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. So, I want to
17 pivot to kind of some bigger, bigger budget questions
18 here. You mentioned the State Executive Budget
19 proposing \$38 million in cuts to ACS but the American
20 Rescue Plan is now bringing \$1.8 billion in Child
21 Care Block Grant funding alone.

22 Do you think that the Preliminary Budget as
23 presented by the Administration, is it still accurate
24 and how are you starting to process the American
25 Rescue Plan funding to CCBG and what do you think are

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2 the areas of opportunity in terms of allocating those
3 resources to bolster our communities?

4 DAVID HANSELL: Hmm, hmm. Let me say a few
5 things and then Deputy Commissioner Moiseyev may want
6 to elaborate.

7 So, first of all, as I said, we are very, very
8 excited about the American Rescue Plan and the impact
9 that I very much hope it is going to have on our
10 budget situation here. Obviously, you know, the ink
11 on the plan is barely dry, so we don't yet know in
12 any detail what it's going to mean but I guess there
13 are really three areas where I hope it will make a
14 difference.

15 First of all, the state, both the state and the
16 city are going to receive direct funding as you know
17 all states and localities around the country will. I
18 very much hope that that new funding the state will
19 receive will lead to a rethinking of the cuts that
20 the Governor proposed. We were very happy to see
21 that the one house bills that were released by both
22 houses of legislature just a couple of days ago,
23 would restore some of the cuts the Governor proposed.

24 I would certainly hope that the American Rescue
25 Plan funding will influence that discussion. And so,

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2 I hope it will have an impact on the final state
3 budget in a way that will not result in cuts to any
4 of our core programs.

5 The city also is receiving direct funding and we
6 don't yet know what that's going to mean. I would
7 imagine that that impact will be reflected in the
8 Mayor's Proposed Executive Budget in a couple of
9 months but until we have that information, we don't
10 really know yet what it's going to mean specifically
11 for our overall program.

12 But as you pointed out, additionally to the
13 general funding going to the state and city, there is
14 a specific infusion of child care funding, the Child
15 Care Block Grant.

16 We know as you said, we know the amount going to
17 the state. We do not know yet how the state is going
18 to distribute it. The state has to decide how to
19 allocate it to New York City and the other 58
20 counties around the state.

21 So we don't know what that will mean. We don't
22 know how much money we will be receiving but we
23 certainly can anticipate that we will be getting a
24 significant infusion of childcare funding, federal.
25 And so, in anticipation of that, we have begun to

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2 plan for how we might use that funding to expand
3 eligibility to families and to expand the benefits
4 that families receive.

5 And so, I think as soon as we know what our
6 allocation is, I think we will be well positioned to
7 come forward with a set of proposals as to how we
8 will use that additional federal child care money to
9 expand child care access and eligibility for
10 families. And that's a conversation that I hope we
11 will be having with you and the Council very soon.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have an expectation of
13 when you might be hearing from your counterparts in
14 the state government about this?

15 DAVID HANSELL: We don't know for sure. The
16 Office of Children and Family Services will have to -
17 actually, we are still waiting to hear from OCFS
18 about the allocation of the last tranche of funding
19 that was provided in the December Stimulus Package.
20 We still haven't gotten that.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's not good.

22 DAVID HANSELL: So, we're hoping that they will
23 move a little bit more quickly on this package and I
24 mean, we know there are some very complicated issues
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2 they have to work through but I hope we will get that
3 guidance very soon.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, I mean, New York City
5 represents probably 40 percent of the children in the
6 state. So, you know, I certainly will be urging my
7 state colleagues to act with you know, all deliberate
8 hast on that. I am going to turn it over to my
9 colleagues because I know we want to keep as close to
10 on track as possible here. So, I am going to turn it
11 over to Council Member Salamanca for questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Chair, I am getting my
13 notes together. Is it possible you can go to the
14 next Council Member and I can go right after them?

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I am not sure that there is
18 another Council Member questions. Do any of my
19 colleagues have questions? Other colleagues? Okay,
20 I will continue with my questions.

21 Head count reduction - I just want to acknowledge
22 Council Members Gibson, Lander, Diaz and Riley and
23 anyone that has questions, please feel free to raise
24 your hand. The Fiscal '22 Preliminary Budget removes
25 75 full time positions leaving 7,249 positions. This

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2 year's budget loses, so this will be the FY21 budget,
3 308 positions as a result of a PEG. So, that's, you
4 know, that's pretty significant, that's about five
5 percent. How is ACS preserving - I am sorry, no not
6 five percent. Yeah, five percent, five percent. How
7 is ACS preserving frontline positions in spite of
8 attrition PEG's and where are the positions coming
9 from?

10 DAVID HANSELL: Let me say a couple things and
11 then I will turn it to Deputy Commissioner Moiseyev
12 to talk in detail because he has been working very
13 closely with OMB on this and I will say, as we work
14 through how we were going to meet our PEG target and
15 how we were going to implement the reductions, we
16 work very closely with OMB to make sure that it did
17 not impact collaborations and I am confident that's
18 the case.

19 The most significant I will say is that despite
20 the reduction in overall headcount and the headcount
21 PEG and of course the one to three attrition plan, we
22 have been able to move forward with hiring our
23 essential frontline staff categories outside of those
24 limitations. So, we are continuing to be able to
25 hire child protective specialists. In fact, we have

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2 a new class starting in May. We continue to be able
3 to hire youth development specialists in our
4 detention program, family court legal services
5 attorneys and special officers.

6 So, while we are operating under the citywide
7 constraints of the PEG and of the one to three
8 attrition, we have been able to fill frontline
9 positions outside of that. But let me ask Deputy
10 Commissioner Moiseyev to elaborate.

11 MICHAEL MOISEYEV: Thanks so much Commissioner.
12 So, the PEG was calculated by explicitly excluding
13 those frontline positions and that's very important
14 to us. So, essentially we are continuing kind of
15 full steam ahead hiring on those frontline positions.
16 The 308 reduction comes from a combination of
17 existing vacancies that were there in January and
18 anticipated future vacancies for the remainder of the
19 year. They come from a mix of various support
20 positions and we certainly do have to make
21 adjustments in how we do business as an agency to get
22 by on lower levels of hiring but like the
23 Commissioner said, very critically, we do not believe
24 there will be any programmatic effect from these
25 reductions.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay and obviously let's keep
3 us informed as we move forward with – and you know,
4 understanding whether some of those PEGs can be
5 reversed or mitigated in the future as a result of
6 the American Rescue Plan.

7 I am going to turn it back over to Council Member
8 Salamanca for questions.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Ah, you are on mute.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, thank you
12 all. Thank you Chair. Good morning, good morning
13 Commissioner. Commissioner, very, very quickly I
14 just have some few questions that I would like to ask
15 you. So, I have the Horizon Detention Center in my
16 Council District and I've spoken to you many times
17 and I have spoken to you team. We are having an
18 issue with the employees that report to ACS who are
19 double and triple parking in front of the Horizon
20 Detention Center, which are causing major issues in
21 terms of safety issues for pedestrians and both
22 drivers.

23 When they raised the age, you know, I was
24 extremely supportive of this project in terms of
25 bringing the adolescents over to the Horizon

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2 Detention Center and I got a commitment from your
3 administration and from your agency that you are
4 going to address this and it has not been addressed.
5 I was wondering if you can speak on that?

6 DAVID HANSELL: Yeah, Council Member, I
7 appreciate your concern about this. You have brought
8 it to me as recently as about a week or so ago.
9 Which I appreciate because when you did and as you
10 have previously, I reiterate to our leadership in our
11 Division of Youth of Family Justice and our
12 leadership on the ground at Horizon that staff cannot
13 double park or triple park at Horizon. That's not
14 acceptable and they in turn make sure that that is -
15 that information is reiterated and reinforced the
16 staff during roll call on every shift to make sure it
17 doesn't happen.

18 We have I believe since you brought it to my
19 attention most recently, my understanding is we've
20 corrected it. In fact, I actually just checked today
21 to make sure and I understand that the situation is
22 corrected today but we will continue to vigilant to
23 make sure it doesn't happen and I hope if it does, I
24 hope it won't but if it does, I hope you will
25 continue to bring it to our attention and our you

1
2 know, our hope is and we would love to work with you
3 on this if it is possible. Is that we can find other
4 parking resources in the community for those staff
5 who do need to drive. Who don't have access to
6 public transportation from where they live and if we
7 could work with you to help identify those and obtain
8 those, that would be our you know, our long term
9 solution to the problem.

10 But we realize even without that, double parking
11 is not acceptable and we will continue to emphasize
12 that to staff.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, thank you
14 Commissioner. It's not just double and triple
15 parking. They are also parking on the sidewalk. So,
16 it's like, I can't walk on the street and I can't
17 walk on the sidewalk.

18 My next question here is, how many adolescents do
19 you currently have housed at Horizon Detention
20 Center?

21 If you give me just a moment, I can give you
22 actually our current - obviously the census varies
23 from day to day but I think I can give you the
24 current census in just a moment.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And while you look for
3 that information, what's the average state for every
4 - you know the average state this past year for the
5 adolescents and what's the cost to housing yearly?

6 DAVID HANSELL: So, our detention census as of
7 yesterday at Horizon was a total of 28; 28 youth at
8 Horizon. Length of stay, I actually spoke to in the
9 testimony and as I mentioned, it has and this is a
10 concern to us, it has increased. Because of a real
11 slow down in court process.

12 As you know, the decision to place a child in
13 detention is not made by us, it's made by the court,
14 usually the family court. In some cases it might be
15 the adult, the L courts and they choose whether or
16 determine whether the child is placed in secure
17 detention, which would be Horizon or Crossroads or
18 one of our nonsecure detention facilities that are
19 operated by nonprofit partners.

20 So, we don't control kids coming in. We don't
21 control kids leaving but it concerns us that the
22 length of stay has increased. In 2020, the average
23 length of stay in secure detention was 33 days, which
24 was an increase of I think five days from what it had
25 been in the year before and we very, very much hope

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2 that the court process will resume, so that I think
3 you know young people have a right to have their
4 cases heard expeditiously in court. They should not
5 linger in detention any longer than necessary and we
6 hope that the courts will resume normal processing
7 very soon.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, so
9 Commissioner. So, I understand why there was an
10 extended stay but what's the average cost per child?
11 Per adolescent that's being held there?

12 DAVID HANSELL: I will actually turn - I don't
13 know if Deputy Commissioner Moiseyev knows that off
14 the top of his head. If not, we will get back to you
15 with that information.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: I mean, that's - go
17 ahead, I am sorry.

18 MICHAEL MOISEYEV: No, we will have to get back
19 to you. I am sorry.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: This is a budget
21 hearing. You should have that information. You
22 know, I just don't understand. Like, we are
23 reviewing your annual budget. You should know how
24 much it costs to house an adolescent. Daily and
25 yearly in Horizon Detention Center.

1
2 Alright, Mr. Chair, my time is up but I will come
3 back for a second round. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council Member
5 Salamanca. I also want to acknowledge – sorry,
6 excuse me. Council Member Grodenchik for questions
7 and we have been joined by Council Member Chaim
8 Deutsch.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Good morning
10 everybody. Good morning Commissioner. Thank you
11 Chair. I have been sitting here listening. It's
12 been a very long year Commissioner and I want to
13 thank you and your entire team for the work that you
14 have done. I just – I was sitting here thinking and
15 didn't have an initial question but I do have one
16 now. And I am wondering, are you working and I know
17 you work DOE? I am sure you do.

18 You know, this has been the most traumatic year
19 of all our lives. People are continuing to get sick
20 and as we emerge from this pandemic and children
21 begin to go back to school, do you have any special
22 plans in place to work with the DOE to ensure that we
23 look after the welfare of these children and figure a
24 way that those that need special attention can get
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1
2 that attention. I am wondering if ACS has wandered
3 down that road yet.

4 So, I would love to hear what you have to say
5 about that.

6 DAVID HANSELL: Yeah, thank you Council Member
7 for that question. This issue, the issue of how we
8 work with the DOE has been a particularly challenging
9 one over the last year. I talked about it a little
10 bit in my testimony. You know, when the schools went
11 fully remote in March, we knew that that was going to
12 change the relationship that DOE had with students.
13 And then of course, we have seen a lot of changes
14 over the last year in terms of kids being in school,
15 out of school, different schedules. Very excited
16 that as of next week, high schools will be reopening.
17 So, all kids in New York City will have at least some
18 opportunity for in person learning.

19 We do, in normal times, we do rely on the
20 Department of Education to be essentially eyes and
21 ears for child safety. Obviously, in normal times,
22 teachers and school personnel see kids as regularly
23 as really just about anybody.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Even more than their
25 parents sometimes.

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DAVID HANSELL: Well, in some cases that might be true. So, we do count on them to identify true child safety concerns and report them to us and they do that. We were concerned during COVID when children were learning remotely, especially at the beginning when I think we all know there were some significant challenges for families to keep their kids connected. They didn't have technology, didn't have Wi-Fi, didn't have broadband. Concerned A, that those challenges were corrected and I think DOE has worked very hard to do that.

But concern B, that those technology challenges not become child welfare issues or child safety issues. And so, we actually work with DOE initially on guidance. They issued back in April of last year when things were still fully remote, about how their teachers and other staff should distinguish between true child safety issues and other issues that were really about technology or connectivity or supports that really DOE was responsible for handling. And we, when things in fall began to shift again a little bit, we work with them to reissue that guidance.

So, we will continue to monitor that as the schools reopen and our goal will be to make sure that

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2 DOE continues to partner with us to be you know a set
3 of eyes and ears for true child safety concerns
4 because we want to make sure we know about those.
5 But also, that they will continue to work with
6 families, to make sure kids have the resources they
7 need so they can fully participate in educational
8 programs.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you
10 Commissioner. I know that we will be hearing from
11 the new Chancellor at the Preliminary Budget on
12 Education. I think toward the end of next week, if I
13 remember correctly. So, I will press that on that
14 day and I thank you again for all your work. Chair
15 Levin, thank you for indulging me.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course. Thank you Council
17 Member Grodenchik. Do any of my other colleagues
18 have questions? Please raise your hands if you do
19 and I will go back to my list of questions.

20 Excuse me. Family Enrichment Centers. You
21 mentioned that they were RFP'd. And so, there are
22 three family enrichment centers in the city. How
23 many family enrichment centers – I guess two
24 questions. First is, how have you seen them working
25 during COVID? I mean, here was a model that was

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2 developed prior to COVID, which in a lot of ways I
3 see as having you know, the times have kind of caught
4 up to that model in a sense that you know, having a
5 location centrally located in a high need community
6 that has you know, an array of resources that are you
7 know available to communities in a nonmandated way.
8 So, there is no coercion. There is nothing that's
9 forcing people to be there but I have seen you know
10 mayoral candidates proposing enrichment centers,
11 community enrichment centers which seemed to track
12 very closely to how the FEC's have been working.

13 So, first off, how have you seen them working
14 during COVID and second, would you like to see more?
15 Would you like to see more FEC's around the city and
16 do you have potential partners for those if we were
17 to be able to expand it?

18 DAVID HANSELL: Honestly, I would say that FEC's
19 have truly proven their value during the pandemic.
20 They, you know the original model of the FEC's were
21 put in place in 2017 and we have three of them as you
22 said, was that they would be co-created with families
23 in each community. We didn't want to assume cookie
24 cutter approach. We didn't want to assume family
25 needs for the same.

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And so, each of the three organizations, provider organizations that ran one of the FEC's, worked with local community members to design the services that they wanted and needed. And so, each of them, they all look different. All three look different from each other, even before COVID because they put in place a sort of suite of programs and services to meet the needs that the families had presented to them.

What we saw during COVID, not I don't think this will be to anybody's surprise, was that family's needs pivoted pretty quickly to concrete services. Food, childcare, technology so kids could do remote learning. You know, all those kinds of things that we know all families in New York City have been challenged with.

And so, the FEC model and this is I think one of the hallmarks of it, is it is flexible enough that the FEC's were able to very quickly pivot to providing the kind of concrete services that families needed. And so, I really don't think it's an overstatement to say that the FEC's were really a lifeline to families in their communities in Highbridge and Hunts Pointe in East New York during

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2 the pandemic because they were able to quickly you
3 know, rearrange what they were doing to meet the
4 needs that families had and we will continue to do
5 that obviously as we emerge from the pandemic.

6 The other thing and this is sort of coincidental
7 but it happened to be during the pandemic that we
8 released the results of the first evaluation that we
9 have done of the FEC model. And it too was very
10 positive. It indicated that the FEC's had overall,
11 the majority of families reported that their
12 involvement with the FEC's had improved family
13 functioning. Had improved their social and emotional
14 attachment with their children and had strengthened
15 their social connections in their communities.

16 So, we also now have evaluation data showing that
17 the model is working in many needs of families. So,
18 I think it has functioned well during COVID and I
19 think it really has proven its value during COVID.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's great. I want to also
21 acknowledge the work that Former Deputy Commissioner
22 Vargas did in setting these up. And that they were
23 created from the ground up. I mean, they were
24 created from the ground up. There was no preexisting
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2 model to go off of and so, you know, I think that
3 that deserves to be acknowledged.

4 Sorry, do any of the Deputy Commissioners want to
5 speak on it?

6 DAVID HANSELL: Deputy Commissioner Martin
7 perhaps.

8 JACQUELINE MARTIN: Great, it looks as though I
9 am unmuted?

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

11 JACQUELINE MARTIN: Yeah, so not a tremendous
12 amount to add to what the Commissioner has already
13 said, but we do believe that this is the right model
14 to reach so many of our families.

15 You know, has been stated, our families and
16 communities we know for over 30 plus years now, we
17 have been invested in prevention services. And so,
18 the FEC's really give us an opportunity to reach
19 families before harm occurs. And that is basically
20 or intent right? We know that these families exist
21 in the communities. So, I think it's a model as the
22 Commissioner said that is proven effective and I
23 certainly believe that what works is where we should
24 you know continue to focus and expand. I think
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2 that's the right thing for the children and families
3 of New York City.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, by expand, would you be
5 open to if some of those federal dollars are
6 available, to additional sites in the city? So,
7 meeting some new neighborhoods outside of the three
8 that have already been established?

9 JACQUELINE MARTIN: Is that a question for me or
10 should Commissioner Hansell take this one.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Anybody can answer that.

12 DAVID HANSELL: Happy to take that. Well, first
13 thing probably to say, which is important to say is,
14 at this point, the FEC's are funded 100 percent with
15 city tax levy. The state provides no support and the
16 federal child care funding streams, including the one
17 we are about to start receiving in New York later
18 this year, the Family First Prevention Services Act,
19 none of them support the primary prevention model
20 that the FEC's represent.

21 So, at this point, this is carried entirely by
22 New York City.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You mean, some of the federal
24 money could supplant some of the existing CTL and

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2 prevention that could then be moved towards primary
3 prevention maybe?

4 DAVID HANSELL: That's certainly theoretically
5 possible. You know when we picked - I mean, when we
6 started the FEC's and I think Dr. Martin really kind
7 of spoke to this, our goal obviously was to serve
8 communities but also our goal was to prevent
9 involvement with the child welfare system.

10 Our hypothesis and I think it's - you know, we
11 don't have it as solid as we would like but I think
12 it is proving out is that if we invest in
13 communities, if we invest in the services families
14 need, we will reduce involvement with Child Welfare.
15 We picked three communities initially back you know,
16 three, four years ago, from which we had historically
17 received high levels of SCR reports, Child Welfare
18 Reports. They are certainly not the only three
19 neighborhoods in the city from which that is true.
20 So, I do think the model that is working in those
21 communities could work in many other communities
22 across the city as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I will certainly be
24 pushing to see if we can expand it as a program. I

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2 would love to see that I think that this is the right
3 model.

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So, moving on, we want to get our other agencies
and we have a couple more things to get to here.
Commissioner, you and I had spoken on Monday and you
said that there was some news you might be willing to
share about CITYFHEPS Vouchers for youth aging out of
foster care, is that right?

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DAVID HANSELL: Yes, yes, well first of all
Council Member, let me thank you for your advocacy on
this. Your advocacy on making sure that youth both
in foster care and leaving foster care, have the
services and supports that they need. You were an
active participate in our foster care taskforce,
which we very much appreciated.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

DAVID HANSELL: And you have been really I think
pushing us and our partners in the city to make sure
that we have the right kind of options in place for
youth as they leave care. If they leave without
permanent family connections including housing, which
is critical.

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So, I am delighted to say that we have agreed
with our partners at DSS, and I know you will be

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2 talking with Commissioner Banks shortly. And OMB to
3 initiate a pilot to test out the use of the FHEPS
4 Vouchers for youth who are aging out of care and need
5 housing.

6 We obviously, we never discharge anyone from
7 foster care to homelessness and we have other options
8 available but we think the FHEPS Vouchers could
9 really be a useful resource for some of the young
10 people leaving care.

11 So, we will be launching a pilot to look at that
12 and see how well that works. We are going to be -
13 beginning with an allocation of 50 FHEP's Vouchers.
14 We will be working with DSS over the next couple of
15 months to design the program. To design a referral
16 process. To make sure we can identify the right
17 young people who will benefit from this and make sure
18 we can provide the support that they will need to
19 make it successful.

20 Our goal is to launch the pilot in July and that
21 we hope to be able to present you know the results
22 and findings to you by this fall. So, I am very
23 excited about this. I will see if Deputy
24 Commissioner Farber would like to say anything
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2 because I know the issue of support for youth aging
3 foster care is a very important concern of hers.

4 JULIE FARBER: Sure, thank you. Thank you
5 Commissioner and then you Council Member for asking
6 about this. You know as the Commissioner mentioned,
7 we do not exist young people to homelessness. We
8 keep young people you know supported until they have
9 an identified housing plan. We work really closely
10 with NYCHA and other supportive housing programs. We
11 have programs with HPD in terms of FHEP Vouchers and
12 so, we are really looking forward to this pilot with
13 DSS to really target the young people who might be at
14 greatest risk of becoming homeless at some point for
15 the FHEPs vouchers. And I am confident that over the
16 next couple of months we will put together that
17 criteria. We will get that information out to the
18 foster care agencies and you know we will connect
19 young people with FHEPS voucher.

20 So, I think you know we will be adding that into
21 the book of housing opportunities that we provide to
22 all kids when they are leaving care.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Deputy
24 Commissioner. We have pending legislation that would
25 potentially mandate that youth aging out prequalify

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2 essentially. The issue being that you know, we don't
3 want to see youth aging out of foster care going into
4 a DYCD or a DHS shelter in order to get access to the
5 voucher that can get them into permanent housing.

6 You know, frankly my beef here is with OMB more
7 than anyone else because I think that a lot of these
8 limitations are because of OMB's resistance over the
9 last several years and so, you know, I really address
10 almost all of my criticism at OMB here.

11 So, I would be eager to see how this is working.
12 If you know, by the fall it's not you know, where we
13 are seeing issues. Or even if it is, we might want
14 to do the legislation to make sure that it goes
15 beyond the pilot and is expanded to every youth
16 that's aging out as well but I appreciate the
17 response.

18 And then, I am just ask one more question about
19 child care vouchers. You know, last year we saw some
20 - because it was such a difficult budget year, we saw
21 some moving around of how the budget is working when
22 it comes to vouchers. I am sorry, I have two more
23 questions I also want to ask about Fair Futures
24 because that was the other area of the budget where
25 we had to figure out what exactly was going on but

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2 basically what happened last year was that we – there
3 were some available funds in the mandated voucher
4 portion that we got in state child care funds that
5 could be used for nonmandated vouchers.

6 So, basically we moved SCCF vouchers into what we
7 used to call Priority 5 or you know, that funding
8 stream, the CCBG funding stream because there were
9 some availability.

10 Now, coming out of the pandemic, we may see that
11 mandated voucher demand goes up. In which case,
12 SCCF, those SCCF vouchers get then bumped back over
13 to CTL. So, it's – you know because there was room
14 within other funding sources, they could be there for
15 a while but if that demand goes up again, there is
16 still going to be this need. So, are you exploring
17 how you can use the influx of CCBG funds under the
18 American Rescue Plan to enhance funding streams for
19 nonmandated vouchers? Because there nonmandated
20 vouchers, just so everybody understands are for low
21 income families that are not necessarily qualifying
22 for public assistance or other types of benefits
23 which would require mandated vouchers. But there are
24 many, many New York families, many families in New
25 York that are above the poverty line, just above the

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2 poverty line that could really use subsidized child
3 care.

4 So, I guess my first question is, are you
5 exploring these other funding streams to be able to
6 support nonmandated vouchers? And then, my other
7 question would be, how much money would it be to
8 support 10,000 nonmandated vouchers? I think that
9 that's the question that we have gone back and forth
10 over the years because that was the pot of
11 nonmandated vouchers when the de Blasio
12 Administration came into office roughly.

13 DAVID HANSELL: Let me start, let me answer and
14 then I think Commissioner Moiseyev can pick up
15 probably on the details.

16 So, you know, as I mentioned in my testimony,
17 what happened last year is when because of the fiscal
18 crisis, the final budget reduced the allocation for
19 SCCF Vouchers, City Funded Vouchers. We wanted to
20 obviously preserve child care for as many families as
21 we could and so, we were successfully able and you
22 alluded, to move most families, not all but most
23 families from city funded SCCF vouchers onto
24 federally funded CCBG vouchers. And we were very
25 happy we were able to do that.

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2 The first thing I will say is just a slight,
3 slight correction. The funding actually doesn't come
4 from the state. The funding comes from the federal
5 government.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, yes, I was mixing
7 because there was the Fair Futures that came from the
8 state. Yes, this is the federal, yes.

9 DAVID HANSELL: This is all federal.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, yes, thank you.

11 DAVID HANSELL: So, the issue is really how the
12 state allocates the money. And the challenge is that
13 there are of course, there are some eligible
14 requirements that are in federal law. But the state
15 applies its own and in some places, the state's
16 eligibility requirements are more restrictive than
17 what federal law requires. And I think that's where
18 to your point, there are opportunities for us to look
19 at with a significant infusion of new money coming
20 in, whether the state can expand its eligibility
21 requirements so that we can serve more families on
22 the nonmandated side of the program.

23 Mandated, obviously any family who is mandated by
24 DSS to participate in, work activities or other
25 activities, they have an absolute right to a voucher

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2 but the nonmandated criteria as you point out are set
3 by the state largely and to some extent by us within
4 the state regulations.

5 So, I definitely think that we need to look at
6 and work with the state to determine where we can use
7 the infusion of new money we are getting to expand
8 eligibility on a number of criteria including income
9 for sure. Because I absolutely agree with you, there
10 are families that are above poverty that are still
11 very much in need of child care but also, that I
12 think there may be categories of families who should
13 be categorically eligible for a nonmandated voucher.

14 You know, we are providing vouchers now to
15 homeless families. I think there may be other
16 categories of families that are experiencing
17 particular challenges that should also be eligible
18 for nonmandated. And so, I am very much interested
19 in thinking about what we as a city believe child
20 care should be and then working with the state to
21 make that possible.

22 But let me ask Michael to speak a little bit to
23 the funding issue because I think it is important to
24 really understand the context for this.

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2 MICHAEL MOISEYEV: Absolutely, thank you
3 Commissioner. So, I wanted to start by maybe talking
4 a little bit about the transfer of SCCF funding to
5 CCBG funding. And I just kind of wanted to clarify
6 that we spent quite a bit of time talking to OMB
7 about how to do this in a sustainable way. There is
8 long term trends that have basically freed up CCBG
9 that actually predate the pandemic.

10 And some of it is just stems from the
11 demographics in public assistance usage. And so, we
12 are going to be looking at it very carefully but I
13 did want to just kind of make a point that the
14 vouchers that were converting from SCCF to what used
15 to be called Priority 5, then CCBG eligibility. They
16 are safe and not just today or tomorrow but for at
17 least a few years and we are going to be looking at
18 that very closely.

19 The infusion of federal money is definitely an
20 opportunity. We are looking very closely at that and
21 like the Commissioner said, it boils down to
22 eligibility and different eligibility definitions and
23 so we are going to be working very closely with the
24 state on that.

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2 To answer your funding question Chair, it's about
3 \$7,500 per voucher is what it comes out to. It
4 varies a little bit depending on the type of voucher
5 but you know, roughly if you wanted to know what it
6 would cost to do 10,000 vouchers, it's \$75 million.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much Deputy
8 Commissioner and I will go to my colleagues for
9 questions. I know that Council Member Diaz has
10 questions and then I will go over to Council Member
11 Salamanca and then I have one last question about
12 Fair Futures.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: I have two quick questions
15 in reference to the pilot program. Can you give me
16 the dollar amount per voucher?

17 DAVID HANSELL: With regard to the?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Pilot program for the 50
19 vouchers.

20 DAVID HANSELL: Ah yes, the FHEPS vouchers. That
21 actually is a question you should probably direct to
22 DSS because they actually administer that program.
23 We don't.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Okay.
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2 DAVID HANSELL: I am sure Commissioner Banks
3 could answer that question for you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Okay, then my next question
5 is last night I received a phone call from a local
6 resident whose nephew is in the foster care system
7 and as he phased out, his exist plan did not come
8 through, so he is facing homelessness. Is there a
9 safety net? How long do you follow for youth who
10 have exited the system? Do you follow them at all?

11 DAVID HANSELL: We do. I will let Commissioner;
12 Deputy Commissioner Farber talk about this. We
13 absolutely do. As I said and she said, we never have
14 a child leave the foster care system to homelessness,
15 so obviously we will want to follow up and get the
16 information and connect on that. But yes, we
17 absolutely do at the point of departure and then we
18 try to provide ongoing support for young people.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: He had a plan, his plan
20 failed. So, okay.

21 JULIE FARBER: Yes, Council Member, I would be
22 happy to follow up on that. So, if your office wants
23 to follow up with my office with the information, so
24 we can follow up on the individual case but as the
25 Commissioner mentioned, we will not exist a young

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2 person to homelessness and if whatever his plan was,
3 if it was a certain kind of housing and it fell
4 through for some reason. Or if it was with a
5 relative, we will come back to the table and figure
6 out a plan.

7 And so, I would be happy to follow up with you on
8 that case.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: Thank you. Thank you very
10 much.

11 JULIE FARBER: Yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member Salamanca?

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Uh yes, thank you
15 Commissioner. I just have a quick question regarding
16 domestic violence. Has there, I know that since the
17 pandemic, there has been an increase in domestic
18 violence and I know that you know, our children going
19 to schools is an opportunity where we can identify
20 some type of child abuse occurring. Have the numbers
21 of child abuse cases decreased or increased in this
22 past year?

23 DAVID HANSELL: In relation to domestic violence?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Well in relation to
25 just the child abuse.

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2 DAVID HANSELL: Child abuse generally. Well,
3 what we know Council Member is a number of reports
4 that go to the state central registry to get referred
5 to us. Those have decreased. I talked about this a
6 little bit in my testimony, the decrease dramatically
7 at the beginning of the pandemic a year ago. They
8 have since recovered and now the reports we received
9 are about 15 percent below what they were before.
10 So, there has been some decrease in the number of
11 reports that we are receiving for investigation.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Is ACS performing some
13 type of outreach to help you know get some of these
14 possible you know child abuse cases reported? Maybe
15 through neighbors or friends or you know. Is there
16 some type of outreach that you are doing currently?

17 DAVID HANSELL: Yes, absolutely. That is great
18 concern for us because we did want to make sure that
19 you know we knew especially back in March when
20 schools closed, we knew teachers weren't going to be
21 seeing kids in person every day and of course other
22 kinds of service providers weren't either. And so,
23 we did want to absolutely make sure to your point,
24 that community members, neighbors, friends and others
25 were being vigilant about child safety.

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2 So, we did several things. One is, we – because
3 we knew also that there was a big increase in 311
4 calls. People needed information about where to get
5 services, so we recorded a PSA that has been planning
6 on 311 about how it's really everybody's
7 responsibility and opportunity if they have a concern
8 about child safety to call the state hotline.

9 We launched a couple of campaigns specifically.
10 One for families, parents and one for teenagers
11 because we were especially concerned about teenagers
12 who were home, isolated, not going to school, not
13 seeing their friends, not you know participating in
14 sports and so on and the impact of that isolation on
15 them.

16 So, we launched two campaigns, one called One for
17 Families and One for Teenagers about how to access
18 resources and a particular look to do if a teenager
19 felt that they were in an unsafe situation, to know
20 that there was some place that they could turn. And
21 as I said, as we looked at the data over the last
22 year, we actually have seen that communities really
23 have stepped up and even though the overall number of
24 reports that we have gotten of possible child abuse
25 and neglect has dropped, the number that we have been

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2 receiving from community members hasn't. It's
3 actually stayed constant. So, it does look to us
4 from the data that we have like communities really
5 are stepping up to the plate to make sure the kids
6 are safe but we want to make sure that they continue
7 to do that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright and then
9 finally Commissioner, I am really interested in
10 knowing what the total cost is to house adolescents
11 at Horizon at these detention centers and I think
12 that that's information that should be available at
13 these hearings.

14 So, I look forward to getting a follow up from
15 your agency on that information.

16 DAVID HANSELL: Absolutely, we will get that to
17 you very quickly.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you. Thank you
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you very
21 much Council Member Salamanca. Council Member
22 Gibson, do you have a question?

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much. Thank
25 you Chair Levin. Good morning everyone to all of my

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2 colleagues. Good morning Commissioner Hansell, to
3 you and the team at ACS. I echo the sentiments
4 expressed by my colleagues and thanking you for all
5 the work that you and the members of your team have
6 been doing every single day during this pandemic.
7 Unfortunately, my county of the Bronx, we have the
8 highest death rates of COVID and it is such a painful
9 reminder of the work that lays ahead.

10 I want to thank you and Chair Levin for
11 recognizing the horrible tragedy that happened to a
12 ten-year-old young boy in Harlem. He was
13 memorialized at a church in my district just
14 yesterday in the Bronx. It is very painful whenever
15 we have cases of neglect and certainly the death of
16 any child that must be preventable and serve as a
17 wakeup call for all of us in terms of what we can do
18 better.

19 So, I have a couple of comments I wanted to make
20 and then a final question. I agree on the family
21 enrichment centers. One of those three neighborhoods
22 you talked about is in my district in the Bronx, so
23 we have done a lot of work with bridge builders and
24 we really provide a lot of support to families.

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2 So, if we have an opportunity in this budget to
3 expand, we should. We should be looking at all
4 neighborhoods, whether you have a high rate of
5 substantiated cases or not. I think family
6 enrichment centers provide a lot of collaboration and
7 really resources for the families that don't know the
8 process. They don't understand the process and
9 certainly don't know what ACS offers.

10 Council Member Grodenchik mentioned the issue
11 that I wanted to raise and that is the coordination
12 with the Department of Education and unfortunately,
13 during the pandemic when students were working
14 remotely, we have seen a couple of cases in our
15 district of parents with multiple school aged
16 children, not enough devices and the inability to log
17 on, on time for school. And certainly, many of those
18 parents express concerns about getting an ACS call
19 against them when they were trying their very best to
20 make sure their children have access to internet as
21 well as devices. The digital divide is a real
22 challenge for us in the city and certainly in our
23 district in the Bronx.

24 And so, I want to further understand how we can
25 be of support. I know the Mayor announced an

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2 initiative on addressing the digital divide
3 particularly for students in temporary housing. They
4 have challenges with internet connectivity. So, I
5 certainly want to talk more about that.

6 And then the third issue, Chair Levin is going to
7 bring it up but I am speaking before him, so I want
8 to add my voice to the incredible foster care youth
9 and advocates that are talking about the Fair Futures
10 Campaign and our advocacy over two years ago. I know
11 it is funded by the state but certainly, the ability
12 to get this baselined anyway you can, so we don't
13 have to return every year just to advocate for this.
14 A comprehensive model for foster youth through age 26
15 is exactly what we should do in New York City and we
16 can lead the way as a city and we can be a model for
17 the country. I represent many foster youth and I am
18 really grateful that every year pre-pandemic, we have
19 had Foster Youth Shadow Day at the City Council where
20 we have our foster youth come to us. They see our
21 work every day but we also hear their stories and
22 their challenges.

23 But foster care subsidy needs to be increased.
24 You know, things like that; the pipeline, someone
25 mentioned a pipeline into public housing. Finding a

1
2 way that there could be a pathway to college careers
3 and longevity and sustainability and real self-
4 sufficiency for foster care youth should be our goal.

5 So, I would love to hear your thoughts on that
6 and how the program is going and anything the Council
7 can do to be of support, add my name to Fair Futures
8 and baselining it and keeping this program going.
9 Thank you so much Commissioner. Thank you Chair
10 Levin.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council Member
12 Gibson and thank you for your advocacy for Fair
13 Futures. Commissioner, do you want to respond to
14 that and are there - is it in the works to try to
15 baseline Fair Futures and to be either Executive
16 Budget or Adopted Budget this year. I think that it
17 would be a great way certainly for the end of this,
18 the last budget of this Administration to get Fair
19 Futures fully in there so that you know our
20 colleagues, the 35 new colleagues next year are
21 trying to advocate to you know, get it once again
22 into the budget.

23 And lastly, from a practical perspective it's
24 really important to be able to give these
25 organization and staff some predictability in terms

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2 of funding year to year and not worrying in June
3 whether or not they are going to have a job in July.

4 DAVID HANSELL: Right, well let me start by
5 saying that Council Member Levin and Council Member
6 Gibson, I am delighted that you both are as
7 enthusiastic about this program as we are. We think
8 this has been a great addition to our support for
9 young people in foster care. The ability to provide
10 not just coaches but as I said in my testimony,
11 coaches and tutors and housing and education
12 specialists. Basically, you know people dedicated,
13 team members who can work with them in an ongoing way
14 to address their challenges and help them through
15 significant transitions in their lives, we think has
16 been a really great expansion of the supports that
17 were already provided to youth and foster care.

18 So, we are very excited about the program and I
19 have to, I mean, I do actually have to acknowledge
20 two of the members of my team who are here at the
21 hearing today because they really made huge
22 contributions to this. When we got the funding for
23 Fair Futures in Fiscal Year '20. The \$10 million
24 allocation, Deputy Commissioner Farber and her team
25

1
2 worked with foster care agencies to get this program
3 up and running in record time.

4 I think you often know when there is new money
5 for a new program in the budget, it sometimes takes
6 the whole year to get that program up and running.
7 That did not happen with Fair Futures, it was a
8 matter of a few months. And so, I really want to
9 acknowledge the work that Deputy Commissioner Farber
10 and her team did to get the program going two years
11 ago.

12 And then last year, when we got the results of
13 the final negotiation of the budget between the Mayor
14 and the Council and we saw that the allocation in the
15 budget for the program for Fiscal Year '21 had
16 dropped to I believe \$2.7 million. We were very
17 concerned about that because we did think it was
18 important to sustain the program at the level that it
19 had been in and hopefully to grow it.

20 And so, Deputy Commissioner Moiseyev and his team
21 in our finance department immediately went to work to
22 see how creative we could be in finding ways to
23 leverage the funding that was in the budget to make
24 sure that we didn't have to reduce the scope of the
25 program in any way. And as you know, we were very

1
2 successful in doing that. We were very successful in
3 utilizing other state funding, match funding and
4 prior year revenue, so that we were able to bring the
5 level of funding for the program this year from the
6 amount that it was allocated in the budget up to \$12
7 million so we could continue to grow it.

8 So, we are very, very committed to this program.
9 We think it has been an enormous success and we
10 certainly hope as the discussions around the
11 Executive Budget begin between the Mayor and the
12 Council that Fair Futures will be prioritized for
13 consideration to continue the program and certainly
14 to – I believe its proven its worth. Proven that it
15 should continue to be a permanent part of our
16 portfolio services for young people and so, I hope
17 that that will be fully reflected as the Executive
18 Budget discussions continue later this spring.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you
20 Commissioner. I appreciate that and I certainly
21 appreciate the really extraordinary support that you
22 and Deputy Commissioner Farber and the entire teams
23 there have given to this program. So, your
24 commitment to it is very clear and I appreciate that.

1
2 So, that's all the questions for me. I realize
3 we are running late and so I apologize to DSS. I
4 know that they were expecting to start you know
5 almost an hour ago. So, with that, I will wrap up.
6 I just want to end by congratulating Deputy
7 Commissioner Saunders on your new appointment. So,
8 congratulations and also, because this would be the
9 last budget hearing with First Deputy Commissioner
10 Brett Schneider, I want to thank him for his
11 extraordinary service and collaboration with the
12 Council over the years and we have always appreciated
13 his voice and his insight and his passion for serving
14 New York City's children and really making a
15 difference in their lives.

16 So, Deputy Commissioner Brett Schneider,
17 congratulations to you and your retirement and thank
18 you for all of your service.

19 And with that, I will let you all go.

20 DAVID HANSELL: Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Commissioner.

22 Thanks everybody. Okay, I will turn it back over to
23 Committee Council Aminta Kilawan to welcome the DSS
24 Administration officials.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, I apologize for
3 those few seconds of delay. We are going to move
4 onto testimony from the Department of Social Services
5 momentarily. We just want to give the Department a
6 moment to log on and once they do, we will proceed to
7 the next portion of this hearing, which will be
8 testimony by the Department of Social Services.

9 So, please bear with us as the Administration
10 representatives log in and we will begin momentarily.

11 [1:41:39-1:45:32]

12 Alright everyone, I see we have been joined by
13 Commissioner Banks from the Department of Social
14 Services. So, I will now turn it back over to Chair
15 Levin to deliver his opening statement for this
16 portion of our budget hearing.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Counsel
18 Kilawan. I have to bring up my remarks here, hold on
19 one moment. [1:46:00-1:46:17] Okay, just loading
20 here.

21 Good morning everybody or yep, still morning.
22 Good morning everybody. I am Council Member Stephen
23 Levin; I am Chair of the Committee on General Welfare
24 here at the Council. I want to thank everybody for
25 joining me for the Fiscal '22 Preliminary Budget

1
2 hearing for the General Welfare Committee and we will
3 now hear from two agencies. The Human Resources
4 Administration and the Department of Homeless
5 Services who will testifying as one under the
6 umbrella of the Department of Social Services on each
7 of their proposed Fiscal '22 Budgets.

8 The City's Proposed Fiscal '22 Preliminary Budget
9 totals \$92.3 billion. Of which approximately \$12.2
10 billion or 13 percent of the entire city budget funds
11 DSS encompassing \$10.1 billion for HRA and \$2.1
12 billion for DHS. These two agencies serve the most
13 vulnerable populations in the city and their vital
14 work is now more important than ever given the COVID-
15 19 pandemic and its devastating impact on our city.

16 As the largest social services agency in the
17 country, HRA provides cash assistance, emergency food
18 assistance, SNAP, HIV AIDS Support Services,
19 otherwise known as HASSA, Legal Services, Anti-
20 eviction services, rental assistance, rental arrears
21 and many other public assistance programs for low
22 income New Yorkers.

23 DHS provides transitional shelter for homeless
24 single adults, adult families and families with
25 children. In accordance with New York City's Right

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2 to Shelter Mandate. DHS also helps clients to exit
3 shelter and move into permanent and supportive
4 housing.

5 The budget put forth does not reflect any of the
6 additional resources that will be needed for COVID-19
7 related expenditures or to support the staggering
8 increase in demand for social safety net programs and
9 homeless services. In Fiscal 2021, DHS recognized
10 \$329 million in Federal FEMA reimbursement – sorry,
11 in Federal FEMA funding and budgeted \$134 million in
12 Federal Cares Emergency Solutions Grants funding.
13 Totaling \$463 million for critical programs such as
14 stabilization beds, de-densifying hotels, isolation
15 hotels and medical services related to the COVID-19
16 pandemic.

17 In Fiscal '21, HRA recognized \$78.8 million in
18 funding for COVID related expenditures, the majority
19 of which were federal.

20 Most notably, \$50 million was added from a
21 federal community development block grant for the
22 city's pandemic food reserve called PFRED and \$22.2
23 million was added from FEMA for COVID related testing
24 in the city's shelter system.

1
2 Remarkably, no funding has been added to either
3 DHS or HRA's budget for COVID related expenditures in
4 Fiscal '22 or in the out years. And so, we want to
5 hear from the Administration why that is and how they
6 plan to address that in the Executive Budget.

7 While the budget maintains the essential benefits
8 programs administered by HRA and the shelter programs
9 administered by DHS, more can and should be done and
10 we need to think more deeply about what we can do
11 most effectively to allocate city resources,
12 especially during these uniquely challenging times.
13 I am particularly disappointed that the Preliminary
14 Plan does not put forth a solid plan for COVID-19
15 spending at DSS in Fiscal '22. No new funding was
16 allocated to restore the Indirect Rate Initiative and
17 no new funding was included for hazard pay. And no
18 new funding was allocated towards addressing food
19 insecurity or the increased need for social services
20 programs.

21 I strongly feel that the city needs more
22 comprehensive planning and a clear path forward on
23 how we will combat poverty, food insecurity and
24 homelessness both during the remainder of the
25 pandemic and in the long recovery ahead. Other areas

1
2 of concern we would like to discuss during the
3 hearing today include the timeliness of DHS's
4 contract payments, which have been slow and
5 challenging for providers, leaving many with delayed
6 payments. DHS's plan to implement Wi-Fi in shelters,
7 particularly those with children. The effectiveness
8 of the CITYFHEPS voucher program and the impact of
9 the pandemic has had on benefit access, HRA client
10 services and human services providers.

11 Before I welcome the Commissioner, I would like
12 to acknowledge my colleagues who are here today and
13 let's see, we have been joined by Council Member
14 Salamanca, Grodenchik, Deutsch uhm, bear with, Gibson
15 and Holden was here, Diaz and if I am missing anyone
16 else I apologize but I think that that is it. Also,
17 I do see a great number of members of the public and
18 advocates on this Zoom as well and so, I want to
19 thank everybody for joining here.

20 I also want to acknowledge General Welfare
21 Committee Staff for their hard work preparing for
22 today's hearing. I want to thank Dohini Sompura Unit
23 Head, Julia Harimus[SP?] Financial Analyst, Frank
24 Sarno Financial Analyst, Aminta Kilawan Senior
25 Counsel and Crystal Pond Senior Policy Analyst and

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2 Natalie Omerly[SP?] Policy Analyst. They really did a
3 remarkable job under difficult circumstances getting
4 this hearing together.

5 I would also like to thank my Chief of Staff
6 Jonathan Boucher and my Legislative Director Nicole
7 Hunt. And now, I will turn it over to Committee
8 Counsel Aminta Kilawan to swear in the
9 Administration. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning again everyone.
11 The next panel will include testimony from the
12 Department of Social Services followed by Council
13 Member questions and then public testimony.

14 Testifying on behalf of the Department of Social
15 Services will be Commissioner Steven Banks
16 Commissioner of DSS. I will now administer the oath.
17 Commissioner Banks, once you hear your name, please
18 respond once a member of our staff unmutes you.

19 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
20 and nothing but the truth before this Committee and
21 to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

22 Recognizing there is a little bit of a delay with
23 the unmuting. You are now unmuted Commissioner.

24 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you very much. I do.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin
3 your testimony.

4 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you very much. Thank you
5 Council Member and Chair Levin and Council Members
6 who are present for this hearing. We have extended
7 remarks that we are asking you to include in the
8 record. I am going to paraphrase them to give time
9 for questions.

10 Obviously, at the outset, I want to acknowledge
11 that COVID-19 has profoundly impacted all of us,
12 including our staff, our clients and our not-for-
13 profit service providers. And over this last year,
14 we have lost family members, colleagues, clients,
15 friends and neighbors. And I want to just take a
16 moment to remember all those who we have lost.

17 Now turning to the January Plan, even in these
18 hard times, the FY22 Budget reflects our commitment
19 to continuing to remove barriers and increasing
20 access to benefits and services and eliminating
21 punitive policies and improving services available
22 for New Yorkers. As we will describe in this
23 testimony, our reforms and initiatives are taking
24 hold, despite long-standing challenges for clients,
25 such as decades-long underinvestment in affordable

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2 housing, income inequality and persistent structural
3 racism. All of which have been brought into stark
4 relief during this past year as the COVID-19 has
5 changed the lives of all of us in so many ways.

6 Many of our reforms and initiatives over the last
7 seven years provided a strong foundation for us to
8 serve New Yorkers throughout the pandemic. Moreover,
9 the federal and State waivers that we have obtained
10 during the pandemic have allowed us to enhance
11 benefits access that we have been developing and one
12 system that decreases burdens on clients seeking
13 assistance under federal and State law through
14 onerous and unnecessary in-person application
15 interviews, appointments and documentation
16 requirements and paternalistic engagement
17 obligations.

18 With the waivers we request and receive this past
19 year has afforded us an opportunity to administer
20 benefits programs with much of the bureaucratic
21 relief we have been seeking for a number of years and
22 it clearly demonstrates the necessity for reforms at
23 the federal and state levels to enable us to continue
24 to make progress for our clients.

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2 The FY22 HRA DSS Preliminary Budget is at \$10.09
3 billion consisting of \$7.84 billion in City funds.
4 FY22 DHS Preliminary Budget is \$2.05 billion,
5 consisting of \$1.25 billion in City funds. The HRA
6 headcount for FY22 includes 10,120 City-funded
7 positions and another 3,472 non-funded positions.
8 The DHS headcount for FY22 includes 2,101 City-funded
9 positions and another 40-grant-funded positions.

10 Obviously, as you aware, there has been a
11 significant impact on the citywide budget due to
12 COVID and all agencies including ours have been
13 tasked with finding savings to address the budget gap
14 resulting from COVID and this has involved making
15 some difficult decisions.

16 The January Plan contains the following one-time
17 savings: \$53.9 million in prior year revenue and \$13
18 million in unanticipated fringe benefit reimbursement
19 savings in FY21 only. \$100 million in federal
20 pandemic related increased Medicaid reimbursement
21 produces one-time City savings. \$8 million in
22 savings in FY21 due to the eviction moratorium and a
23 related lower level of case processing in the Access
24 to Counsel program due to the eviction moratorium.
25 \$20.6 million in savings in FY21 only in the Job

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2 Training Participant programs due to COVID-19 related
3 program suspensions and reductions in activity.

4 \$11.7 million re-estimate in FY22 of the phase-in
5 schedule for Supportive Housing Units due to COVID-
6 19. \$1.2 million in FY21 due to underspending in
7 office supplies from remote work during COVID. \$3.7
8 million in vacancy savings and 723 vacancies in FY21
9 due to the citywide hiring freeze. And in the
10 November Plan, there was one time in baseline savings
11 of \$2.3 million in FY21 and \$3.1 million in FY22 and
12 the outyears to the elimination of 152 positions in
13 savings from those vacancy reductions.

14 I want to highlight a few issues before getting
15 into questions. I want to focus on the state budget
16 right now. To address issues that we have said,
17 testified to in prior years, we have a number of
18 funding cuts at the state level. Cautious from the
19 state to the city and we have advocated very strongly
20 for certain changes in this year's state budget.

21 I am pleased to report that in the two assembly
22 Senate one house bills, that our proposal to address
23 the disinvestment in the city by advocating for the
24 increasing State FHEPS to the FMR Federal Market Rate
25 Rent. That has been included in those two one house

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2 bills. For years, the state has refused to use this
3 standard for setting rent subsidies for the state
4 FHEPS program. And if the city did so in its own for
5 our supplemental CITYFHEPS program among other
6 consequences, it would lead to landlords favoring
7 City Vouchers over state vouchers resulting in a
8 substantial cost shift to the city by incentivizing
9 landlords to rent only the city voucher holders and
10 not the states. And so, we are very pleased to see
11 that this is in the one house bills and we know that
12 we will work with the Council in these remaining
13 weeks to make that part of the final budget.

14 In addition, we have been advocating for the
15 ability to provide cash assistance clients with the
16 same access to benefits that the SNAP clients have
17 had for several years. The ability to access
18 services by phone and online without having to come
19 into an office at the clients choice. That has
20 dramatically reduced the numbers of clients coming
21 into our SNAP offices pre-pandemic. It's stood us in
22 good stead when the pandemic hit to be able to
23 provide those funds for remote services. We have
24 been asking for years to be able to have that kind of
25 access for cash assistance clients and a bill has now

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2 passed both the Senate and Assembly providing to make
3 permanent the waiver that we got during the pandemic
4 to provide that and that is something that we are
5 pressing for in the context of the budget. So there
6 is no delay in implementation in that important
7 client access change.

8 We have also called on the state to support
9 shelter services and outreach by restoring the
10 traditional 50/50 cost shift for single adults in New
11 York City, for outreach workers, for shelter, for
12 safe havens, for stabilization beds and the cost of
13 homeless services for the overnight MTA overnight
14 shutdown initiative. Despite the fact that a Consent
15 Decree requires both the city and state to provide
16 shelter services to single adults experiencing
17 homelessness, the state has steadily reduced its
18 support for single adult shelters in New York City
19 from 50/50 split to only nine percent of those costs
20 for shelter. And in fact, the state pays zero for
21 the cost of outreach workers, stabilizations beds,
22 safe haven beds, and we have asking for this to be
23 addressed in the context of state budget.

24 Obviously, on the federal level, we are very
25 happy with the recent Stimulus Package, which

1
2 provides aid to the city and to the state. And also
3 includes additional rental assistance, which we will
4 talk about in a moment. Let me talk a little bit
5 about HRA's response to COVID, which I think is
6 relevant to some of the questions the Chair raised.

7 One of the most important changes I described
8 earlier is that we have been able to change how
9 clients access benefits during the pandemic to
10 provide cash assistance clients with the same option
11 that we have been providing to SNAP clients the
12 ability to not have to come in to one of our offices
13 to get help.

14 At the same time, I want to illustrate and
15 highlight that we have managed the largest increase
16 in cash assistance or historic increase in cash
17 assistance and SNAP benefits. Let me just give you
18 the overall top line. Between February 2020 and
19 November 2020, there was an approximately 53,000
20 person increase, 20 percent increase and a more than
21 30,000 case increase, 16.8 percent case increase in
22 the cash assistance caseload. And on the SNAP side,
23 between March through December, the agency received
24 152,244 more SNAP applications during the same period
25 in the prior year, which is a 55 percent increase.

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2 And between February 2020 and December 2020, there
3 was 164,699 person increase, 11.1 percent increase in
4 the numbers on our SNAP caseload.

5 The way that we were able to manage this increase
6 was through a series of waivers that we obtained from
7 the federal and state government waiving interview
8 requirements, providing suspensions of
9 recertifications, providing for suspensions of
10 engagement requirements. All of which both help keep
11 clients and staff safe. Enabled us to keep open only
12 a few centers. We got an additional waiver to waive
13 the signature requirement, so that the HRA staff can
14 take applications by telephone for clients who could
15 not manage technology. And so, all of these are ways
16 that we managed the caseload, plus we have redeployed
17 at the height of the pandemic 1,300 staff from back
18 office and support functions to help us in the
19 frontlines.

20 I should say, we are seeking to continue and
21 renew the waivers that we have obtained during the
22 pandemic as the public health emergency continues.
23 And for your awareness, we have submitted with this
24 testimony, a full list of all the waivers that we
25 have obtained.

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I want to highlight in particular the eviction prevention work, which thanks to the partnership with the Council over the last several years, we have been leading the nation in providing access to counsel in housing court. Pre-pandemic, evictions were down city by city marshals 41 percent and we had driven up a representation through the Right to Counsel Law from one percent in 2013 to almost 40 percent pre-pandemic as we were continuing to implement the Right to Counsel Law.

When the Housing Court shutdown and then reopened, a new system was created with the Housing Court, with our providers, with the support from the Right to Counsel Coalition. Which now we are happy to say that as the court has been doing virtual hearings, we have been able to work with the Legal Services community and assign lawyers to literally in every case. So, that cases that are being conducted by conference now have lawyers on them. Because we are now, obviously the pandemic changed the zip code implementation of our Right to Counsel program and now we are about to enter into the last year, there is no zip code limitation in terms of assignment of counsel for those virtual court hearings.

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And in addition, we have been assigning counsel, in respect to the immigration status as we have been doing all along and with a waiver in respect to the income of the tenants and about 14 percent of the tenants with counsel turn out to have gotten income waivers. Again, this is a real tribute to the work of the Legal Services community, which has responded to our work with the court system to provide lawyers for virtually everybody in these virtual hearings.

I wanted to talk lastly about some of the issues involving homelessness during the pandemic and some of the status of our efforts in this area. First and foremost, we have testified about this in previous hearings but I want to just highlight it again. Beginning in March of 2020, we created isolation space in order to isolate clients who showed symptoms or tested positive. At the height, we had about 700 beds available. We worked in partnership with H+H and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in order to develop protocols for our shelters and then we began as you know, the strategic relocation of single adults from congregate shelters into commercial hotels. At the height of that evacuation about 10,000 human beings were evacuated from various

1
2 congregate shelters in order to reduce the density in
3 those shelters. We began a proactive testing program
4 that now we have a positivity rate of 1.3 percent
5 across our shelter system which is lower than the
6 positivity rate obviously across the city.

7 We have now begun vaccinations, approximately
8 8,000 doses have been administered both from a site
9 that we stood up to supplement the city system and
10 through a mobile system that we put in place that
11 builds upon our mobile testing that has been in place
12 over the course of the summer.

13 I think in terms of the street programs that we
14 have implemented, we right off the bat in the
15 beginning of March implemented a screening program
16 for clients on the street and our outreach providers
17 were trained to screen clients for COVID symptoms.
18 We have stood up 1,200 emergency beds during this
19 period of time and during the overnight shutdown,
20 been able to bring in from the subways more than 750
21 people who have remained off the street. That is
22 part of our overall effort from Home Stat in which
23 more than 4,000 people have been able to receive help
24 from us and coming off the streets. That's as a
25 result of tripling the number of outreach workers to

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2 nearly 600 and also increasing the number of low
3 barriers, safe haven and stabilization beds from 600
4 to more than 3,000 with hundreds more on the way.

5 We have talked in a number of these hearings and
6 I just want to bring you up to date on where we are
7 in terms of the four pillars and then I will open
8 this up to questions from you Chair and the other
9 Council Members.

10 I would call your attention to recent report by
11 the IBO as well as a report in City Limits that
12 highlights the reduction in the shelter census
13 accelerating trends pre-COVID. The overall shelter
14 census is now below 52,000 from a high of more than
15 61,000. This is the DHS shelter census. There
16 really are two dynamics going on within the shelter
17 census. One, is the families with children. Numbers
18 are at 2,012 levels as has been pointed out in both
19 the IBO report and the City Limits report. The
20 investments in rental assistance and legal services
21 are having an impact in terms of reducing the numbers
22 of people and families with children in the shelter
23 system.

24 Single adults continue to be now at record
25 numbers in part because of the challenges that we are

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2 seeing with good public policy. The
3 institutionalization continues to be a driver of the
4 single adult population as does decarceration, both
5 positive progressive policies but creating a
6 situation which our shelter system is literally the
7 safety net for individuals who are being released
8 from institutions.

9 But if you look at the four measures that we laid
10 out in terms of metrics for the plan to address
11 homelessness, we said number one, let's prevent
12 homelessness wherever we can and that's the figure
13 that I cited before. Pre-pandemic evictions by City
14 Marshals down 41 percent as a result of our
15 investments together with the Council and Legal
16 Services, along with our payment of rent arrears and
17 this has resulted in evictions down in New York City
18 pre-pandemic. They are up all across the country.

19 Number two, we provided permanent housing through
20 our Social Services Programs to more than 160,000
21 people, most of those are shelter moveouts. Others
22 are people who avoided going into shelter. We have
23 been focused on transforming the shelter system. We
24 closed more than 200 shelter sites that didn't meet
25 our standards. We are out of about 75 percent of the

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2 cluster. Sites will continue to reduce commercial
3 hotel usage for families with children and we have
4 sited 88 of our new borough based shelters with 44 of
5 them already and we have sited 88 of our new borough
6 based shelters with 44 of them already up and
7 operating.

8 And last but not least, as I said, we have been
9 addressing street and subway homelessness by
10 investments that have enabled more than 4,000 people
11 to come in off the streets.

12 Obviously, we know there is a lot more work for
13 us to do. These metrics show however, that the plan
14 is taking hold. The metrics for HRA show that the
15 steps we have taken with federal and state waivers
16 have enabled greater access to benefits.

17 But you are right Council Member Levin that these
18 are challenging times that we are going through and
19 going into and I look forward to answering your
20 questions about how we will navigate through another
21 difficult period after having navigated through the
22 past year.

23 I appreciate the support of the Council in many
24 of these initiatives and the ongoing relationship and
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1
2 working relationship we have with so many of you in
3 your offices and I look forward to the questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Commissioner.
5 First, I just want to just get a point of clarity.
6 You mentioned shelter census being at around 52,000,
7 which is down from a high of 61,000. Is that
8 including stabilization in Safe Haven beds?

9 STEVEN BANKS: Look, I think it's important to
10 consider apples to apples. We have been measured
11 historically by the Department of Homeless Services
12 Shelter System. It does not include the
13 stabilization beds. I think it would - if one wanted
14 to do so, you would have to go back over time and
15 adjust all the censuses of every other administration
16 that's done this but if you would like us to do that,
17 we are happy to try to do that together with you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

19 STEVEN BANKS: But we tend to focus as every
20 administration has on the number of people that are
21 in actually the Department of Homeless Services
22 Shelters. As you know, we run a hostage shelter
23 system, we run a domestic violence shelter system, we
24 have provided emergency housing for people with three
25 quarters houses. A whole range of different kinds of

1
2 shelters. There are HUD funded shelters that are
3 separate from ours and sometimes when you look at
4 that, HUD point and time counts, it has a different
5 number than the Department of Homeless Services
6 Census.

7 So, it really depends, do you want to compare
8 apples to apples or do you want to compare different
9 numbers to different numbers. We are happy to work
10 with every number set you like.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, Safe Haven beds though.
12 That's considered part of the shelter census right?

13 STEVEN BANKS: Safe Havens were started back
14 during the Bloomberg Administration. They were never
15 included in the shelter census.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I don't think I knew
17 that. Okay, I have always been in favor of including
18 the most comprehensive numbers when looking at the
19 shelter census so.

20 STEVEN BANKS: I don't disagree with you, I just
21 want to - the reason why I am focusing on this point
22 is I think it is important for the public to
23 understand that investments are actually working and
24 have confidence in government, both the legislative
25 branch and executive branch.

1
2 And so, if we want to change what the number is,
3 we are going to focus on reducing, we should have a
4 common understanding of what that change is. And so,
5 in the testimony that I have given you today, the
6 common understanding has historically been what is
7 the Department of Homeless Services Shelter Census
8 and is it going up or going down?

9 And so, that's the number I am focusing on.
10 Happy to have a focus as we go forward on other
11 numbers.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, uhm, okay, I want to
13 look into that a little bit more because I just want
14 to make sure that we are obviously counting
15 everything that's in the system.

16 I have a number of my colleagues have their hands
17 raised to ask questions, so I am just going to ask
18 one question first and then I will pass it over to my
19 colleagues. With regard to CITY FHEPS vouchers, you
20 know, we have legislation proposed, Intro. 146 would
21 bring the CITY FHEPS vouchers up to Section 8 levels.
22 And we have almost 40 sponsors at this point. I
23 think at one point, we had 40 sponsors but Council
24 Members keep on leaving for other jobs, so we have to
25 make sure that we get the new replacement once they

1
2 get elected onto the bill. But this bill has almost
3 you know, unanimous support.

4 And obviously, we got from you all, information
5 showing you know how many placements are happening in
6 any given month prior to COVID. At the OMB hearing
7 two weeks ago, I asked OMB about this and their
8 response was you know, kind of surprising, kind of
9 not surprising. Their response was oh well, the CITY
10 FHEPS vouchers are working fine. As demonstrated by
11 the fact that some people are able to get an
12 apartment with them. You know, not obviously I think
13 really examining the numbers and showing you know
14 just how difficult it is.

15 So, I guess my question to you is, how can we
16 convince OMB that these voucher limits must be raised
17 to Section 8 levels?

18 STEVEN BANKS: I think with two weeks ago, before
19 the state budget is finalized, we should be asking
20 ourselves how can we make the senate and assembly
21 line house bills become permanent? As the mayor said
22 in a letter to the governor, as we have advocated
23 publicly and you have to. I want to commend you for
24 your efforts as well. It is essential to increase
25 the state FHEPS value to the FMR. I think an issue

1
2 that has certainly come up in our conversations that
3 we have had and in other testimony, is the concern
4 about increasing the city voucher to the FMR with the
5 state voucher remaining below the FMR and driving
6 state cost shift to the city on top of cost shifts
7 that have been going up for some time.

8 We are at a point where we achieved something
9 that we have not been at a place before, both houses
10 of legislature pressing the governor to increase the
11 state FHEPS to the FMR as a strategy to address
12 homelessness across in New York City particularly
13 post pandemic.

14 The legislation is paired with the way that the
15 legislature is directing or proposing to direct
16 spending the federal money, the one shot federal
17 funds. Which is so important to prevent people from
18 being evicted. Increasing state FHEPS would give us
19 another tool to pay ongoing rent and I think what OMB
20 and we have said previously is, we want our program
21 aligned with the state FHEPS program in order to
22 preserve state reimbursement and that's why we are
23 pressing so hard to increase the state FHEPS amount
24 and then we will obviously come back and have a
25 conversation with you after the state budget.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if the one house bills
3 get codified in the state budget and state FHEPS goes
4 up because we did an analysis and the cost – the
5 state share of that cost is actually you know,
6 relatively modest. You know, I think between \$11 and
7 \$15 million, nothing crazy.

8 That so then, I can expect Mayor Bill de Blasio
9 and OMB Director Jacques Jiha to in the Executive
10 Budget hearings, come out in support of Intro. 146.
11 So, I am glad that that's what I am hearing you say
12 and I don't know if that's that you meant to say but
13 that's what I heard and –

14 STEVEN BANKS: Since I am under oath, let me be
15 crystal clear what I am saying. Anyone listening to
16 this Zoom and all the members of this Committee, I
17 urge you to join with us in pushing this increase in
18 State FHEPS. We have gotten to a place where it
19 actually can happen. We have it within our power to
20 make it happen. 100 percent of our focus should be
21 on that for the next two weeks.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you. I encourage my
23 state colleagues to implement their one house bills.
24 With that, I will turn it over to my colleagues for
25 questions.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now hear from Council
3 Members with their hands raised. In the following
4 order, Council Member Deutsch, Council Member
5 Salamanca, Council Member Grodenchik and Council
6 Member Rosenthal. And we will begin with Council
7 Member Deutsch.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you. Good morning
10 Commissioner. Good morning.

11 STEVEN BANKS: Good morning. I didn't want to
12 take up your time.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Oh, okay.

14 STEVEN BANKS: How are you doing today?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Good, pretty good.

16 STEVEN BANKS: Good, that's great.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, so you know my
18 passion when it comes to homelessness. We had
19 numerous meetings throughout the last six years. We
20 have been in my office and I sat with the Mayor. I
21 sat with you on a number of occasions and to me, you
22 know, tackling homeless like the rest of my
23 colleagues and people in the city is probably one of
24 the most important of the issues that we face here in
25 New York City. And I am proud to work very closely

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2 with one of my shelters in my district. It's a
3 family shelter and where we really interact with
4 them, bring resources, additional resources to them
5 and I want to thank them for the work that they do in
6 my district.

7 To me, as an elected official and as all elected
8 officials, not only do we advocate for the people of
9 New York City but we also advocate for our district.
10 In 2017, the Mayor announced his Turning the Tide
11 plan where you are opening 90 shelters, congregate
12 shelters throughout the City of New York and it's not
13 about the number game. It's not about how many
14 people we actually put into shelters. It's about the
15 quality of those shelters. People deserve to have
16 stable, safe, clean, settings when they are in those
17 shelters and you could have - you could reduce the
18 numbers today by saying that I took off people from
19 the streets. But then those same people will be out
20 in the street again tomorrow.

21 And my first question to you is that what are the
22 numbers of street homelessness today? And how many
23 of those you took off the streets and how many remain
24 off the streets?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: So, since Home Stat began in April
3 2016, there are more than 4,000 actual human beings
4 who are on the streets who have been brought off the
5 streets who are not on the streets.

6 We know where they are and they are not on the
7 streets. We have a [INAUDIBLE 2:22:02], we submit a
8 report to the Council. It was Council Member
9 Espinal's bill, where we every quarter provide the
10 Council with information about our 24/7 outreach
11 teams, contacts with individuals who are on the
12 streets. There are more than 2,000 people who we
13 have verified to be homeless and another
14 approximately 1,400 or so people who we encounter on
15 the streets. So, we are not sure whether they are
16 homeless. We account to many people on the streets
17 who are transient and we may see them once or twice
18 and not see them again. And that's why there are two
19 different categories it's provided for in the local
20 legislation.

21 We report it. We do report it on our website as
22 well. And I should have clarified in my response to
23 Council Member Levin, The numbers of people in Safe
24 Havens, the numbers of people in conventional
25 shelters, the conventional shelter census, all of

1
2 that is transparently reported on our website and you
3 can go there at any time and see that.

4 Currently, in terms of single adults, which I
5 know you talked about congregate shelters and I have
6 to correct the record, we are not opening 90
7 congregate shelters. We are only opening congregate
8 shelters for single adults and all those shelters
9 will be in compliance with state regulation and the
10 Callahan Consent Decree. Which governs the
11 conditions, physical conditions in shelters but we
12 have closed more than 90 shelters and the smaller
13 number of borough based shelters – we have closed
14 more than 200 shelters I am sorry. And the borough-
15 based, smaller number of borough-based shelters are
16 meant to replace them.

17 But we are seeing record numbers of single adults
18 in our shelter system because of economics
19 circumstances and other circumstance and people are
20 voting for their feeding coming in. There are other
21 people on the streets who we are offering help to and
22 it can take months before we can break through that.

23 I know you work with Breaking Ground in your
24 district, one of our excellent providers. I know you
25 have had a good experience with them and we will

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2 continue to work with you in Breaking Ground to bring
3 people in from the streets in your district.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: What are the reasons
5 that someone on the street, a street homeless
6 individual, who refuses to go into shelters?

7 STEVEN BANKS: It's an individualized
8 determination. Someone who is experiencing street
9 homelessness is typically going to also be
10 experiencing mental health challenges. And these are
11 people who have fallen through every social safety
12 net that exists in the city and in the state and the
13 country. And rebuilding trust is a hard process.
14 You have seen it with Breaking Ground in your
15 district in terms of building that trust to bring
16 people inside.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: What is the definition
18 of rebuilding trust? Why would someone who is out in
19 the streets not have trust?

20 STEVEN BANKS: They have been in every
21 governmental system -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 STEVEN BANKS: Every public system, every private
24 system and they are falling through the safety nets
25 and they end up on the streets. If you are getting

1
2 at, do they not want to be in traditional shelters?
3 That's why we built a system at Safe Havens and our
4 stabilization beds in order to bring people in who
5 don't want to be traditional shelter.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, why again
7 Commissioner, why wouldn't someone want to be in a
8 traditional shelter.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Right, there is a whole range of
10 reasons Council Member. They could not want to be in
11 a shelter because there is a curfew. They could not
12 want to be in a shelter because they have had
13 challenges in the past interacting with our agency or
14 any agency in the city. It's an individualized
15 determination.

16 If we learned anything when we started this
17 program in 2016. Looking at numbers and having
18 generalizations about who is experiencing
19 homelessness in the city doesn't work. The way we
20 have been able to get 4,000 actual people off the
21 street to remain off the street, is by understanding
22 that individuals challenge and not making
23 generalizations about what people do or don't need.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, I would like to
25 talk offline also maybe visit several shelters with

1
2 you. I just want to ask you a question on the
3 record. When was the last time our Mayor went with
4 you to visit one of these congregate shelters?

5 STEVEN BANKS: As you know Council Member, the
6 Mayor has been extremely busy with the pandemic. The
7 last time I was with the Mayor in a shelter, I
8 believe was the end of October of 2020. And I
9 appreciate that he made the time to come see one of
10 our Turn the Tide shelters. Where clients were
11 extremely happy to see him and the First Lady as well
12 and the staff that were there from one of our
13 nonprofit providers appreciated his encouragement for
14 the work that they were doing in that shelter. And I
15 am sure that there will be other times that we go to
16 shelters but in a year in which we had unprecedented
17 impact on the city overall, I was gratified that he
18 was able to make the time and come to see one of our
19 new shelters at the end of October, beginning of
20 November. I just don't know the exact timeframe.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you very much.
22 Okay, I am going to come back to the second round and
23 thank you Commissioner.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We will move onto the next
25 Council Members questions.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now call on Council
3 Member Salamanca for questions.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Commissioner, good
6 morning. How are you?

7 STEVEN BANKS: Good. How are you doing? Good to
8 see you in person as opposed to by phone.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yes. Commissioner, I
10 want to first thank you for always being accessible
11 whenever I need you. You always pick up my calls or
12 follow up. So, I want to just publicly say thank you
13 and I appreciate it.

14 Commissioner, I just have two questions. I am
15 trying to get all these in within five minutes. How
16 many single dorm room setting facilities are
17 currently closed or opened?

18 STEVEN BANKS: So, our total congregate shelters
19 for single adults are roughly 100 and we have got
20 approximately 65 of them open but open at half
21 capacity. Just to give you an overall sense of our
22 system, we have in excess of 18,000 single adults in
23 our conventional shelter system, governed by the
24 Callahan Decree.

1
2 We've got about 5,000 people in those reduced
3 density congregate shelters. We've got about 4,000
4 people that were in hotels that we operate that
5 aren't COVID hotels as part of our providing shelter
6 and hotels, particularly for people who are employed.
7 And then we have got you know, approximately 9,000 or
8 so individuals in the density reduction COVID hotels.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, what's the
10 total cost for a [PHONE RINGING] sorry, for a - to
11 house a single individual and to house a family? You
12 know, with children monthly?

13 STEVEN BANKS: I am just looking for the exact
14 number for a moment if you will bear with me Council
15 Member. Okay, from the Mayor's Management Report
16 rates, I am just reading these numbers. From the
17 numbers we gave in the Mayor's Management Report.
18 For single adults it's \$130.63. For adult families
19 \$171.40 and for families with children \$220.69.
20 Let's not forget and I know that you know this but I
21 just want to highlight it that the cost is not simply
22 rent. It's the service dollars that are the driver.
23 I have testified at other hearings and I know this
24 has been a concern.

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2 That we have invested a quarter of a billion
3 dollars in increased services for our not-for-profit
4 providers. Social workers for mental health services
5 for example, all kinds of other supportive services
6 in order to help people get back on their feet.

7 So, there is rent and there is services and so, I
8 want to make sure any time we are doing apples to
9 apples, that we are looking at what rent is versus
10 the services component.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yeah, Commissioner, I
12 know that you may be limited on if you can answer
13 this next question but Bronx Parent Housing Network,
14 you know, they have - they provide services
15 throughout the entire borough of the Bronx in many
16 Council Districts. Some of them in my Council
17 District as well. And I know that there is a
18 leadership change given you know what's happening
19 there. Just curious to know, there is a new leader,
20 there is a new President and CEO that's been
21 appointed by DHS. Is that going to be permanent,
22 temporary? And if it's going to be temporary, you
23 know how will - what's going to be the status of
24 appointing someone that's going to be permanent
25

1
2 there? Or is DHS not going to play a role in that
3 process?

4 STEVEN BANKS: So, thank you for the question.
5 Let me just say first and foremost that sexual
6 harassment is something that we don't tolerate. It's
7 not who we are as an agency. It's not who our
8 providers are. And you and I both know that Bronx
9 Parent Housing Network has provided really critical
10 services for the community.

11 We took action as soon as we learned of all of
12 the allegations in the New York Times Investigative
13 Report. The Board fired the Chief Executive Officer,
14 who is the subject of these allegations. And we
15 required the board to hire an interim CEO who is
16 accountable to us. So that we would have somebody in
17 the organization who can review the circumstances in
18 the organization to make appropriate recommendations
19 about going forward and then there will be a
20 selection process for a permanent CEO of that
21 organization.

22 Once the interim CEO's work is complete and also
23 DOI and we have a procurement -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
25

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Monitor to dig deeper into any
3 financial issues that were there. I think as you
4 know, we had a corrective action plan in place for
5 that provider and the investigative report in the
6 times showed that we evaded that corrective action
7 plan. And although he is gone, we are working with
8 DOI to review the entire situation to see what other
9 issues were there and address them accordingly.

10 But we wanted an interim CEO to be in place so
11 that we can maintain those critical services that you
12 referenced across the Bronx.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yeah, okay. My time
14 has expired. Thank you Commissioner. Thank you
15 Chair.

16 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council Member
18 Salamanca. We will move on to the next Council
19 Member for questions.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now call on Council
21 Member Grodenchik for questions.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you Chair.
24 Commissioner Banks, good to see you. Good afternoon.
25 I just want to follow up for starters on some of what

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2 Chair Levin said in his opening remarks. That in the
3 Preliminary Budget we didn't see enough or not much
4 about how the city plans on dealing with going
5 forward continuing with the COVID-19 crisis. You
6 know, we understand and I guess we are still all
7 unwrapping the latest version of the Cares Act. I
8 know it has another name that Chair Levin has
9 referred to this morning.

10 So, I would like to hear you talk a bit about
11 that. About what the city's plans are but the fact
12 that it's not in the Preliminary Budget disturbs me
13 and I want to put on the record that I hope that by
14 the time we get to see the Executive Budget, that we
15 will have more about how the city continues - is
16 continuing to work on its response to COVID-19.

17 I know that we all have had to pivot in many
18 different directions, some of which we have never
19 tried before but I am also of course going to raise
20 my concerns about not enough money for emergency
21 food. We have had this conversation. Working with
22 Chair Levin and Speaker Johnson, we eliminated that
23 last budget dance as you called it that HRA had with
24 the Council. But this is an extraordinary time and
25 figures show that we are closing in on two, nearly

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2 two million New Yorkers being food insecure. I
3 visited a pantry in my district this morning. I
4 visited one yesterday. I will be at several on
5 Sunday, especially timely with the Passover and
6 Easter holiday is coming and Ramadan right around the
7 corner as well.

8 So, I just want to hear more about your thoughts
9 going forward for the Executive Budget.

10 STEVEN BANKS: So, thank you for the question. I
11 think it's important to just remember the context in
12 which the January Plan came out. We had been seeking
13 barring authority from state and had not been given
14 it. Have been seeking state and city aid in the
15 federal level, had not been given it and so the
16 January plan came out in that context.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I appreciate that
18 Commissioner.

19 STEVEN BANKS: The Rescue Plan provides
20 significant relief to the city in terms of very
21 draconian things which may well have been required as
22 a result of that but also, let's emphasize that the
23 Rescue Plan assistance is one time. It's not ongoing
24 assistance.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I understand that and
3 I am hopeful as we go along that the economy will
4 improve. New York is a very generous city, it's a
5 very generous state. I don't expect that to change,
6 I hope it won't change. I will use my remaining time
7 in office to make sure it doesn't change.

8 I also want to ask you this question and I know
9 it is a foremost in the minds of many people watching
10 today. We are sitting on a rent crisis which is
11 really unprecedented in our lifetime. Probably, we
12 would have to go back to the great depression to find
13 something into what people are facing today. And I
14 just want to know and I want since HRA has been the
15 place in government where people go to get their rent
16 arrears hopefully taken care of at some level. I
17 want to know that you and your folks are working on a
18 plan. So, I know that there was a lot of money put
19 into the federal act that was signed into law last
20 week. How are we going to deal with this and how are
21 we going to make it easier?

22 You know the vaccine roll out which was not your
23 responsibility, could have been better, I will leave
24 it at that. It seems to be working much better now
25 and my experience with it was a very good one.

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2 However, people need to be able to access whatever
3 rent relief that we are going to be able to provide
4 for them and I am asking you to talk about what your
5 agency is doing to make sure as the crime portal for
6 people accessing government at this level, what you
7 are going to do in the days, weeks and months ahead
8 to make sure that we do not have a mass eviction
9 crisis.

10 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you for that question. I
11 appreciate the opportunity to respond to it. So, I
12 think there is two things that I want to make clear
13 on the record. One, you are right, up until the
14 pandemic and continuing during the pandemic, HRA has
15 been at the forefront of providing rent arrears
16 payments to first all evictions. In 2013, before I
17 came in, annually HRA paid about \$125 million in rent
18 arrears payments.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

20 STEVEN BANKS: And in the last year, for which we
21 have full data, you know, we paid nearly \$250 million
22 in rent arrears payments, not quite.

23 So, you can see a commitment to making rent
24 arrears available to people to prevent evictions.
25 Payment of rent arrears across the provision of

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2 lawyers is what enabled us pre-pandemic to drive down
3 evictions by 41 percent. However, you are absolutely
4 right that the level of – the gap between rent owed
5 and ability to pay it is unprecedented potentially
6 back to the great depression as you described and
7 it's why we have a tool that we haven't had before
8 both in the stimulus bill that was enacted by the
9 prior congress and signed by the former president the
10 beginning of January and the most recent federal
11 stimulus bill provides probably a total to New York
12 State an excess of \$2 billion in rent assistance.

13 It has the advantage of being able to be provided
14 without a repayment requirement, which is required by
15 state statute for our rent assistance and without a
16 future ability to pay requirement, which is required
17 by state law for our assistance.

18 We are working directly with the state office of
19 temporary assistance and disability assistance to
20 stand up a statewide portal that would give access to
21 New York City residents not only to money being given
22 to the city but money being given to the state. We
23 want to make sure that New York City residence get
24 their fair share of these benefits and therefore by
25 having the portal that enables New Yorkers to access

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2 not only city revenue but state – city grants but
3 state grants is critical. This week we will be
4 issuing our procurement for trusted community based
5 organizations to provide application assistance and
6 outreach. We are prioritizing outreach and
7 assistance for people that are already in housing
8 court with COVID related eviction proceedings in the
9 COVID impacted communities, the 33 key zip codes in
10 building to small landlords and we will adjust our
11 procurement depending on what the final state
12 legislation is in the next couple of weeks in terms
13 of the allocation of those funds.

14 But I think that tool of federal money is really
15 a game changer for this and our ability to work with
16 the state office of temporary assistance and
17 disability assistance is key. The legislation that
18 the senate and assembly are considering, will help us
19 do that. And the treasury guidance provides a very
20 streamline way to establish eligibility, which we
21 think is very important to make funds available to
22 the broadest number of people. And the reason why we
23 are procuring outreach and application assistance
24 help from CBO's is to make sure that everybody gets

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1
2 the word and has access to the state portal for these
3 benefits.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you
5 Commissioner. I hope when we see you next you will
6 be able to give us greater detail and one last
7 question Chair. Are all those rent arrears monies
8 going to the state? Are we getting – I know that the
9 city is getting certain monies directly. Do we know
10 if any of those monies are going directly to the
11 city?

12 STEVEN BANKS: Yes, of the \$1.3 billion that came
13 in the first allocation from the prior congress and
14 prior president, the city has an allocation of about
15 \$247 million. But the state budget provides for
16 access to the larger state allocation, the state
17 itself got about \$800 million. We get access to
18 those funds and not only our own if we combine in a
19 joint state city plan and that is being offered to
20 localities across the state, not just New York City.

21 With an improved plan, we can get access to not
22 just the \$247 million but to the full state
23 allocation through a state portal and we are working
24 directly with the state office of temporary
25 disability assistance to get access to those funds

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2 and we are procuring, as I said, CBO's to help access
3 the total amount of funding available to New York
4 City residence, not just the allocation of the city.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Alright and do we
6 know -

7 STEVEN BANKS: We didn't think it was a good idea
8 to stand up a separate city system from a state
9 system when it would result in limiting city
10 residence access to the state dollars.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you
12 Commissioner. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
14 Grodenchik. We will now move to Council Member
15 Rosenthal for questions.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Hi, sorry. Thank you
18 so much. Thank you Chair. Commissioner, as I say to
19 you every time we talk, thank you for getting out of
20 bed this morning and trying your best. This is such
21 a horrible, difficult situation and you know really
22 thank goodness for New Yorkers that you are here. We
23 just you know, we are all in a no win situation and
24 you are stepping up to the moment in a way that I
25 don't think anyone else could.

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So, I thank you for that.

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STEVEN BANKS: Thank you so much for your kind words. I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah, I really just have one quick question and I am sorry, I am a little bit working on a couple other issues, so if this has been discussed already I apologize. But have you thought about what happened with Victor Rivera and that whole situation where he was sexually harassing maybe more, maybe worse his staff and clients and sort of thought about setting up a different system for when HRA gets contacted about that? And sort of what a better way of responding could be?

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STEVEN BANKS: Yes, thank you for question.

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22

Council Member Salamanca did ask me about that but I want to be responsive to your question, which is slightly different than his if I may.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

STEVEN BANKS: So, I mean, as you and I have said when we have spoken, we condemn sexual harassment.

It just was a horrendous situation. It's not who our providers are. It's not who we are and we received a single phone call about an incident in 2017 within candid publicly that we didn't escalate it. It

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1
2 should have been escalated. It would have been
3 handled differently today and we have taken a number
4 of steps I think to address, to make sure this would
5 never happen again.

6 There were two complaints made by employees to
7 the State Division of Human Rights and those
8 complaints were settled through the State Human
9 Rights process. We are directing our providers to
10 advise us at any such settlements and any such
11 complaints. The complaint we received again by
12 telephone was for a completely inappropriate comment
13 made in a public setting. Not of the nature -
14 inexcusable but not of the nature of some of the
15 important investigative reporting that was done on
16 this.

17 I think there are a couple of things that I just
18 want to highlight to answer your question. So again,
19 we have got processes to escalate such complaints.
20 We have got a process with DOI to refer such
21 complaints to DOI. We have replaced the CEO of that
22 organization with an interim CEO who is accountable
23 to the Department of Social Services, Department of
24 Homeless Services, not to the board. And that person
25 is conducting a review and importantly operating an

1
2 organization so it can continue to serve people in
3 the Bronx. It's an important Bronx organization in
4 terms of client services.

5 We have also working with DOI, procured or almost
6 completed the procurement for an independent monitor
7 to more fully review other aspects because the CEO
8 from the reporting apparently abated our corrective
9 action plan to address conflict of interest and at
10 risk transaction. And so, we are working with DOI to
11 evaluate what happened there to make sure that there
12 is not a repeat.

13 And in addition to review other providers so that
14 we can make sure that our review of that risk
15 transactions is complete. We depend upon terrific
16 work of terrific not-for-profit providers. The
17 conduct of this CEO does not reflect our providers.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: 100 percent. I am
19 with you 1,000 percent and all that sounds
20 interesting as a response. The piece that missing is
21 what are we doing for the people who call in? For
22 example, have you changed your policy so that if
23 anyone gets a call, anyone in DSS; I don't care you
24 know if it is HRA, DSS, you know, I am sorry,
25 Department of Homeless Services, anywhere in DSS,

1
2 that the first thing that happens be they connect
3 that person. They make sure that person is connected
4 to a counselor who could be their advocate. Like,
5 that's what I am trying to listen for.

6 And the second thing is, perhaps it's a moment
7 when and we may have passed legislation about this.
8 I am sort of forgetting but that you know -

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: A moment to remind all
11 your providers that they are required to do sexual
12 harassment training of their staff. And perhaps send
13 out a letter to all providers saying you know, we are
14 ask- I don't know how this is done right.

15 So, I am spit balling but we are asking you to
16 send out a letter to all of your staff and clients
17 saying, if any one sees or experiences sexual
18 harassment or abuse, they can call this number. And
19 the number is actually one of a counseling group.
20 Not the Police Department, not you know DOI, not HRA
21 but simply a counselor who will figure out who does
22 know about different options but can help walk that
23 client through what their options are. And you know,
24 I don't expect you know, we all throw around this
25 term, oh, I am going to give a trauma informed

1
2 response. Are you kidding me? It takes two weeks to
3 get a training to learn something of a trauma
4 informed response.

5 I don't expect you know an HRA person who is
6 answering the phone to know how to give a trauma
7 informed response but I do expect them to pass
8 somebody over to someone who has been assaulted or
9 harassed over to all the services. We have multiple
10 contracts with nonprofits who do in fact, they are
11 the experts at trauma informed response. And I want
12 to know that anyone who comes in touch with anything
13 in your purview that they get referred to help.
14 That's what they need. That's all they need. You
15 know first?

16 STEVEN BANKS: So, I appreciate your
17 recommendation to us. As you know, over the years, I
18 have taken all your recommendations seriously. Many
19 of them were actually implemented, so I appreciate
20 each and every one of them. Here we have reinforced
21 providers what their obligations are. I think what
22 you are suggesting goes beyond that and I think that
23 it is something that we should flush out with you
24 offline to see how we would implement what you are
25 suggesting.

1
2 I hear what you are recommending and I can
3 understand.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay, I appreciate
5 that. I mean, it just if uhm, I appreciate that. I
6 am not going to drill home the point but I will just
7 say to you and if anyone in the Mayor's staff is
8 listening, what I am saying is not rocket science.
9 It's not because I have any special understanding or
10 knowledge about anything. It's a common sense
11 response to somebody who has endured sexual
12 harassment and I think you know and really this is to
13 City Hall, if you spent you know five minutes with
14 the actual providers, they will tell you this is the
15 first response. Is how is the survivor doing? What
16 happened there?

17 I am not asking for anything more than common
18 sense and I really think, I am happy to talk to you
19 about it offline but you know I mean and perhaps you
20 have to worry about lawsuits, all these other things
21 that I am not aware of but it's a simple letter that
22 goes to every provider that says you know, send out
23 the attached flyer to everyone who works there and
24 works there. And works there or you know, gets your
25 services. And all the letter says is, you know, if

1
2 you see something or experience something, reach out
3 to you know, these five organizations that the city
4 contracts with to provide these service. Crime
5 Victim Treatment Center, AVP, VIP, sorry, it's a
6 bunch of letters but you know what I mean. We have
7 you know providers who speak many different languages
8 for different communities. They speak Spanish, you
9 know, that's all I am asking for is that common sense
10 response to help the survivor.

11 STEVEN BANKS: No, I appreciate that and many,
12 you have given me a lot of common sense suggestions
13 over the years and they have all born fruit. So, I
14 want to work with you on this one.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

16 STEVEN BANKS: Our first response honestly was to
17 make sure we knew of what the extent of the problems
18 really are and we handled them properly. You have a
19 related important priority that we should focus on
20 and I will follow up with you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you. Thank you,
22 [PHONE RINGING] sorry, thank you.

23 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you Chair.
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
3 Rosenthal and I will now call on Council Member
4 Holden for questions.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank you
7 Chair. Thank you Commissioner. Just a few
8 questions. Where are we with the move to smaller
9 faith-based homeless shelters that the Mayor
10 announced over a year ago and how many were opened
11 up?

12 STEVEN BANKS: So, we have opened up I think
13 about 200, 150 Safe Haven beds. One of them that was
14 announced actually on that day, one of the providers
15 that was part of it, not on my watch, has one that is
16 about to open in the lower east side. We expect by
17 the end of the year that we will get to essentially
18 the number that we projected. I want to remind you
19 though that we started with 600 stabilization or low
20 various safe haven beds and we are now at more than
21 3,000. We added a lot of stabilization beds in
22 commercial hotels that are exactly what that plan was
23 talking about but it wasn't contemplated at the time
24 of that plan. What was contemplated at the time of
25 that plan is it would open more Safe Haven beds and

1
2 we have been able to do that in a years' time, given
3 the procurement process that is involved and going
4 forward. In the last year, we have added 1,200 low
5 barrier beds which were exactly what the Journey Home
6 Plan called for and the Mayor's State of the City
7 Address. He said let's build on that and add another
8 thousand. I do believe that when we get to the end
9 of 2021, we will be close to 2,000 total beds either
10 opened or in the process of being opened.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But I asked you about are
12 those faith-based?

13 STEVEN BANKS: Some of those beds are faith-
14 based, some of them are not-for-profit.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: My question was how many
16 faith based, if you have that breakdown because the
17 Mayor had -

18 STEVEN BANKS: Right, I just announced yesterday
19 18 faith-based beds in Staten Island. The faith-
20 based beds that were been sued over to open in the
21 lower east side, will open as soon as that litigation
22 is done and we have other offers from Catholic
23 Charities.

24 You know, the cardinal was very generous and
25 Catholic Charities stood up and offered us a lot of

1
2 buildings and we are going to have to renovate them.
3 They are not going to open by the end of this
4 calendar year but they are going to be fantastic this
5 facilities to that Catholic Charities has offered to
6 us. So, I think that you have to take into account
7 two things. The key was to get beds up so we could
8 bring people in from the street and then to renovate
9 a church to provide the kinds of bed that we need,
10 doesn't happen every night.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, because you know
12 how I feel. I had mentioned about the faith-based
13 being you know even before, years before the Mayor
14 announced and I know you tried it one other time in
15 the past but I think that's the way to go because I
16 have, as you know, the congregate shelter in my
17 district, that model is not working. It's proven to
18 be ineffective and it's proven to be a problem,
19 especially in the pandemic. I mean, we talked about
20 this but just to give you an idea, this shelter has
21 been open; it was originally for 200 employable men
22 and I think there is a 100 men in there because of
23 the pandemic. But with 100 men in there, we had in
24 one year, now it's been open a little over one year,
25 916 calls to our local police precinct at which 500

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2 were 911 calls. 42 arrests, that included attack on
3 homeowners and commercial burglaries, you name it.
4 Since the Mayor announced Turning the Tide to
5 essentially keep the homeless housed in their
6 community, I have asked you over and over again to
7 give us a breakdown of you know, how many homeless
8 are from the zip code or from the borough even and I
9 haven't gotten that. Which is a problem. If we are
10 going to be told yes, this will be an employment
11 shelter. It will be from either the zip code, the
12 community board or the borough, we should have a
13 breakdown, yet I can't get that from your office. I
14 can't even get any stats from your office that has
15 anything to do with that shelter and I don't know
16 why.

17 STEVEN BANKS: We have given you Council Member
18 data on your district and community board. You want
19 individualized? You want the kind of information
20 that would allow you to know who the individuals are?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's bologna, that's
22 bologna.

23 STEVEN BANKS: With respect Council Member, it's
24 not bologna. It's what you have been pushing back
25 on. I also would like to question your embracing or

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2 your embracing of shelters with private rooms when
3 you fought and came to my house to oppose a shelter
4 that would have had private rooms in your district.
5 And we ended up having to open a congregate shelter
6 because you prevented us from -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 STEVEN BANKS: Opening a shelter that would have
9 provided people with private rooms. So, I am having
10 trouble reconciling Council Member what you are
11 saying at this hearing and your actions outside of
12 this hearing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes, I am all for private
14 rooms, which you could have built for a slightly more
15 cost but you didn't. You didn't do that. You didn't
16 do it then. You didn't do it now.

17 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Why didn't you do it now?
19 Why didn't you do it then when I opposed it you said?

20 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, you're not under
21 oath but I am. And so, I said under oath the
22 following: I tried to open a shelter that you ran on
23 for your election opposing at the Holiday Inn.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: In a hotel.

25 STEVEN BANKS: If I could finish Council Member.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I still oppose
3 warehousing people in hotels that you are just - you
4 do it all the time and it is costing us billions, not
5 millions, billions. You have done everything wrong
6 under your leadership, so-called leadership and you
7 continue to do it wrong by building these congregate
8 shelters.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, you are entitled
10 to your opinion but as someone smarter than me once
11 said, you are not entitled to your own facts.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right.

13 STEVEN BANKS: The facts are that we implemented
14 a plan that you have opposed that has resulted in -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You are building
16 dangerous congregate shelters -

17 STEVEN BANKS: If I could finish Council Member.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Because you don't get it.
19 You don't get it. Smaller is better. You don't get
20 it.

21 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, could you propose
22 enough sites in your district?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes, I can.

24 STEVEN BANKS: That accommodate 200 people that
25 would meet state and city. Then why haven't you -

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [INAUDIBLE 3:00:08]

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3 STEVEN BANKS: Then why haven't you in the entire
4 time you have been in the Council?

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5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I have mentioned this
6 to you several times. You turned everything down.
7 You said, the faith-based doesn't work and then a
8 year later then you announced -

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9 STEVEN BANKS: That is not true Council Member.
10 That is not true at all.

9

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11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No, you told me it's not
12 cost effective.

11

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13 STEVEN BANKS: I did not say that Council Member.
14 I said that it was not cost effective to renovate
15 those -

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16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, who is lying here?
17 Okay, thank you Chair.

16

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18 STEVEN BANKS: As I said Council Member, you are
19 entitled to your opinion.

18

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20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, here we go.

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21 STEVEN BANKS: But not your own facts.

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22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Keep it up.

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23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, we are now going to
24 move on to Council Member Rosenthal who has
25 additional questions.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Rosenthal.

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STEVEN BANKS: I think you are still muted

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Council Member.

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COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Hi, sorry, thank you

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for the ability for a quick second round

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Commissioner. I neglected to ask just a quick

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question about contracts. Do you know, is your — do

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you know the status, you know working with your

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echoes on getting contracts signed? Registered and

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signed? I know a lot of providers spoke with some

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the other day, you know, actually it was Legal Aid

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Lawyers but not with your agency. But uhm or they

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might have been.

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But anyway, \$1 million in debt. They are having

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to take out loans. You know the city doesn't pay for

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that. Do you have any sense of what's going on

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there?

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STEVEN BANKS: Sure, you might be referring to

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shelter provider contracts. Look, we greatly value

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our shelter providers. I think you know when I first

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became the DHS Commissioner in addition to the HRA

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Commissioner, that I inherited years of contract

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backlog. In fact, I think some of the criticism

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2 where we are now is people say well, it hasn't been
3 this bad since 2015. But in fairness to everybody,
4 we have had an extraordinary amount of contracts that
5 we have had to process during this COVID period. And
6 we have committed to the leadership of Homeless
7 Services United, a very important organization. The
8 providers they represent are critical to our work.
9 We have committed that we will be done with the
10 registration process of all of the COVID contract
11 emergency contract amendments by the end of this
12 month. We think that is very important to do. It's
13 important to understand and not get tied up in the
14 bureaucracy of it. But that as we move people out of
15 hotels, we had to do contract amendments. We didn't
16 anticipate that we would be out of hotels for this
17 long. I am sorry, in hotels for this long. And so,
18 there have been multiple amendments. We will be, we
19 expect to be done with those contract amendments by
20 the end of this, the end of this month.

21 One of the challenges I know that providers have;
22 I used to run a not-for-profit, is the process of
23 invoicing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yes, for sure.

25

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2 STEVEN BANKS: And I can say, I just looked at
3 this. We have got a total of 250 invoices in house.
4 173 of them for less than 30 days and another 31
5 between 30 and 60 days.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay.

7 STEVEN BANKS: Then we have got about 50 for more
8 than that period of time and there were challenges
9 with those invoices. And one of the things we
10 committed to do with Homeless Services United's great
11 leadership is to actually work on some technical
12 training for people because there are common errors
13 that occur and I think you know, given your prior
14 experience at OMB and I know that you know that we
15 get audited by various levels of the comptrollers and
16 there are common things that are identified in the
17 audits that we have to resolve with the providers
18 with the invoices.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Got it.

20 STEVEN BANKS: You know, lack of back up or
21 missing an allocation.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Right, right, right,
23 so MOCS will do that for your providers at no charge.
24 They reach out. I work with them all the time with
25 providers. I would just send those 50 invoices or

1
2 whatever the contractors are that have to provide the
3 better information. Send them over to MOCS, Dan
4 Simon will never forgive me for that but I would just
5 send them over there and say, can your staff reach
6 out to these people to make sure that the forms are
7 filled in correctly so that we can get them going on
8 passport.

9 You know, I think they can take it. That's their
10 job. They have trained their staff now to really be
11 able to do that and frankly, they can work with your
12 staff as well. I know they do a lot of training for
13 agency echoes and you know they are there to support
14 you.

15 STEVEN BANKS: Let me mention, we work with Dan
16 and his team all the time. I don't want to push work
17 from one place to another. We will work with them
18 together but the bottom line is our staff has a lot
19 more contracts to process than anyone could imagine.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Absolutely.

21 STEVEN BANKS: The providers have more invoices
22 to submit than they could have imagined and we will
23 work through this relationship to make sure that they
24 have what they need. They are important partners of
25 ours.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I feel a little bit of
3 a new need coming on but you know, I am just saying
4 that for City Hall. It sounds like perhaps with the
5 additional work during COVID and perhaps this would
6 even qualify for FEMA reimbursement. You know, this
7 agency had to step up in a way that you never
8 expected you would have had to have done. Anyway, my
9 time is up.

10 STEVEN BANKS: We are going to be done with this
11 before we could have staff hired because it is
12 important to get this done to help the providers.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you. Thank you
14 so much Chair for that.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
16 Rosenthal. I will now call on Council Member Deutsch
17 for questions and then pass it back over to Chair
18 Levin.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Commissioner
21 and now it is good afternoon. So, I have a few more
22 questions.

23 STEVEN BANKS: Okay, I was looking for you in the
24 window, now I see you.

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COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Oh, I am here, yeah.
So, I have been sitting on several mayoral candidate forums and most of the mayoral candidates don't support congregate shelters. My question is, when you sign the lease on a congregate shelter, is there a clause to terminate that lease?

STEVEN BANKS: We have the ability to – we unsigned leases. We sign contracts with providers and we have the ability to terminate contracts based upon a range of reasons and for example, if we were to change our policy and have you know, take a different approach to providing shelter, you could terminate the contract.

I want to raise a note of caution to anyone who is considering these issues for some future administration. In my experience with representing New Yorkers experiencing homelessness and as of the Legal Aid Society and then coming into the Administration, I think one of the most challenging times for people experiencing homelessness is between when Administrations change. I had seen this transition between the Koch and the Dinkins, Dinkins to Giuliani, Giuliani to Bloomberg, Bloomberg to de Blasio.

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2 The Administration stops driving forward to make
3 sure there is enough shelter to meet the need. The
4 new administration comes in and has all the
5 challenges of shelter siting and in the end, if you
6 look back over the years, much of the litigation
7 about violating the consent decrees occurs in the
8 period shortly after the change of the
9 administrations.

10 And so, I don't want to leave some future
11 administration with a deficit in shelter when I know
12 that in the coming year there is going to be a need
13 for a certain number of beds, particularly for single
14 adults who are at record numbers. So, I don't want
15 to pass the buck to the future administration without
16 meeting what we would plan to do to have enough
17 shelter in place to make sure that in the winter of
18 '21, '22, people don't get left without shelter.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, how many congregate
20 shelters is the city actually opening up throughout
21 the city?

22 STEVEN BANKS: So, currently, we have 100 and I
23 can get you -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: 100, so I want to -
25

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STEVEN BANKS: If I could just answer.

3

Currently, we have 100 in operation and then we can

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get you -

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COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, so what happens if

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the next -

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STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, you got to let me

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finish.

9

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No, all I asked for is

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the number.

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STEVEN BANKS: But I didn't give you the right

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number. I did not give you the right number.

13

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: How many? Just give me

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the right number.

15

STEVEN BANKS: I am under oath, please let me

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answer the questions. Thank you. There are

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currently 100 operating out of the new shelters that

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were sited. We will give you the exact number of the

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congregate shelters but the number of congregate

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shelters is corelated with what our projection of

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need is.

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The reason why we haven't run out of shelter when

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we've got record numbers of single adults in shelter

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is because we plan to bring on enough congregate

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shelter to make up for what the projected need is.

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2 So, therefore if you said to us, don't do anymore
3 congregate shelter today. The City of New York will
4 run out of shelter and violate the consent decrees.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, so my question is,
6 nine months before the next Administration comes in,
7 over the next nine months, how many shelters?
8 Congregate shelters approximately? Don't give me a -
9 you don't have to give me an exact number. How many,
10 approximately how many congregate shelters you are
11 opening up throughout the City of New York with nine
12 months left before the next administration comes in?

13 STEVEN BANKS: I will have to give you that
14 number. I don't have it -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Approximately.

16 STEVEN BANKS: I don't have it. I am not going
17 to give you an approximate number. I will give you
18 an exact number but I am not going to guess under
19 oath.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Is it more than one?

21 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, you know it is
22 more than one.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, now how is; I am
24 just curious, how is the provider, how does the
25 provider go through - if the contract gets

1
2 terminated, how would the provider go through an
3 eviction process or do they not have to go through an
4 eviction process?

5 STEVEN BANKS: The City of New York is
6 responsible for providing shelter to human beings.
7 To individuals experiencing homelessness. There is
8 not an eviction process. If people are placed in a
9 shelter, we close shelters. I testified before this
10 hearing and many others that at this point, we have
11 closed more than 200 shelter sites. We relocate
12 people from those shelter sites to other shelters
13 with our system. But if you closed a congregate
14 shelter, you need someplace else to put the human
15 beings that are there.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, you are telling me
17 that if a private property owner places tenants into
18 another building without the consent of their
19 tenants, they don't have to go through an eviction
20 process?

21 STEVEN BANKS I have no idea -

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I am telling you that
23 you cannot take a tenant out of an apartment, even if
24 you have another apartment for that individual

1
2 without going through an eviction process if that
3 individual refuses to leave.

4 So, how is the city circumventing that process?

5 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, there is 30 years
6 of case law about how New Yorkers are experiencing
7 homelessness get moved among shelters.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 STEVEN BANKS: What their rights are. What their
10 rights to hearings are. What their rights to notice
11 are. There is 30 years of case law. We do this all
12 the time. We have been phasing out hotels with
13 families with children and moving those families -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, okay -

15 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, can I finish my
16 answer?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No, no, no, my time is
18 running out so.

19 STEVEN BANKS: Okay but you don't want to hear
20 the rest of my answer.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No, no. So, the City of
22 New York is permitted to do that but a private
23 property owner is not permitted to do that. That's
24 basically what you are saying.

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2 STEVEN BANKS: No, I am not saying that. Do not
3 put words in my mouth.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I am saying that. I am
5 saying that.

6 STEVEN BANKS: I don't think you're - you are
7 like Council Member Holden.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, I know but no but
9 you told Councilman Holden that he is entitled to his
10 own opinion.

11 STEVEN BANKS: That's right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And my opinion is to
13 represent my district and I have been involved with
14 homelessness for the last six years and I have
15 approached you and the Mayor with a homeless plan six
16 years ago and offered to visit every homeless shelter
17 in the City of New York. Just as I have visited
18 every veterans homeless shelter in the City of New
19 York as Chair of the Veterans Committee in the City
20 Council.

21 And I never, you never took me up on any offer
22 and the fact is, one second let me finish now. The
23 fact is Commissioner, I don't know if you take the
24 subways but if you took the subways, your job is far
25 from over. And if we had safe and stable housing

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2 throughout the City of New York, we would not need a
3 city agency breaking ground to convince people to go
4 into shelters. Because they would want to go into
5 shelters.

6 Take a look at Jericho Project, which is a
7 veterans – a veterans shelter. It's permanent
8 housing, supportive housing, supportive services.
9 It's clean, it's safe. It's like a five star hotel.
10 They are a model for all the shelters throughout the
11 city and it's not your fault Commissioner because you
12 have a boss. It's not your fault and I am not
13 blaming you but the fact is, is that we are – we have
14 a homeless crisis and you are building homeless
15 shelters ground up when we have plenty of SRO's
16 throughout the city.

17 We have apartments that have been used by
18 students coming from other states and other countries
19 and I could tell you right now, we have if not
20 thousands, we have hundreds of vacant apartments
21 throughout the city and I will take you to them where
22 you could place homeless individuals in those
23 apartments to live independently.

24 But what this administration choses to do is take
25 the easy way out right? Take the easy way out and

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2 put 140 people in one building 14-17 in one room and
3 that is totally, totally unacceptable.

4 So, if you and the administration want to kill
5 the city, want to not be held accountable for our
6 homeless population, then do whatever you want then.
7 Because I have had conversations with you throughout
8 the years but don't do it in my district because I
9 have a right to an opinion. I have a right to an
10 opinion, just as you have and just as the Mayor has
11 and enough is enough. We are not going to let this
12 administration push our homeless population around
13 without giving them safe and stable housing.

14 I have a plan, a permanent housing plan from
15 2019, the beginning of 2019 for senior housing and
16 the city has been dragging their feet. And then you
17 are coming to me with a congregate shelter and that's
18 unacceptable. The end goal would be the same but it
19 doesn't fall under your belt if you do not open up a
20 congregate shelter because then you don't score your
21 points before this administration ends.

22 We are not going to tolerate this and it is
23 unacceptable. You are doing a great job because you
24 are reducing homelessness. You have been very
25 responsive but people who are homeless, people who

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2 are bad on their luck, do not deserve to be
3 stockpiled in rooms, in buildings, without the proper
4 resources. Because I challenge you Commissioner
5 because I went to visit some of those congregate
6 shelters. I stood outside for hours speaking to
7 people and let's not even get into our AVA.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member if you -

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No. I don't even want
10 to get into the Steven Winters and Associates, what
11 they have to prove ADA compliance with the city
12 circumvent the process by getting waivers from the
13 park and the buildings and that's unacceptable too.
14 And we are going to be watching extremely closely of
15 every step you make and this is unacceptable.

16 So, if you are going to come into my district.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member, you need to
18 wrap up.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No, no, one second.
20 Steve, I need another few minutes. If you are going
21 to come into my district without having
22 conversations, I sent you 16 questions last week,
23 beginning of last week. You have not responded to me
24 with those answers. You should have those answers
25 right away. How many lobbyists are behind these

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2 shelters? How many millions of dollars these
3 developers are making?

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: How many millions of
6 dollars are these providers making? We have SRO's.
7 I will take you to them. We have apartments
8 available. I will take you to them personally.
9 Finally, take me up on an offer.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got to wrap it up.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Chair.

12 STEVEN BANKS: Chair, may I respond to that
13 Chair?

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: My time is up.
16 Commissioner, you are a smooth talker. My time is
17 up.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Well, between all your comments
19 you said I'm responsive and now you are saying I am
20 not responsive. So, I will just leave it at the
21 following Council Member. Every year I send a letter
22 to every Council Member and I send it to every City
23 Board and I send it to every elected official. I ask
24 for help in identifying sites that could be used for
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2 shelter. Some Council Members respond to me and I am
3 very appreciative to that response.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And I didn't respond. I
5 didn't respond because you wrote me a letter during a
6 pandemic. One second, when I need something from
7 you, I call you. I don't send you a letter, I call
8 you on the phone.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Call me up and have a
11 conversation. I don't want to hear this
12 Commissioner. My time is done. My time is up. My
13 time is up. I don't want to hear it. I know what
14 you are going to say. I don't want to hear it.
15 Thank you.

16 STEVEN BANKS: Okay. Then I -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I don't want to hear it.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, Commissioner.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I am like Bob Holden. I
20 don't want to hear it. If someone disagrees with
21 you, they are like Bob Holden. I don't want to hear
22 it. My time is up. Thank you.

23 STEVEN BANKS: For the record, we send a letter
24 to every Council Member.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I don't want to hear it.

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STEVEN BANKS: I have done that every year.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Your time is up too.

Commissioner, your time is up.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member, I am Chairing the hearing. Council Member, I am Chairing the hearing and Commissioner, say what you have to say and -

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: I don't want to hear. I know what he wants to say. I don't want to hear it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member Deutsch. I am Chairing the hearing. I am Chairing the hearing. Commissioner, go ahead.

STEVEN BANKS: Since the beginning of Turning the Tide, we have been sending an annual letter to Council Members asking for help in identifying sites that would work in their districts. Many Council Members have worked with us, some of them have been on this hearing and typically, when someone says, I don't want to shelter in that community, they say you didn't consult with me.

We have an open process for consultation and we are happy to identify those sites.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: When did you send me the letter?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Every year. We will give you
3 copies of every one of them.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, so I spoke to you
5 six and a half years ago. Six and a half years, I
6 have offered to visit every shelter with you.

7 STEVEN BANKS: Chair? Chair?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, that's unacceptable.
9 Now, you tell the Chair.

10 STEVEN BANKS: Chair, I am just going to leave it
11 at this.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay.

13 STEVEN BANKS: That we offered to Council Member
14 the opportunity to work with us. Some Council
15 Members have taken us up and some Council Members
16 have not taken us up.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And I have been one that
18 took you up because I reached out to you and I had to
19 meet the Mayor in the parking lot on six different
20 occasions -

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This is - okay, this is a
22 budget hearing and I have a lot of these are two
23 agencies in one year. So, I got to ask some HRA
24 questions. I got a lot that we got to get through.
25 This is a \$12.2 billion here.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, the Commissioner
3 could put 50 homeless people in his office with a
4 waterfront view. That's what he should do.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, okay, I am moving on.
6 Commissioner, I want to follow up on Council Member
7 Rosenthal's question about the DHS contracts. The
8 issue that I have heard in recent weeks is that these
9 late payments are - this isn't the same stuff that we
10 have been hearing you know, since the day I took over
11 as Chair of this Committee. Because there is always
12 contracting issues around DHS contracts as you said.
13 It's a lot of different contracts from a lot of
14 different eras. A lot of specifics. It's not cookie
15 cutter. I appreciate that.

16 What I have heard though is that there are
17 backlogs right now going back years. You know four
18 fiscal years and the concern that I have about this
19 is that I am concerned that MOCS and/or OMB is kind
20 of putting DHS providers at the back of the line you
21 know, because we have been rationing city funds to go
22 out the door because you know cash flow issues.

23 You know, we haven't gotten any, I mean maybe we
24 will now in coming weeks be getting state and local
25 aid but we have been strapped as a city and my

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2 concern really is that somebody made a decision
3 somewhere to deprioritize homeless services
4 providers. In terms of receiving funds for services
5 rendered under contracts.

6 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you for the question Chair.
7 Let me just sort of lay out some facts for you.
8 First of all, you are right about the context that
9 the city overall had cash flow challenges given all
10 the other things that are going on in the city. We
11 have gotten additional infusion of federal dollars,
12 which is enabling us to make these payments but let's
13 also understand what are the numbers that we are
14 dealing with. There is 40 COVID amendments that we
15 are committed to complete by the end of this month
16 and there are 36 pre-COVID amendments but there are
17 issues with each of them.

18 Some of them and I have been clear with this are
19 not going to process amendments unless they have got
20 a corrective action plan of certain conditions.
21 That's been something I have said publicly. That's
22 not all of them, those are some of them.

23 There are other issues in terms of the processing
24 of responsibility determinations. That is an
25 important part of the process for those pre-pandemic

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2 amendments. But I do think it is important to hear
3 and I have had a series of conversations with the
4 leadership of HSU, Homeless Services United. It's
5 important to hear what they are saying and so, the
6 registration is one issue but the payment of invoices
7 is the other issue. And I think as I answered to
8 Council Member Rosenthal, you are getting a birds eye
9 view of the invoices we've got. 258 in house on all
10 but 200 of them - 200 of them are all less than 60
11 days and are working their way through the process
12 period.

13 I think that the MOCS guidance that MOCS and OMB
14 put together the beginning of January of this year,
15 that provides for a more expedited review of invoices
16 is very helpful to both the providers and to us and
17 appreciated that support from OMB and from MOCS and
18 also has a provision that people should get their
19 invoices in on a monthly basis, instead of batching
20 them up. I think that will help the providers and it
21 will help us.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I appreciate that. I am just
23 - I am concerned about the invoices that are the ones
24 that are you know the outstanding one because you
25 know, the vast majority could be obviously within a

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2 month. But if there are big ones that are
3 outstanding, I mean, HSU did a survey of its
4 providers and we are talking about hundreds of
5 millions of dollars that's you know, that's a waiting
6 payment. I mean, these providers don't have the
7 ability to float all of that.

8 STEVEN BANKS: Right, we don't see the numbers in
9 the same way but I don't want to get in a fight with
10 HSU because I think we are trying to work through
11 this cooperatively.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

13 STEVEN BANKS: But I will give you examples of
14 the reasons why we can't process invoices. They are
15 common problems and we want to work with the
16 providers to address them.

17 So, changing - increasing salaries without
18 authorization when the invoice comes in. We can't
19 pay that invoice if it's got a different salary than
20 the salary is authorized. Lack of backup. Backup
21 doesn't match the invoice amount. The invoice says
22 X, the backup says something other than X. Missing
23 the allocation methodology for sites with shared
24 expenses. We have had Comptroller audits on that
25 issue.

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2 Invoicing staff who don't work at the particular
3 site. Inclusion of ineligible expenses, like sales
4 tax and staff meals. Invoicing amounts that don't
5 align with the approved budgets. Effectively using
6 the invoice process as a budget modification process.
7 The wrong time period crossing fiscal years.

8 These are not nefarious things that people are
9 doing.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, no understood.

11 STEVEN BANKS: But are the things we need to work
12 with the providers to fix because it prevents us from
13 paying.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you. I think that
15 what we are hearing is that that does not account for
16 everything and you know, as you know, these are
17 organizations - some of these organizations are large
18 organizations with Chief Financial Officers that
19 should be able to not make mishaps like that.
20 Because everything you just described are kind of
21 mistakes. I think the concern is that it's not
22 mistake based but that there is something larger
23 going on here.

24 STEVEN BANKS: Right but again, I want to go back
25 to what I said to Council Member Rosenthal and also

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2 to you. One, the volume is higher in the middle of
3 the pandemic. It's higher for them to give us
4 invoices but it is higher for us to process all the
5 amendments but we are at the end of processing the
6 COVID amendments this month.

7 Secondly, we did need additional cash. OMB has
8 provided us with that additional cash with the
9 federal dollars. But thirdly, you are left with this
10 invoice problem and I think that working with the
11 leadership of HSU, we have a good pathway forward.
12 So, you are right, I don't want to leave, I would not
13 want to leave you with the impression that it's only
14 this. It's a combination of these factors and I
15 think we have a solution to each of them.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I want to move on to
17 just HRA's role in combating poverty in the city.
18 So, HRA is the city's, as a social services agency,
19 provides vital support services and benefit programs,
20 the city's most vulnerable population.

21 Despite the considerable economic impact of the
22 pandemic, the agency's budget hasn't changed much
23 since the onset of COVID-19 but the need for social
24 services programs has increased. For example, the
25 number of clients on cash assistance SNAP and HRA

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2 administered Medicaid have all increased since the
3 onset. Does HRA's budget as of the preliminary plan
4 for Fiscal '22 reflect the current needs of low-
5 income residents in Fiscal '22 and the out years?

6 STEVEN BANKS: So, I think there is a couple of
7 parts of our budget and if I may, I would like to
8 sort of in the conversation walk through them.

9 One part of our budget is just the pass through
10 benefits. And as you know when somebody looks at you
11 know a \$10 billion budget, you think oh, my goodness,
12 that's all money for staff or all money for programs.
13 A significant portion of that has passed through
14 benefits for clients. And so, we have been able to
15 manage this dramatic increase in the numbers of
16 people receiving federal food stamps and the numbers
17 of people receiving state and federal cash assistance
18 in this period of time. And I know my good friend
19 and colleague Joe Burg[SP?] is going to talk about
20 later on the public part of this hearing about the
21 impact that SNAP benefits are making in terms of
22 alleviating poverty.

23 So, I think one of the key pieces that we focus
24 on here is making sure we can get people benefits to
25 address the gaps that they are experiencing at this

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2 time. One of the good things in fighting poverty is
3 several things that the various federal stimulus
4 bills have done, which is to enable payment to the
5 maximum benefit level for people that weren't getting
6 the maximum SNAP benefits and to enable the 15
7 percent increase or to implement the 15 percent
8 increase in SNAP benefits in addition to providing
9 enhanced access by eliminating interview requirements
10 and some of the documentation requirements.

11 So, in terms of fighting poverty, the ability to
12 access federal and state benefits for clients, I
13 think has been a crucial thing in this period and you
14 don't need to see that necessarily reflected in our
15 budget.

16 Again, as I said to Council Member Grodenchik,
17 the budget was proposed against the background where
18 there wasn't any federal or state aid to the agency
19 and we manage the increase by redeploying additional
20 staff in order to address that. Pre-pandemic and you
21 were supportive of this and I appreciate it. We
22 dramatically changed our employment services
23 engagement process in order to connect people to
24 employment training and education, as opposed to WEP,
25 which was you know we eliminated. Which was you

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2 know, when I think when I did my first hearing with
3 you. The question was, when are you going to get rid
4 of WEP? We did get rid of it.

5 So, we created a series of programs to connect
6 people to employment but obviously the bottom fell
7 out in terms of employment during the pandemic and we
8 haven't been able to run those job training programs.
9 And some of the savings reflected in the budget is
10 because of that outcome.

11 And so, we will obviously restart those programs
12 as soon as the city is in a position to do so. I
13 think that will help clients move off the caseload.
14 We are very focused on the changes that the city is
15 seeking in Albany in terms of the ability to require
16 hiring. In terms of contracting. We have the
17 ability to require hiring for a not-for-profit
18 contracting. We don't have a broader as a city
19 ability to hire more of our clients in broader
20 contracting that will be an important thing to put in
21 place.

22 So, you know we are at a point now between
23 preliminary and exec, where I think the conversation
24 that you are having with us now is very up front.
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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I am going to be jumping
3 around a little bit Commissioner.

4 STEVEN BANKS: Sure.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With shelter placements and
6 CITY FHEPS, City Funded Vouchers, the data that we
7 have coming out on the PMMR, I just want to read into
8 the record here. Compared to the first five months
9 of Fiscal '20, the first five months of Fiscal '21
10 have seen 4,911 fewer people exiting shelter with a
11 subsidized placement, a decrease of 34 percent.

12 Clients who have moved out of shelter with the CITY
13 FHEPS voucher has decreased by 2,551 individuals or
14 32 percent.

15 So, at a time right now where we are seeing that
16 there are more vacancies in New York City in
17 apartments than we have seen in recent years, why are
18 there fewer people in FY21 moving out of shelter with
19 subsidy? I mean, I understand that there is a
20 pandemic but that shouldn't necessarily be an
21 obstacle for - that shouldn't necessarily be an
22 obstacle for a placement you know, the city is still
23 renting out apartments. I am sorry, that wasn't from
24 the MMR, that was from the Monitors Report.

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STEVEN BANKS: I think that it is important to understand the vacancies that are available are at the moderate and above levels. They are moderate in high income levels. If you look at the vacancies in Manhattan. So, we are not seeing at the end of the market that we are at, not even pegging it to the State FHEPS or City FHEPS rent level but even at the Section 8 levels, we are not seeing vacancies at that level.

I think just as we are seeing fewer people come into shelter, in part at this time because people are still in a lockdown state, there is fewer people moving in the city. So, we are not seeing vacancies at the rates at the end of the market that you are looking for.

Having said that, during -

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Presumably fair market rent is in the end of - FMR is not a low end of the market. FMR is Fair Market Rent.

STEVEN BANKS: It is in terms of where the vacancies are occurring though. That was my point. If you look at moderate low end and high end, the vacancies are occurring at the higher end of the

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2 market. As opposed to moderate, from moderate to
3 low.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With that being said, why are
5 we seeing such a decrease, you know, a third fewer
6 placements than in FY – the first five months of
7 FY20?

8 STEVEN BANKS: The first five months of FY20 were
9 2019 into January. The first five months of FY19
10 were pre-pandemic. We had the ability to get
11 vacancies. We have created a whole way of clients
12 viewing apartments by viewing them virtually. That
13 takes longer. You know, getting landlords to be able
14 to show apartments. The process takes longer because
15 we are doing it virtually. But also, there are fewer
16 vacancies and so, comparing July 2019 through –

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You are saying there were
18 fewer vacancies than there were because I mean, you
19 and I have been talking about this for seven years
20 now about the number of vacancies in the market and
21 for seven years you said that the number of vacancies
22 is low. You know, very low in market but that's one
23 of the biggest challenges that the city faces is that
24 we don't have the vacancies in the rental market.

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Right and that's correct but my
3 point and I wanted to make sure that I didn't express
4 it intricately to you. The first five months of
5 Fiscal '20 include the five months of the year that
6 runs from July -

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: November.

8 STEVEN BANKS: Through November 2019. The City
9 of New York looked different in those five months
10 than July 2020 through November 2020. Don't forget
11 we opened schools and then we closed schools because
12 of the resurgence of the virus. I mean, some might
13 say the fact we have been able to move thousands of
14 people out even in the middle of the pandemic is a
15 tribute to the -

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, the explanation is
17 strictly COVID. That's a strictly COVID -

18 STEVEN BANKS: Yes, yes because I got to tell
19 you, the providers and our staff are out looking
20 every day for apartments and if we can find an
21 apartment and connect somebody to it, they can move
22 into it. We never shut that process down.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can any of the American
24 Rescue Plan Act funds be used to increase City FHEPS
25 voucher amounts?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: No, it doesn't appear so but there
3 appears to be other funding streams that might
4 provide rental assistance by increasing availability
5 of Section 8.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hmm, hmm.

7 STEVEN BANKS: The rescue funds both in the
8 initiative by the last congress and by the Biden
9 Administration is essentially a one-time payment
10 funds to for stall addictions which is critical to
11 continuing to make progress in driving down the
12 census number.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

14 STEVEN BANKS: People housed more importantly in
15 the census number. And I think that it's a tool to
16 stop evictions.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Let me ask about that then.
18 Well, first before that, do you have a cost estimate
19 to what you think it would cost to raise CITY FHEPS
20 to a Section 8 level?

21 STEVEN BANKS: I think we have provided
22 information to the Council on this that shows it's
23 not a question of the cost, the difference between
24 Section 8 and what a CITY FHEPS voucher you know
25 \$1,500 in change would be, \$1,600. It's the loss of

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2 the state dollars that drives up the cost. Because
3 if you make all move out CITY FHEPS rather than a
4 combination of CITY FHEPS, that's a really big cost.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know you are talking
6 about chips away from State FHEPS to City FHEPS.

7 STEVEN BANKS: That's the big driver of the cost.
8 That's why you don't get the - I mean, if you and I
9 just did a mathematical construct, if you can move
10 more people out won't that reduce the cost of
11 shelter? Yes, but then you have to factor in the
12 loss of the state reimbursement for the parallel
13 state program.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hmm, hmm but CITY FHEPS is
15 almost entirely CTL right?

16 STEVEN BANKS: Yes but if you make everybody now
17 getting State FHEPS -

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, no, I get it. I hear
19 that. I hear that. Make that into the response but
20 CITY FHEPS is CTL.

21 STEVEN BANKS: CITY FHEPS is CTL. But also
22 remember the cost savings is not all CTL either.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I know, I know.

24 STEVEN BANKS: We unfortunately can't capture the
25 federal and state dollars for city savings. We can

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2 only capture the city part of the shelter costs at
3 city savings and the rest of the costs are savings to
4 the state and the federal government. It's the
5 reason frankly why we -

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, unless we can repurpose
7 those funds in other ways towards city programs,
8 especially for families where -

9 STEVEN BANKS: Yeah, absolutely but you need
10 federal and state cooperation to do that. Again, not
11 to sound like a broken record, it's why I think the
12 State FHEPS increase is the path forward to
13 accomplish I think what you have been asking us
14 today.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it. Okay, moving onto
16 the indirect rate and hazard pay issues. These are
17 significant issues that we have been hearing from
18 providers about you know, this indirect rate issue
19 was I think a lot of providers had their legs cut out
20 from under them because they were - you know had
21 conditional approval to spend and budget for a
22 certain indirect rate and then, the administration
23 kind of, I believe came back realizing that they had
24 probably over committed themselves and went back and
25 reduced that indirect rate to a much lower

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2 percentage. And so, there are certain organizations
3 that are out hundreds of thousands of dollars after
4 the fact. This is across the human services sector,
5 not just DHS but it's a real problem.

6 STEVEN BANKS: Look, I think you know I
7 understand the challenges here and I think you also
8 understand that against the background of all the
9 challenges in the adopted '21 budget in June that the
10 roll back of the indirect rate was something that the
11 Council and the Administration agreed to among a
12 number of steps that were taken to try to address the
13 budget and obviously, we are going to work with OMB
14 and MOCS and the Council going forward to see what's
15 —

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I wouldn't really put the
17 onus on the Council 50/50 with the Administration.
18 The Administration told us they were doing this and
19 we didn't have much leverage to force them to not do
20 it.

21 So, there wasn't much that we could really do.
22 This was an administration initiative that they then
23 went back on. Again, it's not, this isn't DSS. This
24 is again, this is MOCS and OMB who you know shouldn't
25 make commitments that you can't live up to. Not you

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2 again but the city you know, I know that you don't do
3 that because you are studious not to make a limit
4 that you can't follow through on.

5 I feel that on the same way, I think it is very
6 important in public policy to do that. This
7 administration though, they did that exact thing with
8 this indirect rate debacle.

9 STEVEN BANKS: As I said, we are going to - the
10 Administration will certainly work with the Council
11 going forward on this. I only raise the issue of
12 what was going on last June to level set about you
13 know we didn't know what the city was going to be
14 able to do facing the budget holes that the city was
15 facing and going forward. And unfortunately the
16 Biden Administration has got the significant infusion
17 of dollars now.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to ask about hazard
19 pay. How has DSS approached the issue of hazard pay
20 for frontline workers, particularly within the not-
21 for-profit sector that serves the population that you
22 work with?

23 STEVEN BANKS: I mean, we were given guidance and
24 I know that you have seen it, about how the city -
25 it's not a DSS issue, it's how the city overall would

1
2 address the human services community in terms of
3 their increased needs during the pandemic and we gave
4 providers the ability to give us increased budgets.
5 One of the parameters was that hazard pay perse was
6 not something that could be done.

7 Don't forget that we have municipal workers also
8 under these same circumstances who have -

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There is a lot of cases, I
10 mean, workers are able to I mean, as you know, I mean
11 a lot of job centers and you know a lot of that work
12 has gone remote. There are you know since we rely so
13 heavily on the not-for-profit sector particularly
14 within DHS, you know there's no, you can't work
15 remotely if you are running a shelter. You know, if
16 you are providing food and cleaning services, that
17 can't be done remotely at all.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Right, about 30 percent of our
19 staff worked through the pandemic. And so, I
20 understand what our staff has gone through. I
21 understand what not-for-profit staff has gone
22 through. And in the context of the overall
23 administration's approach to the not-for-profit
24 sector, we provided the funds that we were able to
25 provide to them. And again, I would say this,

1
2 whenever you give me the opportunity to say it, that
3 our frontline staff at the Department of Social
4 Services and frontline staff and the not-for-profit
5 community has certainly done extraordinary work when
6 New Yorkers needed them more than ever and they are
7 continuing to do it today.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think that they should both
9 get hazard pay. How much has been distributed among
10 DHS contracts or DSS contracts in FY21?

11 STEVEN BANKS: I will have to get back to you
12 with that specific number. I thought you were going
13 to ask me that question, I just don't have it at the
14 tip of my tongue.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Moving over to Get Food for a
16 second.

17 STEVEN BANKS: Yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, it is you know,
19 this was Get Food was stood up in the middle of a
20 crisis in a matter of weeks. It was an amazing
21 accomplishment, you know, something that could
22 probably never be replicated or knock on wood will
23 never have to be replicated again. Okay, I am under
24 no allusions that the reason why it was in the
25 Department of Sanitation had to do with personnel.

1
2 That it happened to be that the Sanitation
3 Commissioner was also doubling as the foods are
4 during the pandemic and you know, and she has got a
5 good reputation and well deserved for being able to
6 get things going quickly and handle large complicated
7 systems well.

8 She is no longer with the administration. She is
9 off running for Mayor. Why is Get Food still with
10 DSNY and shouldn't that be moved over to HRA, which
11 is a much more appropriate agency to be administering
12 food distribution because you have experience doing
13 that?

14 STEVEN BANKS: Understood, one of the issues when
15 Commissioner Garcia was here and in her role, was
16 they had the infrastructure to stand up the processes
17 that needed to get stood up at a period of time when
18 we were standing up. All the processes that I
19 testified to during the hearing. And so, the fact
20 that the infrastructure of Department of Sanitation
21 could be used for this purpose I think is a credit to
22 the department, credit to the city that we were able
23 to look beyond our traditional infrastructure.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, totally but it's not like
25 a wise long-term you know, it's not really like a

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2 seemingly - there is not rational along for computing
3 that configuration.

4 STEVEN BANKS: It was stood up in an emergency
5 and using the existing infrastructure and it's
6 certainly a conversation that we will be having going
7 forward about what the best way forward for that
8 program.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are these conversations
10 happening right now?

11 STEVEN BANKS: I haven't been involved in any
12 recent conversations but there are conversations that
13 go on about what's the best path forward for the
14 program.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I strongly want to
16 advocate that you know, if this is a program that we
17 are committed to keeping going for a while, it's so
18 far outside of the core mission of DSNY that again, I
19 make allowances for you know Katheryn Garcia as the
20 Food Czar and as the Sanitation Commissioner and as
21 the NYCHA Chair and as like the gazillion hats that
22 feed more when with the administration but it's just
23 not a wise long-term idea.

24

25

1
2 So, okay, I am going to move over to some HRA
3 issues here. On rent arrears, how many rent arrears
4 grant applications are currently being processed?

5 STEVEN BANKS: We are getting about 1,000 a week
6 roughly, which is roughly half of what we typically
7 get.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How are people accessing
9 this? Through phone, in person or Access HRA?

10 STEVEN BANKS: Through Access HRA or as a result
11 of the settlements that are coming out of the virtual
12 court conferences. Those had been on hold in January
13 and February because of the important state
14 legislation. They are going to begin again. So,
15 renters requests are coming to us from those two
16 different places.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, sorry, they are coming
18 from where?

19 STEVEN BANKS: They come from clients through
20 Access HRA or they could walk in through one of the
21 centers that's open or they are also coming out of
22 the settlement process in the housing court cases
23 that had been continuing until the state legislation
24 with the - they essentially froze everything in terms
25

1
2 of court activity in January and February. That's
3 now starting again.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, what about the phone
5 system?

6 STEVEN BANKS: You could call somebody if you
7 can't use technology and do an application over the
8 phone. We got away from the federal and state
9 government to waive the signature requirement because
10 remember there is a federal and state requirement
11 that someone sign an application?

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

13 STEVEN BANKS: And we had authority to waive that
14 but I have to say -

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you be a little bit more
16 specific about who to call to call somebody? Who
17 should we call?

18 STEVEN BANKS: I apologize. I didn't mean to say
19 it that way. Info, if you call Info Line, you will
20 be connected with somebody who can do that work.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Somebody can call Info line
22 and even if they do have access to technology, they
23 could say, I want to make an application for an
24 emergency renters rent?

1
2 STEVEN BANKS: Honestly, under the emergency
3 circumstances that we are operating under, we really
4 want to limit that because that's the terms of our
5 waiver. That is the terms of our waiver to people
6 who have challenges using technology. Because we
7 don't have the ability to simply waive the signature
8 requirement for everybody.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: A lot of people have problems
10 using technology. I realize that isn't exactly what
11 you want but some people have a right to do it,
12 right?

13 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member, no, actually they
14 don't. We have to meet the terms of the waiver which
15 gives us the ability to waive the signature for
16 someone that has challenges to that technology. Your
17 question is broader but if someone has technology and
18 they just don't want to do it, that isn't within the
19 terms of the waiver that we got.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Your waiver applies to like a
21 general application, not individuals right?

22 STEVEN BANKS: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you required to ask
24 somebody; do you have trouble with technology? And
25 if they say, I don't really have that much trouble

1
2 with technology, they can't take the application over
3 the phone? It's like -

4 STEVEN BANKS: Let me try to answer your question
5 this way. We had to go to the mat to get this
6 signature waiver approved.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah and you don't want to
8 mess it up by having too many people apply at one
9 time.

10 STEVEN BANKS: I think the people that actually
11 can't use technology, who might be listening to this
12 hearing, we would be doing them a disservice if we
13 convey to people that can use technology to try to
14 take advantage, I don't mean advantage in a bad way.
15 To try to get access to us through the waiver that we
16 got specifically for people who can't use technology.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Or have challenges.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many phone applications
20 are you currently taking right now?

21 STEVEN BANKS: I will have to get you that
22 number.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay because this is something
24 I hear a lot. I hear a lot, a lot, a lot that the
25 systems, the phone systems are so vital for HRA

1
2 clients and you know, technology is a blessing and a
3 curse. It can make things very easy and very
4 expedited when it is working well but it is – there
5 is no – you can't interact with a computer. I mean,
6 there is no room for error. There are a lot of
7 people and this is just a broader issue around
8 generations that if you started using a computer when
9 you were 40-years-old, in 1990-95, like that is a
10 huge, huge problem. It's just like speaking a
11 language or like playing music.

12 Like, if you learn younger, you are able to do
13 it, it's a language – it's a skill that you acquire
14 at a young age but if you try doing it when you are
15 older, it is a real problem. So, I just really,
16 really, really want to emphasize. Actually, I want
17 to ask, can you give me an approximate number of how
18 many a week are being taken over the phone? 100?
19 200? 50? 25?

20 STEVEN BANKS: I don't want to guess. Let's get
21 you the number but in the context of the question you
22 are asking, we fought hard pre-pandemic to get the
23 federal and state waiver to allow SNAP applications
24 to be submitted online and by telephone and the
25 number of people in our waiting rooms dramatically

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2 dropped because we gave clients the option of doing
3 that.

4 And we want the same thing for our cash
5 assistance clients to give them the option to not
6 have to come into an office. We understand that
7 people still want to come into offices and that's why
8 we kept offices open during the pandemic for people
9 who still wanted to come into offices. Even with all
10 the concerns about keeping staff and clients safe.
11 So, I am not disputing.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yet phones are a little bit
13 different. Phones are different. The same issues
14 come up with vaccinations. You know, we see this
15 around the country. This is not unique to New York.
16 It's around the country that vaccinations – this is
17 why, this is why like, you know, they have now got to
18 figure out how to like do mobile vaccinations you
19 know because there are seniors that just don't use
20 the computers and listen, we don't want them going
21 into – we don't want senior citizens going in waiting
22 in line at an HRA center. But by all means, pick up
23 the phone. They know how to use the phone.

24 Listen, I was in a meeting the other day with
25 Heights and Hills and I asked them, you know they

1
2 have a case management program for seniors through
3 DFTA and I asked Heights and Hills, how are you
4 reaching – they have a I don't know, 1,500 or 2,000
5 seniors that they have case management services with
6 and I was like, how are you reaching your seniors?

7 Because like, you know, it's during the middle of
8 a pandemic. You going out and knocking on the door?
9 Probably not. You know we are picking up the phone.
10 We are making a lot of phone calls. We are making a
11 lot of calls.

12 Because that's how you reach senior citizens in
13 this day and age right now when you can't see them in
14 person and they can't go over to an HRA job center
15 because it's dangerous. You know, they have got to
16 pick up the phone. They need to – so, my question is
17 okay, so I am really focused – I want to focus on
18 this phone thing. How are you, what is the staffing
19 for HRA phone system Info Line? What metrics are you
20 using in terms of like wait times? Number of dropped
21 calls? Things like that. I mean are there quality?
22 How often are you reviewing you know like the kind
23 customer service aspect of the Info line and what are
24 you doing about it to make it better?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: So, constantly. So, here is three
3 things that we have done recently. One, I think you
4 would have to agree with the following. That the
5 system that we had at Info Line was never
6 contemplated that we would have a pandemic like this.

7 So, we upgraded the technology to enable workers
8 to take calls in their homes, so that we didn't - we
9 weren't going to be limited by the number of staff
10 that could come into our offices. We built that
11 technology. We then upgraded the technology to
12 expand the number of calls that could be taken. We
13 recently trained and redeployed 50 extra workers to
14 Info Line and we are about to deploy another hundred.
15 So, we are, as we can repurpose staff, we are
16 redeploying staff to be able to manage the calls.

17 In the midst of this though, let's also remember
18 we are a year in and the systems that we have managed
19 historic increases in both cash and snap in order to
20 address people's needs. I am acutely aware however,
21 of the challenges that you are describing. I got a
22 father that just turned 100.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Mazel tov.

24 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you. So, trust me.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: He has his vaccine, I hope.

1
2 STEVEN BANKS: He has some challenges which we
3 shouldn't get into here. My mother who is 96 got
4 hers.

5 So, I am acutely aware of these challenges, which
6 is frankly the reason why we went to bat against the
7 Trump Administration to get that signature waiver in
8 order to be able to deal with individuals like that
9 and it's the reason why we have upgraded technology
10 and added and trained more staff to be able to answer
11 the calls that we have got.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The upgrade isn't scheduled
13 until the fall, does the 311 have the capacity to
14 take some of these calls or lend technical capacity?

15 STEVEN BANKS: No, the full upgrade isn't until
16 that point and time. But we were able to add more
17 capacity to manage calls along the way and we are
18 continuing to look for more ways to manage the calls.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now, what if somebody misses
20 a call that I am hearing that the phone numbers that
21 they are calling from, that there is no way for a
22 client to call the number back. They come up as an
23 unidentified number. So, HRA phones are not
24 receiving calls.

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2 STEVEN BANKS: So, those are two different
3 processes that you are talking about. Info Line is
4 the process in which you want to call and say, I need
5 help. Tell me how do I get help. What's going on in
6 my case? And so forth. That's Info Line. We got
7 the waiver to enable telephone interviews and the
8 system that we have is with the staff we have; people
9 are making calls.

10 We have also deployed additional staff to do
11 follow up calls with people who haven't responded.
12 The problem that we have is that the telephone
13 vendors apparently, most, many of them but not all of
14 them, are blocking that the call is coming from HRA
15 and that I know causes some confusion for people. We
16 have tried to communicate out to the community what
17 numbers to look for when people have the calls coming
18 from us and we have been able to minimize the number
19 of people that are missing our calls. We are putting
20 new processes in place to follow up on missed calls.
21 But again, we have -

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But there is no way to
23 receive a call from a client.

24 STEVEN BANKS: You can make a call to Info Line
25 but the workers, the staff, who are doing the

1
2 interviews are not the Info Line staff. They are
3 staff that are in their homes trying to help people
4 and so, we created a way for that staff to be able to
5 make phone calls from their homes to clients.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many calls right now can
7 Info Line handle an hour?

8 STEVEN BANKS: It's not really, it's not measured
9 that way but we would be happy to give you a briefing
10 on Info Line offline.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I strongly encourage
12 you by the way to be in conversations with Katie
13 Kelleher at Legal Aid, who I know you know because
14 you know, she has done a lot of work and I
15 communicate with her regularly about these issues.
16 And so, you know she is very focused on this. I
17 strongly encourage you guys to be in conversations on
18 a policy level outside of any kind of litigation if
19 you can, to speak to these issues.

20 This pandemic has illustrated so clearly the need
21 for functional phone system communication. Not
22 everything can be done technologically. Just all you
23 need to do is look at the disparity in vaccine
24 distribution to show that you know not everything is
25 you know, not everybody has access to technology.

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2 Not everybody is a tech wiz. You know and a lot of
3 it is generational. You know, this is about older
4 people just frankly not having — I mean I mentioned
5 this to Heights and Hills the other day. An
6 organization like OATS, that does older adults
7 technology, like what an amazing organization to have
8 at this time in New York City. Because they foresaw
9 that you know at a certain point, seniors are going
10 to need these skills but it is a lot harder to teach
11 a senior how to utilize various technology
12 apparatuses than somebody who grew up with them. And
13 it is just, it is so essential that we have phone
14 systems that are functional and that are user
15 friendly.

16 STEVEN BANKS: I couldn't agree with you more.
17 Two things, I couldn't agree with you more about
18 Katie Kelleher who I worked with for many years at
19 Legal Aid. Anne Marie Scalia who is someone who I
20 hired from Legal Aid, who is the Deputy Chief Legal
21 Officer in our agency. Conducts work groups, regular
22 calls with Katie Kelleher and we value her input and
23 the input of everybody.

24 I want to just pick up on one thing you focused
25 though, pre-pandemic, we actually had the foresight

1
2 to plan for the future we would need a different
3 phone approach for client services and we didn't just
4 during the pandemic decide to build this one number
5 system. This is something that predated the
6 pandemic. Unfortunately to build out this entire new
7 system will not be completed until towards the end of
8 the year. But that will stand us in good stead for
9 the future because it will help us keep seniors at
10 home and not have to come to offices with or without
11 a pandemic by giving people more ready access to
12 human beings on the other side of a phone without
13 having to go to an office. And our vision pre-
14 pandemic and it's become even more urgent given the
15 pandemic, is to create the same options for clients
16 to access our services that you and I have for doing
17 banking, which is to avoid having to have to go into
18 an office and wait in office.

19 The success we have had with SNAP, shows that it
20 can work for clients but you are absolutely right in
21 terms of building a better telephone access system
22 and that's why we started doing that before the
23 pandemic.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I forgot my password to my
25 bank account the other day and it said call us. It

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2 said contact us and I spent like 45 minutes trying to
3 call my bank to retrieve my password because I got
4 locked out of the app and I didn't know how to do it
5 and I had to call somebody and I am 40-years-old. I
6 grew up with technology.

7 So, I am going to turn it over to Vanessa Gibson
8 for questions and then I got a few more after that.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Council Member.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, I am unmuted. Good
11 afternoon everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you Chair
12 Levin. I am sorry I missed a lot of the hearing but
13 I am catching up. Thank you Commissioner Banks and
14 everyone at DSS and HRA, DHS. Thank you for the work
15 you have done. Over the past year, it has been
16 extremely challenging for all of us and I appreciate
17 all of the work that we have collectively done
18 together.

19 So, I just had a couple of questions and Chair
20 Levin talked a little bit about one of the questions
21 I wanted to ask. And that is, since in my district
22 in the Bronx, my district office is right next to an
23 HRA center that has been closed during the pandemic.

24 So, we have been getting some of those concerns
25 about the call time, the wait time and not being able

1
2 to return phone calls. Everyone is working on cell
3 phones right? No one really has landlines anymore
4 and so, making sure that there is a process for
5 people to be able to call back if there is
6 information and paperwork that is necessary. I just
7 want to make sure that we are doing that.

8 So, do you feel that a year later we are in a
9 good place where cash assistance cases, SNAP
10 applications, although they have been increased by
11 the pandemic, do we have a good handle on the volume
12 of cases we are getting with the staff that you have
13 today?

14 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you for the question and
15 thank you for being situated right beside that
16 center. Pre-pandemic it was a great benefit to us
17 because we worked together in solving many cases.

18 Look, I think we were able to manage this
19 historic increase in both cash and SNAP because we
20 redeployed at the height of it 1,300 DSS and HRA
21 staff to be able to handle the volume. And we are
22 going to continue to evaluate what our needs are as
23 we go forward but the ability to redeploy that staff
24 and create technology for that staff to be able to
25 provide the services is the way we move forward.

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2 I think as the Chair was asking me, the upgrade
3 of our overall telephone systems that is occurring
4 later in the year, I think will improve services with
5 our without a pandemic. I mean there is no question
6 before the pandemic, we foresaw the need to do this
7 with this one number approach. Where people can just
8 call one place and get the access that they need.
9 That will I think go a long way towards addressing
10 some of the issues that you and I have talked about
11 and that the Chair was asking about.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, so should we expect
13 in this budget to see any additional cost on
14 technology, telecommunication upgrades and what about
15 our eligibility specialists. I know we talked about
16 that before. I do understand that there was a
17 request for an increase on the staffing side but how
18 are we doing with the eligibility specialists?

19 STEVEN BANKS: So, in terms of technology, the
20 project for the technology upgrade predated the
21 pandemic and it's in our capital plan. So, it's not
22 a new need. It was something we planned to do before
23 the pandemic and it was always going to be a
24 multiyear project. Unfortunately, it's going to be
25 completed this year.

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2 In terms of staffing, we will have to evaluate as
3 we go forward. All of the DC37 Locals and Ann
4 Garitto[SP?] and certainly tremendous leadership and
5 Anthony Wells and Eddie Rodriguez who we appreciate
6 their partnership through this period. In
7 flexibility in terms of redeploying staff in order to
8 meet the need and I think we will have to evaluate
9 what the caseload is going to be going forward in
10 terms of what additional needs there may or may not
11 be in terms of the future state.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Okay, during the pandemic
13 when we announced the PEBT program, very successful.
14 I was able to join Hunger Free America and open up a
15 new office in the Bronx that would handle all of the
16 SNAP cases and really help constituents navigate the
17 process. PEBT was very successful and I want to ask
18 about the EFAP program. I see in your testimony;
19 we've served millions of meals across the city. We
20 worked closely with Kate McKinsey, the Mayor's Office
21 of Food Policy and we have seen longer lines at food
22 pantries and soup kitchens like never before. The
23 need is so great, we worked with the administration
24 last year to expedite about \$25 million of funding
25 for our pantries and soup kitchens so they could have

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2 added capacity. We are feeding more families.
3 Children are home. They are eating more. Food costs
4 more. There is just added costs all over. So, I am
5 wondering what it looks like now in terms of food
6 access right? Whether it's the Get Food NYC program,
7 while I know that's separate but it's very relative.
8 Are we going to be able to provide more support for
9 our Food Bank, City Harvest, Hunger Free, all of the
10 different organizations that will ultimately funnel
11 food to our pantries and soup kitchens?

12 STEVEN BANKS: So, a lot of different parts of
13 the question. Really important topics.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Yes, food, food.

15 STEVEN BANKS: Food and fighting hunger. So, the
16 pandemic EBT of course was a state program. The
17 state was authorize to run and I appreciate your work
18 and obviously the work of Hunger Free America to make
19 that a successful initiative. We provided a lot of
20 information to people who are coming to us even
21 though it was a state program.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 STEVEN BANKS: In terms of you know one of the
24 key things to focus on. You know the 15 percent
25 increase in SNAP benefits in the recent rescue plan

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2 and the ability to provide the maximum benefit to
3 households that weren't receiving the maximum
4 benefit, those are all federal initiatives that are
5 helping us fight hunger here in New York City.
6 Because the dollars that are coming in on the federal
7 level to increase SNAP. Benefits increase SNAP
8 access are clearly helping us fight hunger but there
9 are still people that can access SNAP for various
10 federal reasons. I think the work that Hunger Free
11 does to put in a pitch for them is important in terms
12 of outreach access to connect people to benefits.
13 But on the city side, you know we have looked at both
14 EFAP and P-thread the sort of food reserve. It was
15 originally started and I appreciate your focus in our
16 testimony about all the additional pounds that have
17 been provided in terms of EFAP.

18 We distributed almost 15 million pounds in FY20
19 and from literally from the pandemic period, March
20 2020 through December 2020, we distributed you know
21 \$15 million in that period alone. We funded 55
22 programs, new programs through EFAP, as a result of
23 the additional money and we focused on funding in the
24 racial inclusion of equity neighborhoods and we
25 funded ten new EFAP programs in those zip codes. We

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2 funded seven CUNY food pantries and we are looking
3 for additional partnerships with nontraditional
4 partners. P-FRED, which as I said was set up as when
5 we usually deal with a supply chain issue has become
6 a sort of a fresh food initiative and also now staple
7 food as well. And a shelf stables that is and so, we
8 have been pushing out those pounds of food to the
9 food pantries in our network as well.

10 So, it's not just the dollars in terms of EFAP,
11 it's now the ability through P-FRED to deliver food.
12 And as I said to Council Member Grodenchik, we will
13 keep looking at what is needed in the coming weeks
14 and months and work with the Council as we always
15 have.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much and I
17 know my time is up and I also want to recognize that
18 we have organizations like Coalition for the Homeless
19 that are providing food for homeless individuals as
20 well. They have a mobile unit that comes in the
21 Bronx and has several different stops every night and
22 it feeds people and I realize because I saw it
23 myself. They feed not just homeless individuals but
24 they feed local residence too. And so, I want to
25 recognize a lot of those partners that are doing this

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work in some challenging situations. I'd like to talk offline if we can about the cluster housing phasing out. And then if you could just provide us with an update on the Right to Counsel work. We know there are about several thousand evictions that are pending and I know that you and the Office of Civil Justice Jordan Dressler have been doing a lot of work reaching out to these families that many of whom have fallen behind in rent.

We have to do everything possible to protect their ability to stay in their homes. We don't want them to become homeless. We want them to remain stable and everything we can do now while the moratorium is in place, we absolutely have to do. So, please know that we are a partner with you on expanding universal Right to Counsel. Making sure that every household eligible has access to a free lawyer facing eviction.

STEVEN BANKS: Thank you. Just to quickly answer you though. In terms of clusters, we are out of 75 percent of them. We are on target to get out of all of them including additional conversions that are taking place that we have spoken about.

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2 In terms of access to counsel Right to Counsel,
3 we have been able to provide counsel to tenants in
4 the virtual conferences. So, now we have virtual
5 full implementation of it now given the fact that the
6 Housing Court is now handling many fewer cases per
7 day because it's virtual as opposed to pre-pandemic.

8 So, working with our Office of Civil Justice
9 under Jordan's leadership, we have been able to work
10 with the providers in the Housing Court to make sure
11 that every tenant has access to counsel now. We were
12 going to go into the last year of implementation
13 anyway, so there is not zip code limitation. There
14 is no immigration status limitation and we have been
15 granting waivers with respect to income. And so, in
16 fact, about 14 percent of the tenants in those
17 conferences have been, where they have gotten lawyers
18 have been above 200 percent of poverty given the fact
19 that we want to keep people in their homes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so much. Thank
21 you Commissioner. Thank you Chair for indulging me
22 the extra time. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council Member
24 Gibson. Okay, I want to get back - I realize that we
25 are running pretty late on public testimony. So, I

1
2 will kind of do a lightening round here Commissioner
3 Banks.

4 What is the agencies plan for reopening SNAP and
5 Public Assistance centers that have been closed for
6 the pandemic?

7 STEVEN BANKS: I am only hesitating in answering
8 because it is not a lightening round answer.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

10 STEVEN BANKS: I was trying to think of maybe I
11 will give a yes or no.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It doesn't have to be a
13 lightening round. I appreciate the public's
14 patience.

15 STEVEN BANKS: So, for this one, it's important.
16 Look, we are going to be guided by the science and
17 the reason why we were able to get all the waivers
18 that we got, that we think are greatly benefiting
19 clients to eliminate the kinds of adverse actions we
20 otherwise would have had to take, is because of the
21 challenges of the social distancing in a center type
22 setting. And so, we kept a limited number of centers
23 open for people that absolutely needed to come in and
24 will be guided by the status of our waivers and what
25 the science is in terms of being able to reopen.

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2 But unlike other kinds of entities, like a
3 restaurant can say they are only going to let in a
4 certain percentage of people but we can't say at a
5 center that we are only going to let in a certain
6 percentage of people.

7 So, we will work with our city partners in the
8 health agencies, Health + Hospitals and Department of
9 Health and Mental Hygiene as well as the state to
10 determine what's the best way to do this. That's
11 different than the Mayor's focus on being able to
12 bring back staff. That's a very different question
13 than how we are going to operate centers beyond the
14 ones we have got to open in the current environment.

15 Obviously, [INAUDIBLE 4:15:26].

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I am actually, I am
17 talking about kind of longer term.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Oh, I am sorry.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And once you know, if by the
20 fall, like let me put it this way, when restaurants
21 are going to be open at full capacity at some point
22 in the future —

23 STEVEN BANKS: With nonsocial distancing, that's
24 the hypothetical? No social distancing?

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, yeah, I mean you know when we have case numbers due to the between the vaccine and heard immunity that we have you know, case numbers that are low. You know, hopefully by the end of this year, is my hope. I mean, that's what their - are centers going to be closed permanently? I guess that's the way to ask it. Are there any centers that are going to be closed permanently.

STEVEN BANKS: Well, there, I mean as we said in our annual audit report to the Council, there are centers which we are opening in places where there is a greater need and there are centers which we are phasing out where there is less of a need because we don't want to be stuck with a footprint about how the agency looked you know 20 years ago when it rented space.

So, I think we have been very clear. We are opening a new center in East Broadway Junction for example. We are closing the two, the SNAP and the Coney Island Center in Coney Island and opening one new building there. So, there are changes that are happening. I don't want to mislead you as we lay out in the audit documents that there are changes

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2 happening across the city based upon usage. We are
3 expanding 16th Street because we can't stay in 14th
4 Street anymore because of lease issues.

5 So, there are changes but if your question is are
6 we intending to keep operating with only one or two
7 centers per borough because that's how we operated
8 during the pandemic. No, the answer is no.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And are you looking to reduce
10 your physical footprint?

11 STEVEN BANKS: Again, as we have laid out, our
12 physical footprint will be reducing because if we are
13 already in 16th Street, we can't continue to lease at
14 14th Street and 16th Street is becoming bigger. We
15 are going to have one less center or similarly in
16 Coney Island, before closing two centers and
17 consolidating them into one in Coney Island, we are
18 going to have one less center.

19 Or you know, I can keep giving you examples.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I know. I understand,
21 I understand but you understand my concern. My
22 concern is that we will be using the pandemic as an
23 opportunity to further reduce in person
24 opportunities.

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STEVEN BANKS: We had a plan pre-pandemic that we've laid out. That continues to be our plan but on the other hand, if we get the cash assistance labor and we can keep all of our centers at 50 percent walking capacity, that's going to be a very different HRA than any of us have ever experienced. Because we found in our SNAP centers, only the waiting room was half full and that was much better client experience and we want that for cash assistance too.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, jumping over to SNAP. There is some reporting bills that HRA complies with that show the number of SNAP cases that are closed during certain reporting periods. What they are showing is like for the last four quarters for example, that the number, the reporting shows the number of cases that are closed. It does not show the denominator of that equation of how many cases were up for recertification.

So, is that something that you can provide for us in addition to the actual number of cases that were closed? The number of cases during that same timeframe that were up for recertification?

STEVEN BANKS: We will have to work with you exactly what your request is. At a top line, it

1
2 seems reasonable. I am not sure that we don't
3 already provide it to you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

5 STEVEN BANKS: But you know, if the legislation
6 that sets forth the reporting requirements that we
7 are complying with you know missed a certain - we
8 will work with you.

9 But I want to also say too one thing. If you are
10 reviewing those reports, you might notice one thing.
11 When we got the waiver to eliminate - to push all
12 recertifications out, you would have seen a dramatic
13 decrease in recertification closings. And then there
14 was a period of time where we could not get the
15 extension.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, those numbers would have
17 gone up dramatically.

18 STEVEN BANKS: Right, so in late August and
19 September, we were pushing very hard with both the
20 Trump Administration and the State was very
21 supportive. We were unsuccessful and then
22 ultimately we were able to get the recertifications
23 pushed out again. So, you will see some variations
24 over the course of the -
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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure, sure and that's a
3 function - that makes sense.

4 The New York Times recently reported about an
5 increase in the number of sweeps that DHS does for
6 people that are on the street. Sweeps or AKA
7 cleanups, you know they are kind of the same thing.
8 So, can you speak to that report and those data
9 points?

10 STEVEN BANKS: Yes but I do think that there is a
11 distinction but let me just answer your question.

12 So, the cleanups that the Times reported on that
13 were based upon a request that we had answered, is
14 information that is collected from multiple city
15 agencies about street cleanups. Parks, sanitation
16 for example and those are generated by 311 complaints
17 about street conditions. The role of the Department
18 of Homeless Services is to go out and try to offer
19 help to people before other city agencies are
20 involved in cleaning up a street condition.

21 We feel our role is really important. To try to
22 encourage people to come inside and to offer them
23 help and then during a time when a street condition
24 is being cleaned up, our role is to continue to be
25 there and continue to offer help to people.

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2 I believe that data showed, as reported that the
3 number of cleanups increased between 2019 and 2020
4 and that's a reflection of changes in 311 complaints.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 311 driven?

6 STEVEN BANKS: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, that's you are saying
8 that those are cleanups? Those aren't necessarily
9 individuals whose belongings were removed?

10 STEVEN BANKS: Again, I want to be careful that
11 you are not drawing the wrong conclusion. There
12 could have been a person at every one of those
13 situations or not.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But that's not tracked then?

15 STEVEN BANKS: Our response - I am sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I will just tell you; I was
17 out yesterday with Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater in
18 my district and we were walking up and down under the
19 BQE and there were places where you know, there were
20 tents where people were sleeping and there were areas
21 of refuse.

22 You know, I draw some distinction between those
23 two things. And so, you know but my question is, are
24 you tracking whether they go out and they are
25 removing you know, they are sweeping out somebodies,

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2 like Erin can tell you that like we saw one in kind
3 of encampment pretty well maintained and it turns out
4 that these were day laborers that you know, had lost
5 their housing. And so, this is where they were
6 getting up and going to work every day actually.

7 STEVEN BANKS: But I think in this city and I
8 think you would have to agree with me, we would be
9 better off doing everything we can to get those
10 people into one of our stabilization beds in a
11 commercial hotel right now. Rather than leaving them
12 to sleep under the BQE.

13 A little further along where you were and part of
14 this overall effort, the State Department of
15 Transportation is cleaning out an area under there
16 which is not an appropriate place for people to be
17 living. And so, we see our role as trying to
18 persuade people to come into commercial hotel rooms
19 in stabilization beds settings that we set up and
20 those day laborers should be inside, not living in a
21 tent under the BQE.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But then are we tracking
23 whether - so okay, if somebodys bed is being swept
24 for example or tempt or whatever, are we tracking

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2 then whether that person is getting housed through
3 DHS?

4 STEVEN BANKS: Look, we have a by name list as I
5 said to Council Member Holden. He didn't want to
6 hear it from me. It can take months to persuade
7 someone to come inside. We have the names of
8 everybody we are trying to persuade to come inside
9 and obviously our track record is ultimately a
10 generally successful one if more than 4,000 people
11 have come inside and remained inside since 2016 but I
12 am, my heart breaks as you are describing people who
13 are day laborers under that area where the State
14 Department of Transportation is cleaning it up.

15 I want to bring them inside and give them a place
16 to stay tonight.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, yeah, I mean, do you
18 have an accurate count of how many people right now?
19 Do you have data coming out of this year's headcount?
20 Do you know how many people are on the streets?

21 STEVEN BANKS: It takes a while to analyze it but
22 I do think that by name list established by the
23 Espinal legislation is actually the best measure.
24 Because it reflects the work of the not-for-profits
25 every day.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And has that gone up?

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Because I hear you know, according to my Twitter feed

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you know, homelessness has exploded for you know the

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tenth time in the last eight years but are you seeing

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an increase based on that list of people on the

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streets? So, people with open cases with your

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providers?

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STEVEN BANKS: No, we are not and in part it's

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because we have got more tools for our not-for-profit

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providers. Adding 1,200 safe haven or stabilization

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beds is providing a resource to help bring people

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inside.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Agreed. So, what people are

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saying to me from you know, the upper west side that

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they have never seen the number of homeless people on

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the street in Manhattan ever you know, anywhere near

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this and things are leaving New York in droves

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because they can't - because the city has gone down

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the tubes. It's the battle days. Helen is, I see

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Helen here that that is not accurate as the agency

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head? You are not seeing the city going down the

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toilet?

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STEVEN BANKS: I think that there is a lot of

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things that are said that don't reflect facts. The

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2 conversation we had at the beginning of the hearing
3 about the numbers of people in DHS shelters, leave
4 aside whether or not you should count HASA and -

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I am talking about people on
6 the street. I am really talking about people on the
7 street here. That's what I get. I hear there are
8 more people on the street than they have ever seen
9 before and I did ask actually my colleagues at one of
10 the social - you know one of the street outreach
11 providers, you know whether they are seeing an
12 increase. They said, yeah, things are kind of you
13 know, we are seeing some increases but are you seeing
14 in the list that you have, that by name list, are you
15 seeing an increase in individuals on the street with
16 cases?

17 STEVEN BANKS: Look, we see fluctuations but not
18 a dramatic increase and I am going to leave
19 evaluating the upper west side to my good friend and
20 Council Member Rosenthal on that point.

21 But I want to also make a different point. Which
22 is, whether you are experiencing homelessness or you
23 are a New Yorker who is encountering someone
24 experiencing homelessness. It's not about the
25 numbers, it's about the individuals and that's the -

1
2 that was the message of Home Stat and the reason why
3 we are succeeding in bringing people in. Is we are
4 not getting caught up in are there more? Are there
5 less? How many are there? We are focusing on each
6 person as an individual and bringing them and helping
7 them come on a pathway off the streets.

8 There is also an excellent study by a Columbia
9 professor Dan O'Flaherty that tells you that if you
10 walk by a corner of a street and you see Steve Banks
11 on that corner for a while and then Steve Banks
12 leaves and Stephen Levin is there for a while,
13 O'Flaherty has done research showing, you will think
14 that even though the first person is gone that
15 homelessness has doubled. But that doesn't really
16 matter that that's what we, as professionals look at
17 it and what academics look at it. It's really, what
18 are we doing to get that person off that street
19 corner and what are doing to change the reality for
20 New Yorkers who say they are seeing more people?

21 And the best answer I have to New Yorkers who
22 assert they're seeing more people, is not to debate
23 them whether there are or not but to double our
24 efforts every day to help bring people in from the
25 streets.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And just speak to that really
3 quickly about stabilization beds. New stabilization
4 beds. How many stabilization? How many Safe Havens?

5 STEVEN BANKS: In the last year, we have brought
6 on more than 1,200. So, we now got more than 3,000.
7 At the time of Journey Home, we had increased the
8 number from 600 when the 90-day review began, in that
9 period of time, to 1,800 at the time of Journey Home
10 December 2019. Now we have got more than 3,000 and
11 we have the ability to bring on more and we will.
12 There are hundreds more coming on line.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then my last question
14 here is, uhm, what is your plan for conversion of
15 hotel rooms potentially to like SRO units?

16 STEVEN BANKS: So, we have a master lease
17 procurement that enables not-for-profits to come to
18 us and seek a contract that could provide financing
19 to purchase a distressed hotel. We have several
20 proposals in the procurement process. Again, it
21 emphasizes the partnership we've got with not-for-
22 profit providers who are coming to us with these
23 creative proposals.

24 We at the Department of Social Services,
25 Department of Homeless Services created a financing

1
2 mechanism that would enable a not-for-profit to come
3 in and get the – take to a bank the financing to be
4 able to convert a distressed hotel into supportive
5 housing and we are very encouraged by the fact that
6 we have got several of these proposals right now we
7 working through with not-for-profits.

8 We think that could provide a very good model
9 going forward for the city.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, one other question
11 about supportive housing. I have heard from
12 advocates a lot that there continues to be concerns
13 around this you know, the phenomenon of creaming.
14 Where individuals are passed over for supportive
15 housing placements because they may present some
16 challenges.

17 We have a bill that would require some reporting.
18 Is there, I think in 2018 HRA came out in opposition
19 to Intro. 147. Does that continue to be HRA's
20 position?

21 STEVEN BANKS: I think we said and you and you
22 and I have spoken about it that we are happy to sit
23 down with you and see what could be a workable piece
24 of legislation. Remember, one of the issues at that
25 time was that the legislation was broader than just

1
2 supportive housing providers and sites that we have
3 oversight over. And therefore the ability to report
4 on things that we don't have oversight over or
5 challenges.

6 I think there is also an important issue to
7 separate the criticism that you are describing and
8 providers who may be a program that aren't
9 appropriately situated to serve the needs of a
10 particular client.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

12 STEVEN BANKS: I do get calls from elected
13 officials for example of how is it that X person is
14 in this facility when they have got these needs? In
15 this permanent housing site when they have got these
16 needs? Is this the right housing site for them? But
17 we are willing to work through with you to see if
18 there might be a potential bill to be able to get it
19 done.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, because the concern is
21 that you know, people are being rejected for
22 discriminatory purposes. Does HRA track those types
23 of - or how does HRA ensure that people aren't being
24 rejected for discriminatory reasons?

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2 STEVEN BANKS: Right, I think there is a real
3 issue about what visibility we can and do have into
4 that process. And we will certainly work through
5 with you legislation to see what could be done to
6 improve it.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

8 STEVEN BANKS: We don't want - look, getting
9 people out of shelter into supportive housing.
10 Supportive housing is the gold standard. The
11 providers of supportive housing are many of the same
12 people that provide street outreach and provide
13 shelter services. They do an excellent job.

14 At the same time, I don't want clients who could
15 get into a facility, into a permanent housing
16 location and improperly rejected. So, we will work
17 with you to see what's possible.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I find it always difficult if
19 why there are people being rejected for supportive
20 housing when the alternative is them staying in
21 housing where there are fewer services.

22 So, the idea that somebody is rejected for
23 supportive housing because they have a lack of
24 insight due to their mental health condition, when
25 you know, I mean, maybe one aspect of the mental

1
2 health condition is the lack of insight into the
3 mental health condition.

4 So, you know, I guess I am a little bit – I am
5 concerned about that being, people being stuck in a
6 purgatory of sorts, where they can't get out because
7 of you know, they demonstrate too many issues to get
8 into the type of housing that supports people with
9 those issues.

10 STEVEN BANKS: No, I take your point and as I
11 said, there is balance between providers being the
12 right program for somebody in terms of what they are
13 –

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's a different issue,
15 yeah.

16 STEVEN BANKS: There is a balance between that
17 problem and the challenge of a client being properly
18 or improperly passed over.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it.

20 STEVEN BANKS: So, we will work with you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, very good. Thank you
22 and I am going to turn it over. Helen has one more
23 question or remark and then I will let you go.

24 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you.
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Sorry, I stepped out
3 for a bit but I just a little bit took issue at the
4 idea that the Upper West Side is flooded with
5 homeless people. I think we; our office has been
6 working really closely with the Homeless Outreach
7 providers on the Upper West Side.

8 Look, there is no doubt there is a homeless
9 crisis. We all know that but I think if we are
10 seeing more, it's because other people aren't on the
11 street as they usually are and during this time of
12 COVID, you know when the streets have been empty, I
13 think the homeless stand out more than before. But I
14 do worry, as we all should, that with the warmer
15 weather coming as usual, we will see more homeless on
16 the street and need to be able to offer them help.

17 I mean, we just had a very unusual situation,
18 which I don't mind mentioning where a movie
19 production team that wanted to film in front of one
20 of the restaurants, literally gave the homeless
21 individual \$1,000, stored his things and put him up
22 at a hotel. And then he was back a week later with
23 all his stuff. We saw the production team moving all
24 this stuff back out from the restaurant onto the
25 street again and that just perplexes me. I mean, I

1
2 just don't even know how to wrap my head around that.
3 But you know, the goal is to make sure that our
4 outreach workers have all the tools they need and our
5 experience has been that they do as good a job that
6 is possible.

7 So, I just didn't want to leave any you know,
8 uhm, inaccurate information on the table.

9 STEVEN BANKS: Thank you for that comment. I
10 would just add to it and I appreciate the Chairs
11 giving us the ability to present during the course of
12 this hearing the progress that we are making but I
13 wouldn't want to conclude without also, emphasizing
14 that even as we talk about the progress we have been
15 making, there is still a tremendous amount of work to
16 do but I am extremely optimistic and I think as I
17 have said before, I am an optimist by nature. I
18 wouldn't have this job or have run Legal Aid if I
19 wasn't an optimist by nature but the idea that we
20 have a federal partner is a tremendous difference now
21 in staving off the human crisis of the evictions that
22 could be out there.

23 I can't say enough about the potential to have \$2
24 billion statewide, a portion of which will be
25 accessible for New York City residents in staving off

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2 this human crisis that will enable us to continue to
3 make the progress we have been making in driving down
4 the traditional shelter census, even as we address
5 the differences in what's happening with families
6 with children going down to 2012 levels and single
7 adults being at record levels.

8 So, the complexity of the problem is not well
9 understood but the solutions that we are trying to
10 bring to bear on the complexity I think you have
11 given us an opportunity to describe them and I
12 appreciate that Chair.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. And
15 Council Member Rosenthal, I apologize, I was being a
16 little bit sarcastic with my remarks.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: You know, I don't
18 mind. There are those who firmly believe what you
19 just said and I appreciated the Commissioners
20 comments in response and you know, I mean, I think
21 it's a matter of being patient with people and
22 educating them and with the main thing being eyes on
23 the prize to try to help get people off the street,
24 which you know, everyone here is trying to do. So, I
25 appreciate you, Chair.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you. Okay,
3 thank you so much Council Member Rosenthal. Thank
4 you Commissioner. I appreciate you and your staff
5 taking the time to be here today. This is our last,
6 this is our final Preliminary Budget hearing
7 together, so you know, happy trails.

8 STEVEN BANKS: If you go back and read the first
9 testimony at the budget and all the changes we made,
10 I appreciate your comment that I studiously
11 [INAUDIBLE 4:39:57]. If you look at what we laid out
12 as the agenda in the first budget hearing, I think
13 you will find that we actually did everything we said
14 we were going to do on the HRA side.

15 Obviously at DHS, we have had less time for the
16 reforms but you can see we are making progress. And
17 there will be a foundation to build upon for the
18 future. People can make decisions about doing more
19 or less but we have got a foundation to move forward
20 from.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Absolutely, your commitment
22 is beyond dispute.

23 STEVEN BANKS: Yours too. Thank you.
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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Commissioner.

Okay, we will take a three minute break and start up with public testimony at 2:25. Thank you.

BREAK 4:40:43-4:47:54]

Okay, welcome back everybody. I will ask Committee Counsel Aminta Kilawan to call on the first public panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, good afternoon everyone. We are now going to turn to public testimony.

First, I want to remind everyone that I will be calling you up individually but in panels. Once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you and you may begin your testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the clock and gives you the queue to go ahead.

A reminder that all testimony will be limited to three minutes and remember that there is a few seconds of a delay once you are unmuted before we can actually hear you. Please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin before starting your testimony. The first panel of public testimony will be comprised of Ralph Palladino of Clerical Administrative Employees Local 1549 and Mr.

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2 Palladino's panel will be followed by a panel
3 comprised of Lauren Shapiro, Emma Ketteringham and
4 Zainab Akbar.

5 So, we are going to begin now with Ralph
6 Palladino.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 RALPH PALLADINO: Good day. Nice to see you City
9 Council and also your Committee. I would like to
10 start by just going through Local 1549's ask in terms
11 of this budget. First, I would like to bring up the
12 hiring of 400 eligibility specialists and 100
13 clerical associates in HRA.

14 The recently passed federal stimulus package
15 shows funding for administrative purposes for SNAP,
16 the localities. We call on the City and City Council
17 to increase the hiring of the eligibility specialists
18 because there is a great need.

19 Also, the hiring of 100 clerical associates,
20 civil services title employees and the agencies of
21 children's services. We would like you to join us in
22 demanding that HRA and DCAS seize their attack on the
23 civil service system and to seize the waste of tax
24 dollars by stopping replacement of civil service
25 clerical titles by higher paid non-competitive ones

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2 who perform the same duties. That's a waste of
3 money.

4 The hiring and use of interpreter title in HRA
5 and ACS and the City Council should not support
6 Senate S 3223 and Assembly A 5414 dealing with the
7 phone usage in terms of clients in SNAP. That is at
8 least as it exists right now without being amended.

9 Last year's city budget covering this year, was
10 supposed to reflect a shift of funding for the police
11 to social services for the community. Yet, the HRA
12 and Agency for Children's Services had to cut their
13 budget and staffing this year, just as nearly all of
14 the agencies. How could this be? Does this mean not
15 enough funding was cut from the NYPD or perhaps it is
16 the usual style of reducing costs by just cutting
17 across the board, regardless of the effects it has on
18 the needy population.

19 Every year since the Bloomberg Administration,
20 the New York Daily News has run articles about the
21 way the mistreatment of HRA clients. For over a
22 decade, we have testified as advocates and clients
23 have about mishandling of services for the corp. in
24 HASA, HRA and Medicaid.

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The closing of centers and the foreseen clients to use social media was reported in the Daily News in August and that was scandalous and the situation has not changed for the clients. In SNAP, there is untrained, higher paid employees helping our members finish the projects. There is a backlog, ACS clerical show doubling of cases in the last 11 years and they have cut the staff by 50 percent. HASA employees caseloads have shown in the past few years over quoters in terms of what their work entitles.

Finally, I would like to say that the proper language services are critical.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

RALPH PALLADINO: Use of Civil Service

interpreter title is documented and written in this testimony excuse me, just as everything else I have said in this testimony. And the client problems, you should read that section in what I have written and that you have and I would just like to say to you City Councilman, you have been very cooperative. You have been very forthright and work together with us and have responded to us when we have asked and forthright and we just want to say, we wish you well and hope you can work with us for the rest of this

1
2 year and thank you on behalf of Eddie Rodriguez and
3 our members.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Palladino and
5 please give my best regards to Mr. Rodriguez as well
6 and you know, I hope that I am able to continuing
7 working with you, not just for the rest of this year
8 but maybe even beyond that wherever I land.
9 Hopefully on feet somewhere but I look forward to
10 continuing to work with you because you know, I
11 greatly respect the work that your members do, day in
12 and day out. This has been very difficult on them
13 and I want to make sure that their jobs are protected
14 and that you know there is a - you know, it was
15 before my time but I represent Greenpoint
16 Williamsburg and there was this phenomenon from the
17 70's and 80's called Plan Shrinkage that they had in
18 the city.

19 I hope that that does not happen with the system
20 of human services in our city where we use this
21 pandemic as an excuse to shrink the system in any
22 way. So, you have my commitment to continue working
23 with you for the rest of this year and hopefully
24 beyond that.

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2 RALPH PALLADINO: Thank you and the public needs
3 jobs and they need good paying jobs and there is
4 nothing wrong with a civil service job to help
5 people.

6 Thank you. You do not make city policy. You do
7 not make policy for HRA, we know this but thank you
8 very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Ralph. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again Mr. Palladino.
11 I am now going to call on our next panel. Our next
12 panel will be in the following order: Lauren
13 Shapiro; Emma Ketteringham; and Zainab Akbar. Over
14 to Lauren Shapiro.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 LAUREN SHAPIRO: Good afternoon Council Member
17 Levin. Thank you for the opportunity and the
18 Committee to speak today.

19 My name is Lauren Shapiro, I am the Director of
20 the Family Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender
21 Services and I am with my colleagues, collectively we
22 represent over 12,000 parents a year in abuse and
23 neglect proceedings in Family Court.

24 Today, I am going to focus my testimony on the
25 impact that COVID-19 has had on our clients and how

1
2 we have responded. As you may know, our clients are
3 the most economically disadvantaged in the city and
4 come from communities of color that have been hit the
5 hardest by COVID.

6 In the best of times, our clients face daily
7 challenges stemming from their poverty including
8 housing insecurity, unemployment and low-wages, lack
9 of daycare and inadequate medical care. And often,
10 our offices are the only resources that our clients
11 have to help them access basic necessities.

12 The COVID-19 pandemic has created even greater
13 need in our clients communities. Parents are
14 struggling with remote learning, limited internet
15 access and issues accessing technology, which is
16 especially difficult for children with special needs.

17 The parents we work with are also facing the loss
18 of work, illness and death and social isolation. For
19 parents with children in foster care who we serve in
20 person contact has been vastly curtailed and is often
21 limited to phone calls or video chats and it is much
22 more challenging for them to be involved with their
23 children's education and their medical and mental
24 healthcare.

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2 During COVID, our clients have had more
3 difficulty accessing services and treatment, which is
4 often required by the court and ACS to get their
5 children home or even to expand from supervised to
6 unsupervised visits.

7 As a result, family reunification is being
8 delayed and the time we spend helping our clients
9 navigate these obstacles has dramatically increased.

10 Our offices have responded to our clients' needs
11 by renegotiating hundreds of visiting plans in and
12 out of court and by ensuring that our clients have
13 access to PPE and the technology they need. The
14 Family Court shut its doors to the public over a year
15 ago. What was an opaque system before has become
16 almost impossible to navigate. Our clients have
17 difficulty accessing virtual proceedings beginning
18 with the first court appearance without access to the
19 proper technology, reaching an attorney and even
20 getting into court can be a challenge. Although the
21 court is accepting less child protective filings, the
22 cases that are filed all involve family separation
23 and we are doing as many emergency hearings now as
24 before but under much more difficult circumstances.

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2 Unfortunately, the court also believes that they
3 don't have to follow statutory timeframes for
4 conducting emergency hearings, so we are seeing
5 delays in family reunification in these hearings as
6 well as permanency in other hearings.

7 When we do have hearings, they take much more
8 time due to technology issues and it is challenging
9 for our clients to meaningfully participate. For
10 families with children at home, delays in court mean
11 that they -

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Expired.

13 LAUREN SHAPIRO: Are being unnecessarily
14 monitored by ACS. All these court delays are causing
15 a huge bottleneck and making it very difficult for us
16 to resolve cases, which has a direct impact on our
17 pending caseload.

18 During COVID and its aftermath, restoring our
19 Article 10 funding and fully funding our pre-
20 petitioned advocacy is necessary to ensure that our
21 offices can handle the ongoing unique needs of our
22 clients and to address the increasing backlog of
23 cases in family court, which my colleagues are going
24 to speak more about.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks so much.

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LAUREN SHAPIRO: And I am done.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Lauren. I am now going to turn to Emma Ketteringham.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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EMMA KETTERINGHAM: Good afternoon. My name is Emma Ketteringham, Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice at the Bronx Defenders. I want to start by saying that you know nothing in ACS's testimony this morning actually spoke to the kind of transformation that is necessary in this moment.

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Expanded prevention services is expanded surveillance. When it is delivered by the same city agency that has the power of family separation and dissolution.

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As said, in the Times today by Professor Chris Gottlieb, when ACS knocks, it's not benign social work. We need direct investment and not funneled through the agency with the power to dissolve families. We need direct investment in the lives, health, schools and communities of the city's most vulnerable and marginalized families.

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The direct investment and reimagining of family support that is being called on in this moment by impacted families.

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2 And a hearing on the general welfare of our city,
3 can't just be about ACS. It must also include
4 ensuring that adequate funding is provided for the
5 legal representation for the parents who are ensnared
6 in this system.

7 The parents who face the surveillance by ACS, who
8 face prosecution and the loss of what is most
9 important to them, their children. And yet, in this
10 moment, the city is planning to reduce our budget.
11 We call upon the City Council to pressure the Mayor
12 and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the
13 Mayor's Office of Management and Budget to restore
14 our Fiscal Year '22 funding to Fiscal Year '21
15 levels. Our model of interdisciplinary
16 representation links attorney's, social workers and
17 parent advocates to provide parents with
18 comprehensive representation in Article 10 cases
19 brought against them by ACS. We provide
20 representation that is mandated by New York Law to
21 parents who face enormous obstacles even in the best
22 of times.

23 Since we were created in 2007 by the city, the
24 foster system census has shrunk by almost 50 percent.
25 Together we prevent thousands of children from ever

1
2 entering the foster system. And for the parents
3 whose children have entered the system, we reduced
4 the family separation by months.

5 Not only does our model actively divest from what
6 is a policing system, ensuring that we are funded
7 adequately, is a good investment. According to one
8 city, our work translated into \$40 million in annual
9 savings for the city and it has translated most
10 importantly into the priceless preservation of family
11 bonds. And we fulfill a need that is urgent and
12 real, even though the number of Article 10 cases has
13 declined slightly during the COVID pandemic, our
14 offices are representing just as many parents as
15 before the pandemic.

16 Our work load is determined -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 EMMA KETTERINGHAM: Not just by new intake but by
19 our pending overall caseload. Cases last an average
20 for two years and some cases pend much longer.

21 Presently, cases are stalled due to the pandemic
22 and a backlog of cases is building and the longer a
23 case pends, the more complex it becomes and the more
24 unfortunately likely it is for a family to be
25 dissolved permanently. We will enter Fiscal Year '22

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2 with a rising pending caseload of complicated cases
3 with families on the line.

4 So, we are asking today that the City Council
5 take action now to ensure adequate funding for the
6 family defense providers by pressuring the Mayor,
7 MOCJ and OMB to provide us with revenue in Fiscal
8 Year '22 that at least matches what we receive in
9 Fiscal Year '21.

10 And if I can have just one more moment to explain
11 what Council Members might not know.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Emma you mean Fiscal '21 or
13 Fiscal '20?

14 EMMA KETTERINGHAM: We need Fiscal '20 – we need,
15 in Fiscal Year '22, we need what we are now getting
16 in Fiscal Year '21.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

18 EMMA KETTERINGHAM: And so, just to explain, you
19 know what many people don't know is that despite our
20 pending caseloads being on average 30 percent higher
21 than they were in Fiscal Year '16, our contracts are
22 still baselined at Fiscal Year '16 levels. Which is
23 basically a shortfall of 30 percent in needed funds.

24 And then each year, we have to go through this
25 sort of cumbersome lengthy contract amendment process

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2 to have restored what MOCJ acknowledges is the
3 funding we truly need. Which is funding that
4 corresponds to Fiscal Year '20 and Fiscal Year '21
5 caseload levels. We end up getting the funding
6 eventually but it is always late in the contract
7 term, which make it very unmanageable.

8 And so, without intervention, we will be forced
9 once again to begin the year at a deficit and just
10 have to hope and pray for restoration of our full
11 funding and this will force our caseloads to rise to
12 unmanageable levels.

13 Collectively, we need an additional \$9.6 million
14 for Fiscal Year '22 in order for us to be fully
15 restored. And this funding you know, should be
16 restored as soon as possible to avoid an even worse
17 crisis for parents facing the loss of their children
18 in the system. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Emma. I am now
20 going to call on Zainab Akbar followed by Tehra
21 Coles. Zainab Akbar, over to you.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 ZAINAB AKBAR: Good afternoon Council Members.
24 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My
25 name is Zainab Akbar and I am the Managing Attorney

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2 of the Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem's
3 Family Defense Practice. NDS is a community-based
4 public defender that provides high quality advocacy
5 to the residents of Harlem in Northern Manhattan
6 where a largely Black and Brown and family housing
7 public benefits criminal and immigration matters.

8 As a Defender with our main office located in the
9 community we serve, we see the disparate impact of
10 economic and racial inequities on our clients on a
11 daily basis. The current public health crisis has
12 heightened those realities and unless the city and
13 state dedicate resources to our community, the
14 negative tole will be devastating and long lasting.

15 I am here today alongside my colleagues from
16 Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services and
17 Center for Family Representation to urge City Council
18 to fully fund our right to the family advocacy
19 initiative. In particular, I would like to talk
20 about the importance and the necessity of the City
21 Council's funding of our work clearing our clients
22 records at the State Central Registry, otherwise
23 known as the SCR.

24 New York State has one of the most punitive and
25 opaque registries in the country. New York parents

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2 who are listed on the SCR are routinely denied
3 employment based on unproven allegations. Tens of
4 thousands of New Yorkers are on the registry and many
5 don't even know that their names are listed, let
6 alone that they were named in a report and then
7 investigated and determined by ACS to have an
8 indicated case.

9 The majority of parents listed in the SCR never
10 have cases filed against them in court and never have
11 the allegations against them reviewed by a judge to
12 determine whether they are supported by evidence and
13 actually warrant drastically limiting a person's
14 employability. In these cases where there is no
15 court filing, parents are never assigned an attorney
16 to inform them of their right to challenge their
17 listing on the SCR. A listing which remains
18 accessible to employers and others for years,
19 restricting parents ability to work and support their
20 families.

21 Employment opportunities that parents might be
22 barred from because of an SCR record are exactly the
23 kind that can help lift low income New Yorkers out of
24 poverty. Work within a daycare, home and health aid
25 work for example and they are the kind of essential

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2 frontline jobs that our city needs more of as we come
3 out of the pandemic.

4 In the 1990's, the second circuit and the New
5 York Court of Appeals held that people with indicated
6 cases in the SCR are entitled to fair hearings before
7 that information is released to employers and OCFS
8 established procedures to provide those hearings.
9 Until the City Council funded this incredibly
10 important initiative in 2019, New York City's low
11 income parents who are mostly Black and Brown and who
12 are disproportionately impacted by the registry, were
13 not given access to the Council in SCR hearings that
14 are necessary to amend the indicated case. Empirical
15 data indicates that people of color are
16 disproportionately unlikely to undertake the
17 administrative challenge process to clear their
18 records, even though the changes of prevailing are
19 high for those who do.

20 Although last year New York law was changed and
21 there will be some modifications that could benefit
22 parents, the law does not go into effect until
23 January of 2022 and there is a new type of
24 rehabilitation hearing that parents will have the
25 opportunity to apply for to clear their record.

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2 Regardless of what kind of hearing a parent is
3 granted, they must present their case before an
4 administrative law judge and advocate for the
5 clearance -

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

7 ZAINAB AKBAR: Against an experienced ACS
8 attorney in a hearing where witness testimony and
9 documentary evidence are presented and considered by
10 the judge. It is critical that the city continue to
11 provide low income parents with access to attorneys
12 to navigate the changes in the law and to represent
13 them in these hearings to remove unjustifiable and
14 unreasonable barriers to their employment. This is
15 even more urgent as the unemployment rate in New York
16 City remains high. People who challenge their
17 inclusion in the SCR and have their names cleared can
18 get jobs that serve society and financially support
19 their families once they are cleared.

20 We ask that City Council fully fund the Right to
21 Family Advocacy Initiative for Fiscal Year '22, so
22 that low-income parents who are mostly Black and
23 Brown and who are some of the most impacted by the
24 pandemic, can have the ability to remove unnecessary
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2 barriers to employment as the city returns to
3 normalcy. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Zainab. Before I
6 call Tehra Coles, I just want to read off the names
7 for the following panel, so you all can be ready. So
8 after Tehra Coles testifies, we will have Kathleen
9 Brady, Katherine Wurmfeld, Raysa Rodrigues Samantha
10 Sutfin-Gray and Marion White. So, I will now call on
11 Tehra Coles.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 TEHRA COLES: Good afternoon. Thank you for this
14 opportunity. Can you hear me? Yes, okay. My name
15 is Tehra Coles, I am a Litigation Supervisor for the
16 Center for Family Representation and I just want to
17 take a few moments to talk to you about the Right to
18 Family Advocacy Initiative.

19 It provides desperately needed due process and
20 legal representation and advocacy to services for
21 individuals and families that are involved in the
22 child welfare system. Contracts with the city do not
23 fund us to provide this critical representation
24 before a court case is filed and without it, parents
25 do not have access to counsel before a petition is

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filed. And so much happens before a petition is filed. There is the call to Child Abuse Registry. There is a knock at the door often late at night during early hours of the morning. The intrusive questions. The demand that you wake your sleeping child and have the disrobe, so they can be inspected by investigator. The request that a parent sign, sometimes medical releases and the question of landlords, teachers and others.

Critical decisions are made at this stage and greater consequences can occur when it comes to how cases proceed including whether a family will be diverted to services or whether a case will be filed in court. And most significantly, whether children will be separated from their parents and without access to counsel, parents are forced to meet with the ACS who make these decisions and navigate the state interference into the family on their own.

The result is that too many cases are filed and too many children are unnecessarily separated from their families and all of this proportionately impact Black and Brown families from the city's low-income neighborhoods. At CFR, like our sister agency, 100

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2 percent of our clients are poor and 93 percent of
3 them are people of color.

4 I know that our partner agencies have similar
5 numbers. Through this initiative low income parents
6 actually have access to attorney's as well as
7 hotlines, emails and walk in hours during the phase
8 with ACS investigations. Teams of attorney's, social
9 workers, paralegals and parent advocates are
10 available to advise parents about their rights, their
11 choices and consequences of decisions made during an
12 ACS investigation. And they are able to meaningfully
13 engage in the process and ACS is better informed
14 about the families situation.

15 I also want to just quickly mention the
16 legislation that's pending about the state and local
17 level that will require ACS to inform those investing
18 - it investigates of their rights from the first
19 [INAUDIBLE 5:11:07] and we urge the Council to pass
20 this legislation.

21 With the funding that the City Council has
22 provided, the family defense providers who electively
23 represented over 550 parents between July 2019 and
24 April 2020 and we avoided unnecessary and traumatic
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2 family separations and often kept family court cases
3 from ever being filed.

4 So, I join the others that you have heard from on
5 this panel and asking that this initiative be fully
6 funded and I am happy to answer any questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just want to thank this
8 entire panel. I know how difficult the work that you
9 have been doing was before the pandemic and the
10 challenges that your clients are facing prior to the
11 pandemic were you know, were so daunting but as you
12 have detailed in your testimony, that the work and
13 the challenges are so much greater and that as a real
14 impact on people's lives and their families and that
15 loss of time is you know, can't be regained. The
16 time that families are split up.

17 So, you certainly have my commitment that on the
18 Council side, we will be pushing to expand the
19 initiative and continue funding it and seeing you
20 know that it's really had that this value but I want
21 to work with you all in the coming months to do
22 whatever we are able to do legislatively to improve
23 the outcomes and improve the system and really orient
24 it towards keeping families together and getting a
25 better semblance of justice than our current system

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2 affords people. But I thank you very much for your
3 testimony and for your time.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this entire
5 panel for your testimony. I am now going to call our
6 next panel. Our next panel will be as a reminder in
7 the following order: Kathleen Brady-Stepien;
8 Katherine Wurmfeld; Raysa Rodrigues; Samantha Sutfin-
9 Gray; and Marion White. Over to Kathleen Brady.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 KATHLEEN BRADY-STEPHEN: Hello, my name is
12 Kathleen Brady-Stepien, I am the President and CEO of
13 the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies or
14 COFCCA. Our member agencies include over 15 not-for-
15 profit organizations in the city providing foster
16 care, adoption, family preservation and juvenile
17 justice services.

18 I offer four key requests for you today and the
19 first relates to prevention and primary prevention.
20 We recently conducted a survey of largely frontline
21 staff in prevention services programs in the city
22 with our friends at the Citizens Committee for
23 Children. We found no surprise that family's needs
24 have increased for food, for PPE, cleaning supplies,
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2 mental health counseling, housing and many more
3 needs.

4 We are particularly concerned about our older
5 adolescents. Since they have been out of school,
6 they are exhibiting more maladaptive socialization
7 behaviors and they are displaying enhanced mental
8 health challenges.

9 We are really proud of our members on the primary
10 prevention front. Bridge Builders, Children's
11 Village, Good Shepherd and Graham Windham for
12 partnering with families in their communities to
13 build up the FAC's over the last few years. We see
14 these family enrichment centers as a very low cost
15 investment that is also a racial and social justice
16 measure given that they are available to communities
17 without any child welfare system intervention. And
18 we would like to work with the Council and the City
19 to expand these. Our providers stand ready to do
20 more FEC's in various communities.

21 Number two, on workforce. Our essential workers
22 worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support
23 the city's kids and families. We join with the
24 voices of the Human Services Council. We ask the
25 City Council to renew the COLA for human services

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2 workers in the FY22 budget at a rate of at least
3 three percent.

4 Number three, the Indirect Cost Rate. We
5 strongly support the Human Services Council's call
6 for full restoration of the Indirect Cost Rate. We
7 ask the City Council to stand with us in full support
8 of the need to fund our programs fully for these
9 costs, which would be \$171 million needed to fully
10 honor this funding initiative for Fiscal Year '20,
11 '21 and '22. These funds are even more critical
12 given the extraordinary costs that our providers have
13 had to take on throughout the pandemic to support
14 their staff and their families and our communities.

15 And finally, we strongly support fair futures.
16 This is an incredible initiative to provide our young
17 people with strong, stable relationships with
18 positive adult figures to provide coaching and
19 tutoring and building towards a positive future for
20 our young people and we ask the Mayor and the City
21 Council to make Fair Futures a permanent fixture in
22 the City Budget and to baseline \$20 million for this
23 important program.

24 Thank you so much Chair Levin and all the other
25 City Council Members for the opportunity to testify.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Kathleen and
3 congratulations on your new position.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again Kathleen. We
5 are now going to call on Katherine Wurmfeld for
6 testimony.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 KATHERINE WURMFELD: Hi, good afternoon. I am
9 Kate Wurmfeld, the Director of Family Court Program
10 with the Center for Court Innovation.

11 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. As
12 you know, the center has enjoyed a long standing
13 partnership with Council on improving public safety
14 while reducing the use of incarceration and the
15 footprint of the police. Which is why we are asking
16 for Council's continued support on the points of
17 agreement to close Rikers Island which feels more
18 important now than ever as we emerge from this public
19 health crisis and space reckoning with systemic
20 racism and harm to communities of color.

21 So, to that end, we are seeking renewal funding
22 for project reset. New York City's first array into
23 early diversion prior to the criminal court process.
24 With Council funding, the program in the Bronx,
25 Brooklyn Felony Alternative to Incarceration, an

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2 evidence based pilot program for people otherwise
3 facing jail or prison time. Driver Accountability
4 Program, a proportionate response achieving
5 accountability in vehicle and traffic law cases and
6 the Centers Innovative Criminal Justice Program core
7 funding for a range of community based justice
8 initiative across New York City.

9 So, I also wanted to talk today about how we can
10 move further upstream to reduce intergenerational
11 cycles across the stem involvement when folks first
12 have contact with the justice system as children.
13 Through an ACS investigation or a family court
14 filing. Often leading to the trauma of family
15 separation and lifelong consequences.

16 Our Strong Start Court Initiative seeks to
17 address this cycle with a transformative
18 multidisciplinary collaborative approach to child
19 protection cases, involving children birth to three
20 years of age. The very first point of entry for
21 these children at a critical stage of development
22 that too often leads to a lifetime of system
23 involvement including criminal court and future child
24 welfare involvement.

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2 Notably, a significant percentage of the parents
3 served by Strong Start, at least half were involved
4 in the child welfare system as children and almost
5 all are Black and Brown, a powerful reminder of the
6 need for reform.

7 Strong Start seeks to transform the family court
8 child protection process with several core
9 strategies. Including a clinical social worker who
10 is a neutral party, not part of the court or ACS,
11 coordinates a multidisciplinary court team,
12 consisting of all of the attorney's, services
13 providers and case planners that often work in silos.

14 Keeping families together wherever possible and
15 where children have been removed, maximizing contact
16 between parents and children and working tirelessly
17 toward family stability and reunification through a
18 strength based approach.

19 Clinical assessments for all families to connect
20 them with targeted evidence-backed services based on
21 expert knowledge of the infant family field. Monthly
22 clinical conferences with the whole court team to
23 problem solve and move cases forward. Detailed
24 reports to the judges who provide monthly oversight
25 and who attest to how this allows them to resolve

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2 cases much more efficiently and with the information
3 they need to assess risk and make informed decisions
4 towards permanency.

5 Training, consultation and psychoeducation to the
6 court -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 KATHERINE WURMFELD: And community on trauma and
9 child development in order to leverage the impact for
10 all court involved families.

11 This approach has been even more critical during
12 the pandemic and disruptive court processes that has
13 led to family preservation and reunification on cases
14 that would otherwise have languished. Attorneys and
15 judges often tell us that every family should have
16 the benefit of a strong start, which is why this
17 budget cycle we are fund raising to expand the
18 program to Manhattan, which is the only borough that
19 does not have strong start programming.

20 Currently, we are funded solely with private
21 foundation support and know that the only way to
22 expand and sustain programming is to attract the
23 investment and commitment of city and state
24 government.

1
2 We thank Council for the time today and for all
3 the support already received and look forward to
4 continuing to work together to reduce
5 intergenerational cycles of system involvement to our
6 criminal and family justice programming. Happy to
7 answer any questions. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Kate. I am
9 now going to call on Raysa Rodriguez followed by
10 Samantha Sutfin-Gray. Over to Raysa.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 RAYSA RODRIGUES: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you
13 so much Council Member Levin and all of the Council
14 staff for this important hearing today. My name is
15 Raysa Rodriguez, I am Associate Executive Director
16 for Policy and Advocacy at CCC.

17 CCC is a multi-issue independent child advocacy
18 organization that aims to ensure all New York
19 children are healthy, housed, educated and safe. I
20 will sound a little bit like a broken record right
21 now. Like my colleagues really pointed to the fact
22 that this time has been so hard on children and
23 families and in particular, New Yorkers who were
24 already struggling before COVID and before the
25 economic collapse. We know that those who are

1
2 hurting most now are those who were living in poverty
3 before the pandemic, experiencing severe rent burden
4 and other risk factors that we know children and
5 families face.

6 I want to call attention to a number of key
7 priorities and look forward to working with the
8 Council to make sure that these priorities are met in
9 this year's budget. In the area, child welfare, as
10 my colleague Kathleen mentioned, we are excited to
11 have on the ground a survey of qualitative data with
12 COFCCA. I won't go through the findings but I will
13 tell you that what we hear from providers is that
14 more and more families are experiencing need and
15 hardship. 37 percent of survey respondents also
16 indicated that their current contracted funding needs
17 to be supplemented to meet these needs.

18 [DOGS BARKING] I am sorry for that. I will move
19 quickly to the area of homelessness. Thank you so
20 much Council Member Levin for your continued
21 partnership to combat family homelessness. CCC is a
22 Cohead in the family homelessness Coalition. We aim
23 to tackle family homelessness by three key
24 strategies. The first is strengthening preventive
25 services. Earlier on before a housing crisis,

1
2 ensuring and offering onsite support services and
3 shelter and expanding the options of affordable
4 housing units.

5 Thank you again for your leadership. We look
6 forward to working with you. The availability of \$6
7 billion in federal aid marks an important opportunity
8 to make sure that we increase rent vouchers, as an
9 example. Now is the time to pass Intro. 146 to make
10 sure that families experiencing housing instability
11 have access to more competitive rent vouchers.

12 In the area of youth justice very quickly, I want
13 to point out CCC is a member of the Youth Justice
14 Research Collaborative. Our work here is really
15 aimed at evaluating and assessing the implementation
16 of raise the age legislation. What I will call out
17 is that in our qualitative work with this group,
18 surveying not only service providers but defenders
19 and youth engaged or involved in justice systems. We
20 hear from service providers time and time again that
21 what youth need to really prevent system involvement
22 is all the services that we know help. Whether it's
23 health, mental health, access to income and housing
24 supports. And so, here you know what we want to make
25 sure we point out is the critical need to target

1
2 youth services to youth who are at most at risk of
3 systems involvement.

4 And then lastly, in the area of food insecurity,
5 CCC echoes the priorities of colleagues in Lunch for
6 Learning and the New York COVID Food Coalition. And
7 we urge the city to take immediate steps to combat
8 food insecurity and support families struggling with
9 hunger by addressing emergency feeding and benefit
10 access, addressing hunger in schools and supporting
11 community-based organizations that feed New Yorkers.

12 I will be submitting longer testimony and at the
13 end of that testimony is CCC's full analysis of the
14 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year '22. Thank you so
15 much for your time and I am happy to take any
16 questions.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Raysa. I am going
18 to call on Samantha Sutfin-Gray for testimony.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 SAMANTHA SUTFIN-GRAY: Good afternoon. My name
21 is Samantha Sutfin-Gray and I am the Vice President
22 of Performance and Quality at SCO Family of Services.
23 And I am also a member of the Clinicians in Child
24 Welfare CCW.

1
2 I worked for SCO Family of Services for two years
3 and have been in the field as a clinician and
4 researcher for 15 years.

5 Thank you to Chair Levin and the members of the
6 Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to
7 testify during today's Preliminary Budget hearing.
8 Today, I am submitting a report for review by the
9 Committee on behalf of the clinicians in Child
10 Welfare and asking for the Committee to review our
11 recommendations as it relates to telehealth for
12 children.

13 The clinicians in child welfare whose members
14 promote best practice and advocate to enhance
15 delivery services in the child welfare system
16 released a report on why telehealth services are so
17 critical, especially to the communities hit hardest
18 by the virus.

19 Previously inaccessible to New York's Medicaid
20 recipients, expanded telehealth services had made
21 strides in closing New York's health equity gap
22 deeply benefiting the groups previously excluded from
23 these services.

24 The paper findings have made clear that the city
25 and state must permanently remove harsh restrictions,

1
2 hamstringing access to these critical services. The
3 paper accomplishments of telehealth when in New
4 York's child welfare system and exploratory study,
5 draws from quantitative and qualitative study results
6 from 249 participants who responded to the survey to
7 highlight how communities have used behavioral
8 health, telehealth during the pandemic.

9 Of those surveyed, 120 were parents or
10 caregivers, 71 were foster parents, 51 were the
11 individuals receiving services and seven did not
12 declare what type of individual they were. The key
13 findings included 76 percent of the participants that
14 they were able to connect to additional supports, so
15 we are not accessible prior to telehealth.

16 Two, the majority of children and families
17 reported telehealth to help – was helping them to
18 meet treatment goals and develop or continue the
19 therapeutic alliance in the comfort and safety of
20 their own homes without travel time and costs. Three
21 participants identified safety, convenience and ease
22 of making and keeping appointments as areas improve
23 through telehealth.

24 Four, most noted that they were able to maintain
25 a connection with their therapist, services provider

1
2 or care coordinator. And were able to work together
3 to accomplish the treatment goals. And lastly, the
4 lack of technological infrastructure continues to be
5 a challenge it is something that we truly advocate
6 that the City Council and ACS take a look at in terms
7 of how we can fund better technology for our services
8 recipients. I am submitting the full report for the
9 record. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Samantha. I will
11 now call on Marion White.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 MARION WHITE: Good afternoon. Thank you for
14 giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is
15 Marion White and I am here on behalf of the Child
16 Abuse prevention program of the New York Foundling.

17 The founding is one of New York City's oldest and
18 largest nonprofit providers of human services and our
19 child abuse prevention program educates thousands of
20 children each year about their right to personal
21 safety.

22 First and foremost, I want to thank Chairman
23 Levin and the Committee Members for their unwavering
24 commitment to our communities children. For the past
25 two years the child abuse prevention program has been

1
2 allocated a generous grant of \$248,000 from the
3 initiative to combat sexual assault, which has been
4 crucial to our ability to prevent abuse from
5 occurring and from going unreported.

6 The foundling is requesting renewed funding for
7 CAP, Child Abuse Prevention Program to address the
8 ongoing threat of child abuse at this critical moment
9 in our community. Changes necessitated by the
10 pandemic have placed tremendous stress on families
11 and strained family relationships. This places
12 children at risk, serious risk. Just last week Ayden
13 Wolfe was killed at home by an abusive family member.
14 An increased online activity has also created a
15 dangerous opportunity for internet predators.

16 At the same time, children who were cut off from
17 their teachers and other mandated reporters who work
18 on the frontlines of detecting and reporting signs of
19 abuse to authorities. CAP is designed to help third
20 and fourth grade children recognize situations that
21 might be abusive and assure them that they have the
22 right to seek help from a trusted adult if they are
23 experiencing abuse.

24 The program uses relatable child size poppets to
25 discuss safe and unsafe and confusing touches and

1
2 after the workshop, children are given the
3 opportunity to stay and speak to a trained counselor
4 or our prevention specialist during our virtual
5 workshops. Students have been given an opportunity
6 to speak with the Counselors at the end of the
7 program either through a Google breakout room or we
8 also have an activity sheet that the kids can
9 actually request to speak to the counselor and that's
10 worked very well.

11 Next page, one sec. The impact of the work is
12 clearly illustrated by the testimonies of the people
13 we work with. For example, one Guidance Counselor
14 shared the following story.

15 One of my students was suffering from sexual
16 abuse perpetrated by her mom's boyfriend. The
17 student would normally not have been brought to my
18 attention, however, thanks to your presentation, this
19 eight-year-old girl found the strength and courage to
20 disclose the abuse to one of our presenters. The
21 student mentioned to me later that the show inspired
22 her to be brave despite the threats from the
23 perpetrator. Had it not been for your program, the
24 abuse would have continued into the summer. That was
25 from last year.

1
2 In cases like this when a child discloses a
3 serious case of abuse, our team of prevention
4 specialists are trained to respond appropriately and
5 work hand and hand with schools to make reports to
6 either the state central registry or law enforcement
7 as necessary.

8 We look forward to continuing our partnership -
9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 MARION WHITE: With schools and with City Council
11 to prevent abuse from continuing unreported in our
12 community as we emerge from this crisis. Thank you
13 for giving me this opportunity. If you have any
14 questions, happy to answer them.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much Marion.
16 I am now going to call on our next panel. Our next
17 panel of witnesses will be in the following order.
18 Eric Lee, Tierra Labrada, Ted Houghton and Jessica
19 Yager. I will now call on Eric Lee.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 ERIC LEE: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Eric
22 Lee, I am Director of Policy and Planning for
23 Homeless Services United. Thank you Chair Levin and
24 members of the General Welfare Committee for allowing
25 me to testify today.

1
2 For the consideration of time, I will summarize
3 my written testimony. At this critical juncture,
4 when the city is poised to recover, the Council has
5 the opportunity to lay ground work to best prepare
6 the city for the challenging months ahead.

7 Recognizing the extremely tough financial situation
8 that the city is facing, we are very grateful to the
9 Council for its leadership and commitment to
10 maintaining level funding for homeless and eviction
11 prevention services in the FY22 Budget.

12 We are hopeful that the Council will also
13 institutionalize pandemic related expansions to
14 homeless services to preserve gains made such as
15 expanding capacity for stabilization beds for street
16 homeless individuals. To maintain viability of these
17 entire nonprofit sector, which is relied on for a
18 myriad of human services including eviction
19 prevention, emergency shelter and public benefits
20 assistance, the FY22 budget must invest in additional
21 \$171 million to honor the city's prior funding
22 commitments for the indirect cost rates for nonprofit
23 city contracted contracts. They are retroactive to
24 FY20.
25

1
2 Just last week, the city notified nonprofits they
3 would further slash reimbursement rates to a dismal
4 30 percent of their approved contract rates for FY21
5 and '22.

6 As Chair Levin and Council Member Rosenthal
7 raised earlier, due to chronic payment delays, DHS
8 contracted nonprofit providers are particularly
9 unable to absorb this indirect cut. HSU thanks
10 Commissioner Banks for his commitment to working with
11 the providers to address late payment delays. With
12 regards to the Commissioners testimony that the
13 majority of invoices are aged less than 60 days.
14 Invoice policy actually calls for payment to be made
15 within seven days and we look forward to working
16 collaboratively with the department to fix this.

17 As touched on earlier by the Committee, several
18 nonprofit organization are owed over \$10 million each
19 and some of them are considered terminating their
20 contracts at the end of this Fiscal Year.

21 We urge the Council to stand, to continue to
22 stand with nonprofit providers and hold the
23 administration accountable for its obligations to
24 nonprofits. Demanding that the registered contracts
25

1
2 and amendments promptly and pay invoices in full and
3 on time.

4 As Housing Courts reopen, eviction prevention
5 providers will be essential to ensuring that as many
6 tenants as possible remain stably housed. Some home
7 based providers already report operating at maximum
8 capacity and we urge the Council to commit additional
9 funding to hire additional home based staff within
10 zip codes serving the highest eviction rates.

11 We are heartened by news that the state
12 legislature is seeking to raise state FHEPS rent
13 levels and HSU is grateful to Chair Levin and members
14 of the Council that co-sponsored Intro. 146. And we
15 urge the entire Council to pass this -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 ERIC LEE: Piece of legislation this budget
18 cycle. With OTDA's temporary waiver for the loss and
19 requirement for State FHEPS eligibility, which was
20 one through the hard legal advocacy of Legal Aid
21 Society, families must be able to access this
22 important rental assistance voucher in a timely
23 manner given that the waiver tentatively expires May
24 1st.

1
2 To accomplish this, HRA must commit funding to
3 hire additional FHEPS centralize determination unit
4 staff, which is a current team of only 12 people, as
5 well as additional homeless diversion unit staff, to
6 be able to timely complete and process FHEPS
7 applications. And we also recommend that they embed
8 FHEP specialists within HRA centers moving forward to
9 be able to help people with in-person applications
10 after the pandemic.

11 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Eric for your
13 testimony. I am now going to call on Tierra Labrada.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 TIERRA LABRADA: Good afternoon Chairperson
16 Levin. Good to see you again members of the New York
17 City General Welfare Committee. My name is Tierra
18 Labrada, the Senior Policy Analyst at the Supportive
19 Housing Network of New York. The network is a
20 membership organization representing the nonprofit
21 developers and operators of supportive housing, their
22 staff and tenants.

23 For the last several weeks, through testimony and
24 outreach to Council, the network and our partners
25 have been advocating on behalf of our members and

1
2 community for several things to be included in the
3 Fiscal Year '22 budget and we are encouraged by the
4 passage of the American Rescue plan which will bring
5 \$6 billion in needed assistance to the city.

6 As such, we are calling on the city to do the
7 following: First, fully fund the Indirect Cost Rate
8 Initiative. As our partners mentioned already, the
9 retroactive cuts to the Indirect Cost Rate are
10 detrimental to the nonprofit sector. Not only are
11 providers grappling with increased expenses due to
12 COVID, they now have to work on their budgets to
13 account for gaps in funding because the city has
14 failed them.

15 We stand with our partners in calling for a \$171
16 million to fully fund the initiative for Fiscal Year
17 '20, '21 and Fiscal Year '22 and to ensure full
18 funding in the years to come. In addition to fully
19 funding the ICR, we are also calling for a
20 restoration of at least a three percent COLA increase
21 on nonprofit human service contracts and full funding
22 of emergency pay retroactive to March 20, 2020.

23 Second, with the influx of stimulus into the
24 city, we are calling on the Council and
25 Administration to increase rental subsidies to the

1
2 fair market rent, making them more competitive with
3 programs like Section 8 and broadening housing
4 options for people exiting shelter. We can do this
5 with the passage of Intro. 146, which would increase
6 City FHEPS vouchers. We can also achieve this by
7 increasing supportive housing scattered site
8 contracts to the fair market rent.

9 Finally, I know this is out of the purview of the
10 General Welfare Committee but one of the points that
11 are definitely our priorities is the HPD hiring
12 freeze. Currently, there are dozens of vacancies
13 across HPD's development preservation and rental
14 assistance administration department, which are
15 beginning to impact the pace of supportive housing
16 development and move ins.

17 While we sincerely appreciate the tremendous
18 effort to HPD staff, they have made amazing strides
19 throughout the pandemic, allowing for the largest
20 number of supportive housing units ever to be
21 financed in the six month period. There is a
22 tremendous tole to long periods of understaffing and
23 overworking.

24 And because some positions have not seen salary
25 increases in almost a decade, there is potential that

1
2 the city could lose even more staff with no capacity
3 to fill the vacancies. Even positions that are fully
4 funded by the federal government are not being held
5 vacant.

6 Now is not the time for the city to skimp on
7 housing but to increase efforts to ensure that New
8 Yorkers have a safe, stable place to call home.
9 Thank you and I welcome any questions.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony
11 Tierra. I will now call on Ted Houghton.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 TED HOUGHTON: Hi, my name is Ted Houghton, I am
14 the President of Gateway Housing and I have been
15 working in government and nonprofits for about 30
16 years now and I just want to limit my testimony on
17 the subject of Intro. 146 and funding City FHEPS
18 vouchers and other locally funded rent subsidies at
19 fair market rents.

20 This is a really strategic and big idea that we
21 can do that can really be a game changer for us. We
22 have focused and focused and focused on providing
23 shelter and meeting the terms of the right to shelter
24 in New York City. We really need to shift that and
25 really turn it into a right to housing and the way to

1
2 do that is to provide rental subsidies that extend
3 for as long as people need them and provide enough
4 money coming in each month to really allow them to
5 meet the market and actually afford to live in the
6 housing that's out there.

7 We are on the verge of a potential eviction
8 tsunami that may really increase homelessness if we
9 don't move quickly. And that's why I urge you to
10 really, to provide funding for 2022, 2021 now so that
11 the next Mayor will have money to work with when we
12 try to do a lot more rentals more quickly as the
13 effects of the pandemic wear off.

14 There is 8.5 million people living in New York
15 City. They have got to live somewhere and right now,
16 we are choosing to make 85,000 of them live in
17 shelter and we say, well that's because of the right
18 to shelter and other things but the fact is that we
19 are putting people into one of the most expensive
20 institutional settings instead of into their own
21 homes that they have independence and support and are
22 able to succeed. The effects on children, on
23 seniors, on disabled people of being homeless are so
24 well documented at this point that any cost just
25

1
2 about is going to justify helping people stay in
3 housing.

4 The improvement in children's outcomes, the
5 improvement in healthcare, all the different benefits
6 that we see from lives in stable affordable housing
7 justify just about any kind of expense spent on these
8 rent subsidies. But the fact is, is that even if we
9 increase spending on rent subsidies, we are going to
10 move families out of shelter more quickly and that's
11 going to reduce cost of shelter. We are going to
12 prevent families from entering shelter in the first
13 place and that's going to reduce costs and we are
14 going to reduce all sorts of Medicaid costs and other
15 kinds of emergency care.

16 So, I urge you to try to -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 TED HOUGHTON: Get this in to the budget now.

19 Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Ted for your
21 testimony. I will now call on Jessica Yager followed
22 by Craig Hughes. Over to Jessica Yager.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 JESSICA YAGER: Good afternoon Chair Levin and
25 Members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is

1
2 Jessica Yager, I am the Vice President of Policy and
3 Planning at WIN. The largest provider of shelter to
4 homeless families with children in New York City.

5 I am here today to discuss a pending expense
6 before the City Council that the city has the funding
7 it needs to enact, thanks to the latest federal
8 stimulus bill. The proposed expense is the increase
9 of rental voucher values to Section 8 levels, as
10 outlined in 146. I am very happy to be here as one
11 of the many voices making the case for this important
12 bill.

13 Intro. 146 is critical to helping families break
14 the cycle of homelessness and housing instability.
15 Despite overwhelming support, it has languished for
16 three years in the City Council because of the
17 administrations concerns about funding.

18 Thousands of New Yorkers have publicly pushed for
19 its passage, many describing how difficult it is to
20 find housing with the voucher. A diverse cross
21 section of 80 leading nonprofits and civic
22 institutions have signed their support for the bill.
23 Yet families are still spending months in shelter,
24 unable to use their vouchers because the vouchers pay

1
2 hundreds of dollars less for rent than market rate
3 values.

4 With more than \$6 billion in federal stimulus
5 dollars coming directly to the city, we ask you to
6 finally bring Intro. 146 to a vote and pass this
7 crucial bill for our most vulnerable neighbors. The
8 City FHEPS voucher is intended to offer a clear exit
9 path out of shelter for eligible families but because
10 the voucher amount is so low, that exist path is
11 blocked. WIN has been monitoring street easy data
12 and NYC rents for years, as we have fought for this
13 update to the voucher. At no point during this time,
14 including since COVID hit has there been even a
15 single neighborhood in the city where the median
16 asking rent for a two bedroom apartment has been
17 within reach of a family with a City FHEPS voucher.
18 Not a single month in a single neighborhood for at
19 least two years.

20 There is wide spend consensus on the clear
21 solution to this problem. In order to make City
22 FHEPS an effective tool, it's rents must reflect the
23 actual cost of housing in New York City. CITY FHEPS
24 maximum rents should be pegged to the rents in the
25 Section 8 voucher program, which are based on New

1
2 York City's fair market rent. 37 of your colleagues
3 agree, 80 leading nonprofit groups agree, the Daily
4 News Editorial Board agrees and most importantly,
5 thousands of New Yorkers struggling to find housing
6 with this broken voucher agree.

7 While the city is facing unprecedented fiscal
8 challenges right now, without change, the shelter
9 system risks being burdened way over capacity with
10 families experiencing COVID related hardships.
11 Additionally, as the city emerges in COVID-19,
12 helping its residence to successfully enter permanent
13 housing will have strong economic effects. Helping
14 it to fill our housing units and place families in
15 neighborhoods throughout the city that will benefit
16 from their presence.

17 We must do all that we can to widen the door out
18 of shelter. This is the right step and the best use
19 of tax and federal stimulus dollars to help families
20 who need to find a home. Thank you for your time and
21 consideration.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Jessica.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again Jessica for your
24 testimony. I am going to now call on Craig Hughes.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, Craig, before you
3 begin, Jessica, I just also want to thank WIN for
4 their advocacy around 146 which has been
5 extraordinary you know from the get go. So, just
6 thank you very much, appreciate it. Thanks Craig.

7 CRAIG HUGHES: I echo those thoughts about WINS
8 advocacy around 146, which has been incredible with
9 the Safety Net Project which is where I work. Also,
10 we are in strong support of that.

11 Before I go into my formal testimony, I just want
12 to take Commissioner Banks up on something he had
13 said about sticking to – having choice free facts and
14 opinion and really agreeing with him on that and to
15 that point, just very brief for the record, summation
16 of how homeless counts work in New York City in terms
17 of just the Department of Homeless Services numbers.
18 He was correct in pointing out that actually there
19 are multiple shelter systems in New York City and
20 unfortunately there is a larger public policy problem
21 of only acknowledging much of the time the Department
22 of Homeless Services numbers.

23 With that, even within the Department of Homeless
24 Services numbers, there are significant kind of
25 misleading data points that get put out there. So,

1
2 just for the record, every day or almost every day,
3 the city Department of Homeless Services puts a
4 document up, which is its daily count and it's a very
5 misleading document. In the middle of the document
6 it says total shelter census and it says 51,453
7 individuals. But there is two boxes, one on the left
8 and one on the right. The single adults and the
9 family intake boxes.

10 Those are not actually included in the total
11 shelter census box and so, actually that 51,453 has
12 to be added 118 people in the overnight drop ins,
13 1,150 people in the Safe Haven utilization. Hundreds
14 of people that are sheltered in path and intake
15 processes and so on. Thousands of more people are
16 actually included in that number that are just not
17 talked about. Because the City strategically says,
18 this is who is in the mainstream shelter census.

19 There are just DHS overseen. It's ridiculous.
20 It's a political matter and I do hope the
21 Commissioner can also stick to the facts in reporting
22 the number of homeless people in the systems.

23 With that, in my testimony, I am actually going
24 to testify today on behalf of Peter Malman[SP?].
25 Peter is a member of the Safety Net Activists who was

1
2 homeless for many years and couldn't be here today
3 but he wanted to make sure his words got said and I
4 will do that very quickly.

5 So, good morning and thank you Chair Levin. I
6 begin with the fact that over the past year in New
7 York City and it's Department of Homeless Services
8 has ignored CDC guidelines to place folks in single
9 rooms or support hygiene of those on the street by
10 more than doubling the number of sweeps on short
11 notice.

12 The effect is terrorizing those on the street
13 constantly and interfering with census and annual
14 counts of unsheltered people, by which the city gets
15 financial assistance from the federal government.

16 Despite an initial promise of 75 percent in FEMA
17 reimbursement for moving people into individual hotel
18 rooms, the city doubled up people, sometimes in
19 spaces where beds were as close or closer than in
20 congregate shelters. HPD has ignored the exodus from
21 New York City of those who could afford the housing
22 units. It has provided billions to developers who
23 cannot rent them as the city's vacancy rate grows and
24 incomes decrease. It has inclusion with DSH, averted

1
2 using its own guidelines to house those living in
3 communities -

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 CRAIG HUGHES: May I finish Chair?

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

7 CRAIG HUGHES: Thank you. It has inclusion with
8 DHS averted using its own guidelines to house those
9 living in communities where buildings are built to
10 allocate ten percent of community preference with
11 those living on the streets or in hotel and shelters
12 and communities.

13 A budget of over \$3 billion per year goes to
14 shelter people at more than 3,400 for years on end.
15 CITY FHEPS vouchers pay under \$1,300 a month, with
16 \$800 a month for rooms and only utilize about four
17 percent of their issuance. I am confident that a
18 majority of that can be seen to actually be in the
19 \$800 shared rooms. CITY FHEP vouchers need to be
20 parallel to Section 8 or fair market rent. This can
21 be accomplished by voting in Intro. 146. It has a
22 veto proof majority. The City Council backs the
23 bill. There is no more excuse around federal
24 funding. The bill needs to pass. Homeless people
25 need to get housed.

1
2 Rescue aid has come from the federal government
3 with guarantee of 100 percent reimbursement for FEMA
4 up through September to safely place people in
5 hotels. Still the housing process is sprouted in
6 bureaucracy and mystery. And in the housing
7 placement requires a homeless housing assistance
8 application that must be submitted to DHS and passed
9 along to HPD. Yet looking up homeless assistance
10 housing application, one finds 2010 online, one finds
11 2010E housing application information and often that
12 is congregate and transitional housing which is not
13 safe for many people.

14 It is time to do the math and science. The US
15 CDC guidance said to place people in single rooms or
16 support access to hygiene while people are on the
17 street and get shelter residents out of congregate
18 shelters. The cost of recycling people in shelters
19 and terrorizing those in the street, increasing
20 infection risks and rates for all of New York City,
21 will cost our city and economic crisis federal
22 dollars by disruption of accuracy of the US Census –
23 the Census and the annual homeless tallies.

24 Our vacancy rate – this will be my last piece
25 here. Our vacancy rate is on the rise of funding

1
2 incomes and this sets the stage to house people and
3 keep people housed at a profit over the amount spent
4 annually to keep people in unstable settings.

5 Those on the streets and in shelter and hotels
6 could be housed and those at the risk of homelessness
7 can be sustained but the homeless industry must end.
8 We can no longer spend billions to hide, degrade and
9 destabilize New Yorkers while placing the entire city
10 at health risk and those at risk of homelessness and
11 downward spirals to the desolation of experiencing
12 shelter.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's all?

14 CRAIG HUGHES: Sorry, I got muted. I was
15 pointing to my mute bottom. So, those were the words
16 of Peter Malman who is a member of the Safety Net
17 Activists and who couldn't be here today and I am
18 honored to testify on his behalf. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you Craig and
20 obviously, thank you for continued advocacy on a lot
21 of the issues that are effecting the most vulnerable
22 New Yorkers and so, I just want to express my
23 appreciation and gratitude.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much again
25 Craig. I am now going to turn over Moderating to my

1
2 colleague. Natalie Omary, Natalie is the Policy
3 Analyst for the General Welfare Committee. So, I
4 will turn over Moderating to Natalie.

5 MODERATOR: Good afternoon everyone. My name is
6 Natalie Omary and I am Policy Analyst for the General
7 Welfare and I am going to assist in Moderating the
8 rest of today's hearing.

9 I will now call on the next panel for public
10 testimony in the following order: James Meagher,
11 Gabriela Sandoval Requena and Amy Barasch. James,
12 you may begin when the Sergeant prompts you.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

14 JAMES MEAGHER: Good afternoon and thank you for
15 the opportunity to testify. My name is Jimmy Meagher
16 and I am Policy Director at Safe Horizon. The
17 nation's largest nonprofit victim services
18 organization. Safe Horizon offers a client centered
19 trauma informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each
20 year who have experienced violence or abuse and we
21 are using an antiracist lens to guide our work.

22 Over many years, the Council has been a key
23 supporter of our programs helping adult, adolescent
24 and child victims of violence. Today, I will focus
25 on two key initiatives that are funded by the Council

1
2 and contracted through HRA. The Supportive
3 Alternatives to Violent Encounters or SAVE Initiative
4 and Immigrant Opportunities Initiative or IOI. Which
5 provide critical funding to Safe Horizon and to our
6 community partners across the antiviolence field to
7 provide trauma informed responses to survivors. I
8 will also discuss the overwhelming need for
9 meaningful housing assistance to survivors and our
10 support for Intro. 146.

11 Our Domestic Violence Law Project DVLP utilizes
12 funding through the Supportive Alternatives to
13 Violent Encounters Initiative to provide direct legal
14 services to indigent victims of domestic violence in
15 Family, Supreme and Integrated DV Courts throughout
16 the city. Due to the pandemic, court operations have
17 been severely affected and even though the family
18 courts continue to operate on an emergency basis,
19 hearing only emergency matters, our attorneys
20 continue to assist the Family Courts in filing
21 Emergency Petitions and motions on behalf of
22 survivors.

23 In the months and years ahead, as our City
24 recovers from COVID-19, our legal services and the
25 services provided by our legal partners across the

1
2 city will be critical for the many, many survivors
3 who are waiting for the courts to return to normal.
4 We are seeking a restoration for this initiative.

5 And our Immigration Law Project utilizes funding
6 through IOI to provide expert legal advice and
7 representation to undocumented victims of crime,
8 violence, abuse, trafficking and torture. During
9 this pandemic, the federal government kept
10 Immigration Courts open. When New York remained on
11 PAUSE, our staff served as essential, frontline
12 workers in the fight to protect immigrant victims and
13 their families. Our work didn't end during this
14 pandemic, rather our community of advocates worked
15 even harder.

16 We are also seeking for this initiative funding
17 to be restored as well. Lastly, Safe Horizon joins
18 the calls of housing advocates across New York City
19 in urging the Council to pass Int. 146 as soon as
20 possible. Clients across all of our programs need
21 safe, affordable, stable housing. So many victims
22 and survivors of all forms of violence call our
23 Hotlines and turn to our programs for housing
24 assistance every day. And the housing options we can
25 offer remain too few in number.

1
2 Temporary emergency shelter will always serve a
3 purpose for survivors but our City needs to do
4 everything it can to connect New Yorkers experiencing
5 homelessness to permanent housing. Although it is
6 not the only solution for our homelessness crisis,
7 passing Int. 146 and raising the amount of the City
8 FHEPS rental voucher to Fair Market Rent is one key
9 part of any comprehensive housing plan. By
10 increasing the voucher amount, more of our clients
11 will be able to leave shelter and find safe, stable
12 housing. This will also increase geographic mobility
13 for voucher holders, allowing survivors to better
14 navigate their safety and find the housing right for
15 them.

16 Our mission is to provide support, prevent
17 violence and promote justice for victims of crime and
18 abuse, their families and communities.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 JAMES MEAGHER: When we say "justice for victims"
21 we mean so much more than just criminal justice.
22 Rather, we cannot promote justice for victims and
23 survivors without also demanding housing justice and
24 economic justice.

1
2 Our clients, need safe, stable, affordable
3 housing to find justice and healing. As we advocate
4 for equitable access to housing resources and
5 subsidies for all people experiencing homelessness.
6 The help available to you as a person experiencing
7 homelessness should not be determined by the door you
8 walk through, whether that's an HRA DV shelter, a DHS
9 shelter or a DYCD shelter.

10 When we invest in the safety, healing and well-
11 being of individual New Yorkers, we invest in the
12 safety, healing and well-being of New York City as a
13 whole.

14 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify
15 today.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

17 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony James.
18 Next up will be Gabriela Sandoval Requena. Gabriela,
19 you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now. You are
21 still muted.

22 GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Thank you for that.
23 Good afternoon Chair Levin, Council Members and
24 Committee Staff. Thank you for the opportunity to
25 testify today at the Preliminary Budget Hearing.

1
2 My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena and I am the
3 Senior Policy Analyst of New Destiny Housing. New
4 Destiny is a 27-year-old nonprofit committed to
5 ending the cycle of domestic violence and
6 homelessness by connecting families to safe,
7 permanent housing and services.

8 We have submitted the written testimony. So, I
9 would like to use the time to underscore the
10 takeaways and our four recommendations. As you know,
11 domestic violence continues to be the number one
12 driver of family homelessness in New York City. HRA
13 manages to the largest domestic violence shelter
14 system in the country and additionally, 41 percent of
15 families enter the separate VHS shelters cite
16 domestic violence as the cause of their homelessness.

17 COVID-19 has only exacerbated the predicament for
18 survivors with stay at home orders forcing them to
19 make the impossible choice between shelter or
20 remaining with their abusers. And this is largely
21 due because housing resources are very limited for
22 survivors of the kids.

23 The Department of Social Services 2020 Annual
24 Report on Exits from New York City DV Shelters
25 reveals that 37 percent of the 2,700 households that

1
2 left the DV Shelter System were actually transferred
3 into the DHS system. With over 1,000 households,
4 that actually is 1,000 households that left shelter
5 for shelter in 2020.

6 While only 64 households moved to permanent
7 housing by using a voucher or rent subsidy. So, we
8 urge the City to take much needed steps to expand
9 equitable access to housing and for that, New Destiny
10 makes four recommendations.

11 First, is to pass and fund Intro. 146. Second,
12 is to allow HRA shelter resident equal access to HPD
13 homeless set aside units which would cost the city no
14 additional funding. Third, is to increase a
15 credibility in the HRA Domestic Violence Shelter
16 System by requiring it to maintain census. Like DHS
17 us, which would also cost the city no additional
18 funding. And fourth, is to leverage federal funding
19 to develop a \$10 innovation fund to support the
20 [INAUDIBLE 5:59:09]. That mitigate or avoid the
21 trauma of homelessness for survivors.

22 For more information, I would like to invite you
23 to check out our website and see our 2021 policy
24 platform that's available there. And I also urge you
25 to support the priorities of the Family Homelessness

1
2 Coalition. That's a coalition of shelter and housing
3 providers, advocates and other nonprofits. Helping
4 homeless New Yorkers in New York City.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to submit the
6 testimony today and I welcome any questions you may
7 have.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Gabriela. Thank
9 you.

10 MODERATOR: Thank you Gabriela.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And thank you for all the
12 work that New Destiny does.

13 MODERATOR: Next, we will have Amy Barasch. Amy,
14 you may begin once prompted.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 AMY BARASCH: Thank you so much for giving me the
17 opportunity to testify today. My name is Amy
18 Barasch, I am the Executive Director at Her Justice.

19 For 28-years, Her Justice has provided women in
20 New York City with free legal information, advice,
21 brief services and full representation in family
22 court matters, divorces and immigration matters under
23 [INAUDIBLE 6:00:15].

24 Our clients are living in poverty in the five
25 boroughs of New York City, most are moms. Many are

1
2 survivors of partner violence and 90 percent are
3 Black and Brown women. Support from the City Council
4 has been critical in making our mission possible and
5 we are deeply grateful for the Council's continued
6 partnership.

7 Her Justice offers our legal help through a pro
8 bono first model. Our small legal department of 21
9 people trains and mentors thousands of volunteer
10 attorneys who are paired with women who are unlikely
11 to obtain legal help otherwise. This approach has
12 allowed us to reach tens of thousands of women over
13 the years, far more than we could have reached on our
14 own. Over 6,000 women and children were helped by
15 Her Justice in 2020 alone. The Council supported Her
16 Justice through both Save and Speakers initiatives
17 will be only that much more vital as we continue to
18 assist the clients we already have whose cases are
19 lasting longer under COVID as they get stalled in the
20 courts. While we also manage the continually
21 changing city court processes as well as respond to
22 the coming increase in legal demand that we
23 anticipate.

24 We urge the Council to appreciate the extra work
25 facing all legal services providers when courts are

1
2 in crisis. Women like our clients must rely on a
3 civil justice system that has been historically and
4 systematically under resourced.

5 In the before times, our clients sometimes spent
6 hours, days and years moving through the family
7 courts to access basic freedoms. Personal autonomy,
8 financial independence and safety from abuse. When
9 these courts do not function well or smoothly, there
10 is real economic consequence for the litigants. Case
11 delays impose a cost on litigants and create barriers
12 to resources to which they are entitled.

13 The barriers and delays under COVID are
14 unprecedented. During this COVID year, the model we
15 use at Her Justice, showed itself to be flexible. We
16 brought our helpline to our homes. We created
17 specially equipped spaces in our offices from which
18 clients could appear remotely in court if they didn't
19 have access to safe and reliable technology. We
20 revamped our community outreach efforts using
21 technology, so that we actually reached more people
22 than we usually do and we recently released a report
23 about the child support process as it existed before
24 COVID as a way to assist the courts and imagining a
25

1
2 new system for child support that would function
3 after COVID.

4 But how we work is inextricably linked to how the
5 courts work. Due to the pandemic, the City Civil
6 Courts have experienced closures and partial
7 reopening's creating confusion and uncertainty for
8 litigants and frankly, for attorney's as well.

9 As sympathetic as we are to the challenges facing
10 the enormous state court system in having to adapt to
11 this health crisis, we struggle to understand why the
12 process in Family Court is so at hawk and confusing
13 even for lawyers who work hard to be well-informed.
14 This court confusion will exacerbate the long term
15 harm that has been warned by women like our clients
16 and that will have ripple effects for their children
17 and all of the human service providers in this city.

18 I would like to highlight a few key points
19 quickly. The Family Courts are only hearing cases
20 that they deem essential.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 AMY BARASCH: Most litigants only go to family
23 court once they have been unable to address their
24 issues on their own.

1
2 So, our clients don't understand what the courts
3 think are essential and not essential. For victims
4 of partner violence orders of protection are
5 important but often addressing child visitation or
6 child support can be even more important.

7 I know I am running out of time. I will go
8 super-fast. The court processes are confusing to
9 non-lawyers in a good day. It's not a good day.
10 They are confusing now to lawyers as well. It's very
11 hard for us to counsel clients when we have a hard
12 time understanding what's going on. I honestly don't
13 know how unrepresented people are figuring it out.

14 Many victims of partner violence suffer financial
15 abuse. Under COVID as we know, there has been a
16 great deal of job loss and economic harm. Debt and
17 damaged credit because of financial abuse can make it
18 hard to leave a relationship because you can't rent
19 an apartment, get a job or buy a house or car.

20 It's a cruel irony that we have clients who are
21 being sued by third party debt buyers for debts
22 accrued by their abusers, at the same time as they
23 cannot file or move forward a child support case in
24 the Family Court. And our immigrant clients are in
25 extreme crisis. For them too, the lack of child

1
2 support is a huge barrier, since they have been
3 ineligible for relief under most federal relief
4 programs during COVID. Sometimes child support is
5 the only economic relief that they have an ability to
6 seek.

7 So, in short, we thank the Council for their
8 support for the essential legal services that we
9 provide to women living in poverty in New York City
10 and we look forward to continuing to work with you to
11 support this community.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Amy.
13 Thank you for your testimony and the work you do.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you for your testimony Amy. I
15 will now call on the next panel in the following
16 order: We have Nicholas Buess, Rachel Sabella, Joel
17 Berg, Molly Krakowski and Gregory Silverman.

18 Nick, you may begin once the Sergeant prompts
19 you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, who are we waiting on?
22 Oh, Nick, I think you are up. Can you – are you
23 trying to speak yet Nick?

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Mr. Buess, we do not hear you.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Maybe now? Keep trying, mic
3 check. Hmm, okay, Nick, we are going to come back to
4 you okay.

5 MODERATOR: We will come back. We can move onto
6 our next panelist. We have Rachel Sabella.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 RACHEL SABELLA: Thank you. My name is Rachel
9 Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New
10 York. We work to address child hunger and poverty
11 across the state. Thank you Chair Levin, not only
12 for the opportunity to testify today but for your
13 leadership during your tenure at the Council and
14 addressing food insecurity. Great strides have been
15 made due to your leadership and the member of this
16 committee. We have come a long way. I think about
17 all the conversations and campaigns we have worked on
18 together but now we need the Council's support more
19 than ever before.

20 One in three kids in New York City could face
21 hunger this year due to the pandemic. I want
22 everybody to take a moment and hear that number.
23 Before the pandemic, it was one in five. A decade of
24 progress has now been reversed in a few short months.
25 We need more than ever before to take drastic steps

1
2 to address food insecurity and we need all levels of
3 government to get involved because there isn't a
4 single solution.

5 We heard a few times today about the 15 percent
6 increase in SNAP benefits. This was a huge step by
7 the federal government, as SNAP is the first line of
8 defense against hunger. There are likely newly
9 eligible New Yorkers for this program. They may not
10 know that they are eligible. The FY22 New York City
11 budget needs to invest funds in outreach and
12 awareness. We need to reach out to community
13 members, get them enrolled, help them to access these
14 programs.

15 From what we have heard anecdotally, there is
16 going to be a cut or as the budgets look at
17 reductions in places where things can flow down, now
18 is not the time to be slowing on marketing but it's
19 to get the word out to invest in communities
20 organizations to do this work.

21 I also want to say how important it is to invest
22 in the emergency food network. Providers have been
23 on the frontlines since day one. We have also seen
24 organizations who have never had a food program
25 before, start one practically overnight as they look

1
2 to support their community members. We need to make
3 sure that the budget has that funding. That it is
4 able to support school pantries, food pantries, soup
5 kitchens, any type of program that is going to
6 address food insecurity.

7 I will have additional recommendations that will
8 circulate tied to the Department of Education Budget
9 but we want to be really mindful that today is
10 specifically about HRA and programs under the General
11 Welfare umbrella.

12 But to close my remarks, I want to be very
13 careful on time. Again, I want to thank this Council
14 and just say how much we look forward to working with
15 you, working with this Administration to make sure
16 that this budget not only strengthens but expands
17 funding for programs that address food insecurity.
18 Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Rachel and it's
20 been wonderful working with you these past few years
21 and you know, we still have a lot of – we have
22 challenges we are facing right now that we never
23 anticipated a year and a half ago. So, you know, I
24 look forward to continuing to make strides in this
25 last year.

1
2 MODERATOR: Thank you Rachel. We will now hear
3 from Joel Berg. Joel, you can begin once prompted by
4 the Sergeant.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 JOEL BERG: Hello, I am Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger
7 Free America. I too want to thank the Chair. This
8 isn't your funeral, so we are still going to be
9 working with you in the future but thank you so much.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's like Tom Sawyer and Huck
11 Fin, like going to their own funeral.

12 JOEL BERG: Right, first I want to announce we
13 have ended hunger, so we don't need any money. That
14 was my early April Fool's joke. I guess I shouldn't
15 joke about these things. It's serious. As everyone
16 has indicated, the hunger rates dramatically
17 increased in the city and considering that the
18 unemployment rate is three and a half times what it
19 was a year ago, we shouldn't be shocked but the
20 hunger rate is still double what it was a year ago.

21 I really want to focus on the importance of the
22 safety net programs funded by the federal government,
23 administered by the city and SNAP went up 184,000
24 people. That's a huge increase, an historic
25 accomplishment through HRA but there are many, many,

1
2 many more people eligible today than before. And in
3 fact, the truth of the matter is, that when you
4 compare where we are to peak participation, a number
5 of years ago, we are still way below peak
6 participation. A number of years ago, I have all the
7 numbers in my encyclopedia, written testimony but we
8 are still way below peak participation even though
9 our unemployment rate is far higher than it was when
10 that occurred in 2013.

11 Also, 100,000 students who are probably eligible
12 for SNAP now because of the changes in federal
13 policy. And I just want to put this in concrete
14 numerical terms, the SNAP program in New York City
15 last year spent \$3.4 billion, \$3.4 billion with a B.
16 If you were to increase participation in that program
17 by only five percent, that would be \$175 million
18 extra dollars for New York City.

19 So, you know Mr. Chairman, I rarely come and make
20 self-interested requests. I rarely talk like
21 everyone else; we need more money for our
22 organization but I will this time and say that the
23 \$600,000 we got in the last year to do benefits
24 access was about the most effective money the city
25 has ever spent. We and other groups that do benefits

1
2 access leverage at least \$20 for every city dollar we
3 get and so, while we strongly support the
4 continuation and expansion, making sure there is
5 money for food and staff and all the home delivered
6 programs and the Grab and Go programs and EFAP and
7 PREFED, we want to particular emphasize the need to
8 continue this benefit access money. And I point out
9 with every penny spent on SNAP is matched by the
10 federal government.

11 So, it's an extraordinarily good investment
12 overall and again, thank you for your leadership and
13 I will just say as we go into a new Administration,
14 we need to really ramp up our online applications. I
15 understand all your concerns about online
16 applications but for most of our clients and
17 customers, it's been a big plus and we need to expand
18 that beyond SNAP to combine that with every other
19 program with Section 8 and every other antipoverty
20 program in the city. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, I just want you to
22 reiterate for every dollar we spend on the outreach,
23 how many dollars comes in?

24 JOEL BERG: At least \$20 of SNAP outreach - of
25 SNAP benefit dollars.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Multiplier of 20. For
3 \$600,000 investment, we are getting 20 times that
4 back into the city?

5 JOEL BERG: Well, roughly yes. So, you know, WIC
6 is a slightly larger numerical, less numerical
7 investment but yes, because we are also matching the
8 federal funds. And I would also point out that even
9 though food is untaxed, when people get more SNAP
10 dollars they are able to save money to buy more taxed
11 items. Diapers, you know, hygiene products etc. and
12 those are taxed.

13 And so, and this creates jobs adding to income
14 tax revenues and reducing unemployment roles reducing
15 cash assistance roles.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Cast aside, this is money
17 going into the economy.

18 JOEL BERG: Yeah, not only is this the right
19 thing to do morally, it is just smart business.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hmm, hmm, thank you. Thank
21 you, I appreciate that.

22 MODERATOR: Thank you Joel.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think Nick – are you
24 available now Nick?

1
2 MODERATOR: Do you want me to mute and we will
3 come back to Nick.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, he is here.

5 NICHOLAS BUESS: I am here. To many headphones
6 going on. Thank you so much Chair Levin. Thank you
7 to the Committee Members. I also want to
8 particularly thank the Committee staff for all of
9 their attention to hunger issues and antipoverty
10 issues. I am Nick Buess from the Food Bank for New
11 York City.

12 As you know, our city's food pantries have
13 experienced a spike due to the pandemic. 75 percent
14 have reported an increase in visitors. 91 percent of
15 those are first time visitors and 79 percent include
16 families of children.

17 Food insecurity has increased by more than 44
18 percent in our city. This is the highest rate in the
19 last ten years and while the loss of wages and jobs
20 has driven this increase for people who are food
21 insecure, recovery is a much longer road than is
22 indicated by simple metrics like unemployment rates.

23 For instance, after the great recession, it took
24 ten years for food insecurity to fall below pre-
25 recession levels. In the last year, Food Bank for

1
2 New York City has distributed over 100 million meals
3 to partner agencies. This is a 61 percent increase
4 in overall food distribution compared to last year.
5 We have also distributed over a million pounds of
6 non-food items like PPE, baby and hygiene products.

7 We have developed new partnerships with ACS,
8 NYCHA, Health + Hospitals, many other programs across
9 the city and our income support services like Joel
10 was just talking about help people navigate SNAP but
11 also help free tax assistance. When you combine
12 those services for our organization, it brings in \$38
13 million back in the pockets of low income New
14 Yorkers.

15 This work would not be possible without the
16 support from the city. In particular, our
17 partnership with HRA, via the emergency food
18 assistance program EFAP and in coordination with our
19 benefits access unit.

20 Last spring, I reported about a third of partner
21 programs suspended service due to the pandemic.
22 Today, most of those programs have reopened but our
23 city must continue to invest in food, capacity and
24 partnerships to expand the depth and reach of
25

1
2 nutritional systems in the coming fiscal year and
3 beyond.

4 So, ongoing support for EFAP will be essential
5 and we will continue to work with HRA to ensure a
6 steady supply of food that compliments other
7 emergency food services. We urge the city to fund
8 capacity at distribution hubs like ours and community
9 food locations. We stand with the Speaker and
10 Council Members calling on the Administration to
11 provide an additional \$25 million for food pantries
12 and soup kitchen capacity. We also call on the City
13 Council to invest in innovative programming like food
14 pantries in schools, mobile food pantry distribution
15 that helps fill in the gaps and supply as well as
16 funding community organizations to do the outreach to
17 New Yorkers for income supports like SNAP.

18 Lastly, I want to thank the Mayor's Office of
19 Food Policy and their team for coordinating efforts
20 across the city agencies. We know there is more work
21 to be done but we stand with our network of direct
22 service organizations who have the experience and
23 community connection to protect our neighbors from
24 hunger. Thank you.

1
2 MODERATOR: Thank you Nick. We will now hear
3 from Molly Krakowski. Molly, you may begin once
4 prompted by the Sergeant.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: Hi, thank you for the
7 opportunity to testify today. My name is Molly
8 Krakowski, I am Senior Director of Government Affairs
9 at JASA.

10 JASA is a large senior service agency serving
11 over 40,000 older New Yorkers. In addition to a
12 whole wide range of aging services, we also have
13 contracts for adult protective services, community
14 guardian, legal services in Queens and a significant
15 number of other programs.

16 We are very appreciative of the New York City
17 Council's continued focus on the needs of the most
18 vulnerable New Yorkers throughout the pandemic.

19 JASA's budget request and priorities for FY22 are
20 tied to fair funding of social service contracts in
21 New York City. We are looking for the city to fully
22 fund the New York City contracts and honor the
23 indirect rates for human services sector that require
24 approved prior to the FY21 budget. We are distressed
25 that the city is failing to fulfill its promise to

1
2 fund certified indirect costs which are the backbone
3 that support direct delivery staff in providing
4 essential care to New Yorkers in need.

5 In order to supply and support clients and staff
6 during the pandemic, JASA pivoted last March to
7 virtual programming and remote work in most programs.
8 JASA's adult protective services and community
9 guardian staff continue to meet in person with their
10 clients as did home delivered meal staff providing
11 daily deliveries and home care workers continuing to
12 provide in home care to clients.

13 As an example of this effort, from March 2020
14 through the end of February, JASA APS staff managed
15 4,900 referrals and conducted nearly 10,900 face to
16 face visits. In other programs, JASA has continued
17 seamlessly with program oversight and service
18 delivery managed virtually.

19 For example, in JASA's contract to provide
20 supportive services at one of HRA's Senior Affordable
21 Rental Apartment program, SARA programs located in
22 Beach Channel. We have been doing many different
23 initiatives to address social isolation and trying to
24 keep people connected.

1
2 I am just going to skip to the vaccine efforts,
3 which we have been doing across the board. Trying to
4 get people appointments but also coordinating at our
5 HUD buildings with CBS to provide vaccine clinics, as
6 well as at Beach Channel and additional programs like
7 NORCs and Senior Centers in conjunction with the
8 city.

9 There is a very big need to invest in the human
10 services sector. The city really needs to honor like
11 I said, prior commitments. The pandemic has only
12 started to highlight the importance of indirect
13 personnel. Indirect funding supports our IT
14 department, our human services, finance, facility
15 support. For example, through our COVID-19, our
16 human resource department has followed and provided
17 updated safety and other guidelines on working in
18 office as program sites and remotely. JASA's IT
19 department is supporting hundreds of remote work
20 stations, troubleshooting online course offerings,
21 support groups in addition to monitoring servers and
22 providing network safety and security. JASA's
23 accounting department –

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
25

1
2 MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: Has submitted and resubmitted
3 numerous budgets and modifications this year in order
4 to keep up with changing city requirements and
5 updates regarding PPE and COVID-19 expenses and
6 shifting to remote activities. Indirect services are
7 essential to daily and long term agency operations.
8 We are experiencing an extraordinary level of
9 uncertainty related to the course of the pandemic but
10 our current experience also informs our vision and
11 the needs and the preferences of the city's older
12 adults and vulnerable populations.

13 In priority as senior services and aging
14 populations now is to ensure the safety of clients
15 including access to vaccines providing them with
16 tools that are necessary for safe and appropriate
17 housing, food security and social connectedness to
18 people in communities that are important to them. We
19 look forward to working with City Council, the Mayor,
20 HRA and DFTA to implement and FY22 budget that's
21 senior friendly and human services growing.

22 So, thank you very much.

23 MODERATOR: Thank you Molly. We will now go to
24 Gregory Silverman. Gregory, you can begin once
25 prompted by the Sergeant.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

GREGORY SILVERMAN: Hi my name is Greg Silverman.

I am the CEO of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger. Thanks for inviting me and WSCAH to testify at the General Welfare Preliminary Budget Hearing.

I am here representing 50,000 New Yorkers in need who come to WSCAH as our customers. Found in 1979, WSCAH's launched the countries first choice model grocery store slash food pantry almost three decades ago. Today, we are one of the largest emergency food providers in the city. We alleviate hunger by ensuring all New Yorkers have access with dignity to a choice of healthy food and supportive services.

In the words of City Council Speaker Johnson access to adequate nutritious food as a human right, I am going to focus my remarks on the EFAP program because I think we have heard a lot about COVID responses from the frame.

So, we share what Speaker Johnson said previously and share this conviction. Last year, we gave out almost 2.5 million pounds of food over half of that, over 50 percent was fresh fruits and vegetables and we think that's key. Our customers deeply appreciate that. We survey them and find out that information

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2 and so, we continue to push really hard no matter the
3 pandemic or any issue to provide the healthiest best
4 food possible.

5 WSCAH created a collective purchase model with
6 some of the other largest emergency food providers in
7 the city. St Johns Bread and Life, Project
8 Hospitality, New York Common Pantry, Met Council,
9 Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Funded by Robinhood, New
10 York Community Trust, See Change, New York State
11 Health Foundation.

12 Because we believe that we wanted to advocate for
13 our customers to get the best food possible. We did
14 this partly because of programs like EFAP, the
15 Emergency Food Assistance Program. We don't think
16 they are not providing the necessary choice of fresh
17 and health products. At WSCAH we survey our
18 customers. They want healthy food. Our job as
19 emergency food providers is not simply just to
20 provide calories or ultra-processed food. It's to
21 give people access with dignity of choice of healthy
22 food and supportive services. EFAP has been said to
23 be a huge win for New York City because of its \$22
24 million in baseline budget but let's be clear, the 50
25 percent of fresh produce that we give out at WSCAH,

1
2 doesn't come from EFAP. EFAP distributes \$22 million
3 of ultra-processed foods to New Yorkers who need
4 healthy minimally processed foods.

5 This is a tragedy and it's time to change it. It
6 is well passed time to align EFAP the RFP, the City
7 Charter to budget with food insecure folks needs and
8 I think you know, we have seen in the last - during
9 the pandemic, we have seen the ability of other
10 programs to work in different ways. We can align
11 EFAP in the same way HIPNAP is run. We have seen New
12 York City demonstrate through PFRED and the Get Food
13 Program, the ability to put customers' needs front
14 and center.

15 Although these programs have faced many issues,
16 such as lack of fresh, healthy, culturally
17 appropriate food via get food and sluggish
18 bureaucracies of PFRED, they have increased the
19 ability for folks to try out new models.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 GREGORY SILVERMAN: In our increased customer
22 centric role, solutions much move towards and not
23 away from customers in the community. Emergency
24 feeding solutions such as EFAP, PFRED, Get Food, must
25

1
2 focus on bringing healthy food options direct to
3 people.

4 PFRED and Get Food have successfully tested the
5 approaches. Our hope is that WSCAH these programs
6 continue to grow and evolve and that in conjunction
7 with a choice centric EFAP. A purpose built
8 citywide, open data model allowing collaboration
9 across anti-under communities in giving all
10 organizations the ability which they do not have now,
11 to deliver a choice of healthy culturally appropriate
12 food to all in need. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Craig.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you very much to this panel.
15 Calling the next panel up, we will have MJ Okma,
16 Michelle Yanche, Nicole McVinua, Marcyn Campbell and
17 Darren Bloch. MJ, you may begin when prompted by the
18 Sergeant.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 MJ OKMA: Good afternoon, my name is MJ Okma with
21 the Human Services Council. A membership
22 organization representing over 170 human services
23 providers in New York.

24 Over the past year, city contracted human
25 services workers who are majority women of color,

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2 were not provided PPE. They were not given COLA in
3 last year's budget and they were not afforded job
4 protection while the city and state
5 disproportionately cut human services.

6 Due to these compounding cuts, our city's human
7 services sector has seen a net loss of over 44,000
8 jobs since this time last year. One of the extremely
9 damaging cuts from the city was the retroactive
10 dismantling of the Indirect Cost Rate Funding
11 Initiative before it was ever truly implemented.

12 When the first retroactive cut was announced last
13 August, providers faced a cut up to 40 percent of
14 their indirect funding on Fiscal Year '20 contracts.
15 Despite the fact that the Fiscal Year was already
16 over and the money was spent.

17 This allowed the underfunding of ICR to be
18 replicated. In the Fiscal Year '21 budget before
19 MOCS announced that it was in fact a loss and
20 reduction, rather than a right sizing.

21 In response, nearly half of the City Council, the
22 Comptroller and all five Borough Presidents condemned
23 the cut and called for funding to be restored. But
24 instead of prioritizing pay, city contracts as
25 committed, last week MOCS and OMB told the Nonprofit

1
2 Resiliency Committee that providers will face another
3 staggering retroactive cut of up to 70 percent of
4 their indirect funding in current Fiscal Year '21
5 contracts, with less than four months left this
6 Fiscal Year. This is unacceptable and displays a
7 complete lack of regard for the New York City Human
8 Services providers, young frontline workers.

9 In order to address this crisis, the Fiscal Year
10 '22 Budget must include \$171 million to fully honor
11 the ICR initiative and pay human services providers
12 the indirect rates that the city has already
13 previously committed to paying them. That \$171
14 million covers 91 in total for Fiscal Year '22
15 including the \$34 million already currently
16 baselined. \$57 million for Fiscal Year '21 and \$23
17 million for Fiscal Year '20 to fill in the gaps
18 between the cost the committed to paying nonprofits
19 in the amount actually included in the last two
20 budgets.

21 More data as well as a detailed timeline of the
22 failed ICR rollout can be found in my written
23 testimony. The Fiscal Year '22 budget must also
24 support the human services workforce with the
25 restoration of COLA at a rate of at three percent and

1
2 comprehensive emergency pay for city contracted human
3 services workers, retroactive to March 23, 2020 when
4 the stay at home order was first put into place.

5 Thank you Chair Levin for providing me this
6 opportunity to testify. We greatly value your
7 support and partnership.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you MJ.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you MJ.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now go to Michelle
11 Yanche. Michelle, you may begin when prompted by the
12 Sergeant.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 MICHELLE YANCHE: Thank you everyone. I am
15 Michelle Yanche, Executive Director of Good Shepherd
16 Services. Particularly would like to thank you Chair
17 Levin and all of the members and staff of the General
18 Welfare Committee for hearing this testimony.

19 I am going to just summarize and I want to add
20 Good Shepherd Services voice to the four key points
21 that other colleagues have raised up today. My
22 comments are going to concentrate on salary parity
23 for residential staff in child welfare and juvenile
24 justice in preventive service investments. The need
25 for investments in nonprofits and particularly

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2 Indirect Cost Rate and the restoration of budget cuts
3 hitting children with emphasis on for this hearing on
4 Fair Futures.

5 So, first just related to salary parity for
6 residential, if you hear nothing else of my testimony
7 today, I hope that you will remember my plea to you
8 to make sure that with the Stimulus package and this
9 budget, the next budget that we will adopt for New
10 York, we finally will bring some level of equity and
11 parity for our residential staff in child welfare and
12 juvenile justice residences.

13 I have testified about this in the past and
14 specifically to the point that their day in day out
15 jobs in normal times, they are not being – we are not
16 able to fairly and equitably compensate them for the
17 incredible jobs they do and the risks that they take.
18 That has been dramatically exponentially increased in
19 the middle of this pandemic.

20 Over the past now full year, the staff in our
21 residences have been on literally the frontlines of
22 the pandemic effort and that has meant putting their
23 own lives and their families lives literally on the
24 line. And they are the staff among many providers,
25 including Good Shepherd Services who have been most

1
2 likely to get themselves become ill and bringing
3 also, by putting themselves on the frontlines,
4 bringing COVID into their families and communities.
5 We have a responsibility to address this.

6 On preventive services, I just want to call
7 attention to the impact of the Governor's Proposed
8 Budget and ask that the City Council join us in
9 calling on a restoration of the nearly \$38 million
10 cut that would hit ACS from the Governor's proposal
11 to reduce by five percent the states withholding as
12 well as in that compounding with the historical rate
13 reduction and reimbursement from the statutory 65 -

14 This is a time when we need to be investing more
15 in preventive services. And in particular, in
16 primary prevention. Very quickly, I really cannot
17 emphasize enough the need to make sure that we are
18 reversing the cuts to the indirect cost rate.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

20 MICHELLE YANCHE: Many other colleagues have
21 touched on this. I just want to point out that with
22 the 40 percent reduction in the first year of
23 implementation FY20, coupled now with an additional
24 70 percent reduction for FY21, we will have lost a
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2 full year of the value of what has been only a two
3 year implementation.

4 And finally, please, please restore fair futures
5 and make sure that we can baseline \$20 million and
6 work towards a scale up to full implementation over
7 the long term. Happy to answer any questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Michelle. I do
9 have a question actually. Can you speak a little bit
10 about the Family Enrichment Center, FEC that you guys
11 run in East New York?

12 MICHELLE YANCHE: I am so glad you asked. That
13 was part of my testimony but had to be cut because I
14 could see my clock ticking down and I wanted to talk
15 more about residential.

16 But yes, we operate one of the three family
17 enrichment centers. We call ours the CRIB, Community
18 Reinvestment in Brooklyn and Community Resources in
19 Brooklyn and we operate in East New York. I know
20 that Chair Levin and many of the other, some of the
21 staff and other folks in this hearing have visited.

22 We were you know, very fortunate to just have our
23 contract renewed. We were really hoping to see there
24 be an expansion. That was what the plan was for this
25 year, so that other colleagues and other

1
2 organizations would have the opportunity to operate
3 family enrichment centers and this really would have
4 been the right time to do it.

5 Our family enrichment center has been absolutely
6 pivotal in Good Shepherd Services pandemic response
7 efforts over the past year. The Family Enrichment
8 Center is truly a primary prevention model, meaning
9 that it is - it's open to the whole community. And
10 it is a community led and community driven strategy.
11 It's not specifically focused on families already
12 known to the child welfare system. Although
13 absolutely can and does serve those families as well.

14 But we were able to really engage the community
15 in identifying right on the ground. You know, we use
16 the term boots on the ground but this was truly boots
17 on the ground. So, identify what were the pressing
18 community needs at every step of the past year of the
19 pandemic. And to use it really as a location, as a
20 HUB, as a platform for mobilizing resources to meet
21 those needs directly.

22 Everything from technology distribution for young
23 people, so that they could be part of homeschooling
24 more effectively. Food distribution efforts,
25 financial assistance, benefits enrollment and meeting

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2 every other kind of community need and this similarly
3 as our family enrichment center has been a critical
4 part of our efforts over the past year, it's going to
5 be a critical part of the recovery.

6 And this is really exactly the time when we
7 should reactivate that opportunity to allow other
8 organizations to open family enrichment centers in
9 all of the communities that have been hard hit.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, can I ask just, does the
11 - you know, I have wondered since I first went, like,
12 does the affiliation with ACS in any way kind of like
13 you know cloud the mission or prevent people from
14 participating or add to any community skepticism or
15 anything like that because it's you know, it is you
16 know, just generally speaking you know, what we hear
17 from ACS is like not what people want to hear.

18 MICHELLE YANCHE: Well, I mean, that's the beauty
19 of the Family Enrichment Center model. Is that it
20 really is actually designed, not only to you know,
21 not to emphasize the ACS involvement but really even
22 not to emphasize Good Shepherd Services.

23 I mean, it is a - it is purposely you know named,
24 branded, cooperated with community. That is really
25 what the model is. It's not supposed to be you know,

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2 this is ACS and Good Shepherd Services. It's really,
3 we are facilitators in the process and it's very much
4 about uhm, brining community to the table to design,
5 implement, lead, mobilize and that's also, honestly
6 that's why it's been so incredibly effective during
7 the pandemic because it really creates a platform for
8 community to assist community, neighbor to assist
9 neighbor.

10 This is exactly the kind of strategy that not
11 only is effective in "normal times" but it is
12 especially effective to help neighbors help each
13 other in a crisis.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Michelle. Thank
15 you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Michelle for your
17 testimony. We will now go to Nicole McVinua.
18 Nicole, you can begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 NICOLE MCVINUA: Good afternoon Chair Levin and
21 members of the Committee. My name is Nicole McVinua
22 and I am the Director of Policy at Urban Pathways.
23 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the
24 FY22 Budget.

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2 Urban Pathways is a nonprofit homeless services
3 and supportive housing provider. We assist single
4 adults through a unique combination of street
5 outreach, drop in services, safe havens, extended
6 stay residences and permanent supportive housing.
7 Urban Pathways served approximately 3,900 New Yorkers
8 in need last year.

9 Throughout the pandemic, our doors have never
10 closed and our services have never stopped. In fact,
11 we opened an additional 60 stabilization beds to
12 bring New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness
13 inside to safety.

14 At great risk to their own health and the other
15 families, our frontline staff continued to come to
16 work to ensure the wellbeing of our clients and our
17 residences and like Urban Pathways, Human Services
18 Providers across the city have continued to provide
19 food, childcare and other critical in-person services
20 throughout the last year.

21 And while the human services sector stepped up to
22 meet the needs of New Yorkers in crisis,
23 unfortunately New York City government did not step
24 up to support us in the same way. Throughout the
25 last calendar year, the city has allowed the COLA for

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human services workers to expired in the middle of the pandemic by not renewing it in the FY21 budget. Failed to provide comprehensive emergency pay for low-wage city contracted frontline workers and created fiscal chaos for the sector by retroactively cutting the Indirect Cost Rate Funding Initiative, like so many of my colleagues have spoken to. At a time that we were experiencing so many increased costs related to COVID.

And so, what this looked like for Urban Pathways was a retroactive cut of \$387,553 in FY20 and then just last week, we found out that we were getting the 70 percent reduction, which is a loss of \$678,218. So, this is you know a massive loss to our organization.

So, in order to address this crisis, the FY22 must include the following: The restoration of the COLA on the personnel services line of all human services contracts at a rate of at three percent. Comprehensive emergency pay for human services workers retroactive to March 23, 2020 when nonessential workers in New York were ordered to stay home and \$171 million to fully honor the Indirect Cost Rate Funding Initiative for FY20, FY21 and FY22.

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2 And the other thing I would like to join my
3 colleagues in supporting, is the funding for the City
4 FHEPS voucher. Our staff does extremely challenging
5 work and one of the most difficult tasks that they
6 have is helping our clients who are experiencing
7 homelessness to find independent and permanent
8 housing.

9 And the reality is, is that the City FHEPS
10 voucher has a great capacity to provide meaningful
11 access to the private market but it just falls short.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 NICOLE MCVINUA: The maximum rental allowance of
14 \$1,265 for a single adult is just impossible to find
15 an apartment in New York City and it creates a lot of
16 frustration for our clients and for our staff who are
17 assisting them.

18 And so to address homelessness, the city must
19 take the step of creating adequate access to the
20 private market by raising the maximum rent on City
21 FHEPS vouchers to at least the Fair Market Rent
22 value, like so many have spoken to today.

23 Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am
24 happy to answer any questions.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Nicole.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Nicole. We will
3 now go to Marcyn Campbell. Marcyn, you may begin
4 when prompted by the Sergeant.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 MARCYN CAMPBELL: Okay, thank you. So, good day
7 members of the New York City Council. My name is
8 Marcyn Campbell and thank you for the opportunity to
9 testify today.

10 I will be sharing my story with you in hopes that
11 emphasizing just how important Covenant House is at
12 the Youth Shelter. I was a member of Covenant House
13 located in Midtown Manhattan by Time Square for about
14 a month and a half from approximately November 29th
15 to mid-January.

16 So, I emphasize enough about how much that
17 program helped me. So, before that point in life I
18 wouldn't have seen other than living in a shelter. I
19 grew up relatively in an English background. I had
20 attended top schools. I was an honor student and
21 eventually I got accepted into one of my top schools
22 with an academic scholarship and college.

23 So, despite my accomplishments however, there is
24 just my personal life and I had issues with my mother
25 a lot. So, in November 2020, we reached a boiling

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2 point and I was kicked out of the house. So, I spent
3 a week with a friend but eventually I moved to New
4 York City and to be close to the college I will be
5 attending and where a friend of mine at Covenant
6 House.

7 So, Covenant House was truly a blessing for me.
8 I was at one of my lowest points of my life, I never
9 saw myself being in. Despite this, I was welcomed to
10 the program with opened arms. The staff there at all
11 levels - [INAUDIBLE 6:42:16] success and it made me
12 feel so inspired to witness that.

13 The services that are provided by the institution
14 were also amazing. I was able to receive the maximum
15 medication at a timely manner. I was also able to
16 meet amazing new people, not just on my floor but at
17 all the services provided at Covenant House. From
18 music studios to the art room. So, Covenant House
19 wasn't just a place to stay for a month and a half,
20 it was a truly extraordinary service that provided me
21 with resources that I am utilizing to this day.

22 In fact, at Covenant House, I was able to begin
23 internship with an advocacy lawyer and mentor
24 [INAUDIBLE 6:42:48], which is why I have the
25 opportunity to speak here today.

1
2 So, that's why I am calling for the city to
3 provide extra funding to homeless youth services such
4 as those at Covenant House. Even though Covenant
5 House is doing a lot right, there is still so much
6 that additional funding would help with.

7 So, the money could be put towards a development
8 and workplace and programming which at Covenant House
9 is called Covenant Works. And I saw as part of the
10 program, I can speak to how much that helped me.
11 Funding would also go towards mental health services
12 which are especially valuable to homeless youth as
13 they overcome the trauma they experience on
14 homelessness they cause.

15 I benefitted from Covenant House mental health
16 services during my time there and so I emphasize how
17 much and important these services are. So, I feel
18 like the thousands of homeless youth living in
19 shelters cost the city and as the most vulnerable
20 population, the city should be doing more to ensure
21 the protection.

22 At Covenant House homeless youth are able to rise
23 up out of their current situations and into a safe
24 space where people are fighting constantly for their
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1
2 success. And that in turn leads to them becoming
3 self-assured members of society.

4 Covenant house, [INAUDIBLE 6:43:56], that's why I
5 am calling for the City Council to further fund
6 homeless youth services of Covenant House. If the
7 city really wants to service most marginalized
8 communities. This is where to start.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 MARCYN CAMPBELL: Okay, that's all for me.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much Marcyn
12 for your testimony. We will now go to Darren Bloch.
13 Darren, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 DARREN BLOCH: Thanks so much. Good afternoon
16 Chairman and member of the Committee. My name is
17 Darren Bloch, I am the CEO and Executive Director at
18 Greenwich House. We are a 118-year-old settlement
19 house that provides a variety of social services and
20 supports to about 15,000 children, families, adults
21 and seniors each year.

22 I am joining you today to share my serious
23 concerns about the related budget cuts to social
24 services providers that are being proposed for this
25 current year and the coming year. Hearing protests

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2 against cuts to social services is nothing new to
3 this process, I know. But these particular cuts at
4 this particular moment show a unique carelessness and
5 deep disconnect from the needs that we are seeing.
6 And I have really struggled to think about how best
7 to characterize what we are seeing here and the best
8 I have come up with is gross negligence. And to be
9 clear, I am using that term with thought and care.

10 Gross negligence is extreme indifference. It's a
11 deliberate and reckless disregard for the safety and
12 the treatment of others. It's a serious thing.
13 Companies are sued for millions of dollars because of
14 gross negligence. Parents lose their children to the
15 foster care system because of neglect and I am
16 calling it out here because the actions that are
17 proposed are that seriously out of whack with what
18 the system needs and can absorb right now. And yet
19 our Mayor and the Governor here in New York are
20 literally in the process of taking funds back from
21 the very people and organizations that we have been
22 celebrating for 12 months as our frontline essential
23 workers in this battle with COVID.

24 The proposal right now is hypocritical. It's
25 shortsighted and it's dangerous. The realities and

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impacts of this health and mental health crisis are going to be felt for years, we know this. And not having local leadership that's actually planning and investing in these programs, people and systems is devastating enough. But proposals that are deliberately weakening these very organizations that have been the backbone of our response to COVID and that are going to be the backbone of our community recovery, it's simple malpractice.

These proposed cuts with clear and tangible certainty will hurt essential workers and they are going to hurt hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers that we serve and support every day.

Perhaps most dramatic is the fact that we are not talking about hundreds of millions in new program funding, which we actually need. The calls you are hearing are to fulfill funding commitments already made for critical work that's already been performed or already underway.

We have been reminded recently that governments prime direct is to protect its citizen rate and at a national level, we have quickly seen the difference in outcome between smart investments and neglect.

1
2 Here in New York, we can not afford to not meet
3 this moment. In response to this crisis, it doesn't
4 correspond to the scale the problem, you will be
5 prolonging the effects of the COVID-19 even further.
6 And if you are not investing in these programs, you
7 are going to be exacerbating the racial and the
8 social disparities that have already been all too
9 apparent in our response to this pandemic.

10 The impact of these cuts are going to be felt in
11 every neighborhood in this city because the work we
12 are all doing reverberates in every community. I
13 strongly urge the Mayor's Office to reconsider —

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

15 DARREN BLOCH: Just one sentence left, if I can?

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course, yeah.

17 DARREN BLOCH: Thank you. I strongly urge the
18 Mayor's Office to reconsider its proposed cuts to
19 these people in programs and at the absence of
20 forward thinking leadership to the Mayor's teams, I
21 hope the City Council steps up to provide a set of
22 investments to protect New Yorkers from indirect and
23 direct impacts of COVID. And that doesn't disrespect
24 and disregard the people who have been on the
25

1
2 frontline helping our neighbors and New York's
3 recovery.

4 Thanks so much for your time and commitment to
5 New Yorkers.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Darren. Yeah, you
7 know, the way that I like to think about it or look
8 at it is, city government can't do a lot of the
9 things that we would hope to do. We rely on the not-
10 for-profit sector to do the things that we couldn't
11 do. We couldn't pay for it ourselves if we did it
12 ourselves. We wouldn't be able to function if we did
13 it ourselves. We absolutely entirely rely on a
14 network of social service organizations that have
15 collectively about 4,000 years of experience and uhm,
16 and yet we continue to treat them like they are
17 expendable and that's just not acceptable.

18 DARREN BLOCH: Yeah totally and I think, and as a
19 point Joe Berg raised and I think appropriately so,
20 you know, and it is really intangible but the ROI on
21 these community investments is profound. I mean, the
22 amount of the reach of these fairly minor investments
23 in a huge city budget truly pay for itself over time
24 around education, health outcomes, criminal justice
25 outcomes and the like.

1
2 So, it's a deeply frustrating and disappointing
3 presentation from an administration I think that has
4 tried to be thoughtful about the social service
5 infrastructure we have. It just, it falls so short
6 of the need right now.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, thank you that you
8 pointed it out. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Darren and to this
10 panel for your testimony. We will now go to our next
11 group of panelists who include Bianca Bennett,
12 Jennifer Pinder and Nancie Katz. We will begin with
13 Bianca Bennett. Bianca, you may begin when prompted.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 BIANCA BENNETT: Good afternoon Council. My name
16 is Bianca Bennett. I am a Youth Advocate and Quality
17 Assurance Assistance for You Gotta Believe. A
18 nonprofit organization that finds families for older
19 youth who are at risk of aging out of care or who
20 have aged out.

21 As a Quality Assurance Assistant and law and
22 government student, I ground myself on efficiency and
23 I am very data oriented. I wanted to come to you
24 today and present a plethora of statistics on how You
25 Gotta Believe has transformed the idea of family and

1
2 has committed thousands of New York State youth with
3 unconditional support.

4 However, when it comes to youth and care, I know
5 as a former foster youth that we are more than just
6 numbers. I want to express a personal story on YGB
7 helped me find my family and my purpose in this
8 world.

9 I was placed in a New York City foster care
10 system from the age of 13 to the time I aged out at
11 21. During the whole process, my unconditional
12 support was my maternal grandmother, who at 18 became
13 my legal kinship guardian. She was the only person I
14 could depend on and when I turned 21, I was scared to
15 age out but I knew with the support of my
16 grandmother, I could take on the world.

17 A month later, my grandmother had a sudden brain
18 hemorrhage and passed away. I was devastated. Here
19 I was aged out of care, alone and unaware of what to
20 do. In the following two months, I lost my housing
21 despite working three jobs and had stressed myself
22 out so bad I hospitalized myself with sciatica for a
23 week and was unable to work.

24 Although I had the skills that I was taught in my
25 independent living classes, maintaining a job,

1
2 creating a bank account and other adult
3 responsibilities, I was in survival mode because I
4 had no one to help guide me through the process. I
5 was alone and I was falling deeper in the rabbit hole
6 of depression and often thought following in my
7 mothers footsteps of substance abuse.

8 It wasn't until I reached out to my Vice
9 President at college and her and her husband came to
10 my rescue. I found an instant connection and
11 imagined being part of their family. It wasn't until
12 I reached out to You Gotta Believe where they gave me
13 the belief and confidence that despite me being 22, I
14 deserved family and I was worth it.

15 Because of that combination, I am currently in
16 the process of being adopted this year. This is just
17 one story of how you got to believe has changed my
18 life. I have had the privilege as an employee to
19 watch our services make a difference in foster care
20 agencies and the youth and families in our system.
21 You Gotta Believe does more than just instill hope
22 that family is possible. They are with you every
23 step of the way. We are on call 24/7 with parent and
24 advocates to assist with post placement. Because of
25 our lived experience with the foster care system, we

1
2 can provide the knowledge and impact of an agent to
3 change the narrative for not only youth but the
4 perspectives of the agencies we work with.

5 In addition because YGB is an agency comprised of
6 former fosters and adopted parents. Our organization
7 provides employment and advocacy opportunities to
8 allow power back in the voice who have been hindered
9 by the system. By uplifting their voices and
10 providing spaces for them at the table, we can make
11 effective change based on our living experience.

12 I, myself, as an employee have benefited from the
13 professional development that You Gotta Believe has
14 provided and have traveled all over the country
15 before COVID advocating for childrens rights in
16 foster care reform.

17 I never thought my voice mattered. The YGB
18 proved to me that when you are not at the table, you
19 are on the menu. So, you pull up your own seat and
20 you make room. YGB needs the support of the City
21 Council to be able to continue to work with young
22 people and bring hope back into the agencies again.
23 I as a former foster youth and employee of You Gotta
24 Believe, supports its efforts in supporting older
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youth and care and I hope that the City Council will do the same.

Thank you. If you have any questions, I am free to answer.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Bianca, thank you for telling your story and for advocating for YGB, which is really one of the most essential and unique organizations that we work with. They are you know, one of only two or so organizations that really are dedicated connecting older youth in care to forever families and hearing your story you know really, really demonstrates that in a meaningful way. And so, I thank you for sharing it and for – and congratulations on your adoption and for all the work that you are doing and it's very moving to hear your story and thank you for sharing it.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Bianca. We will now go to our next panelist Jennifer Pinder. Jennifer, you may begin when the Sergeant prompts you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

JENNIFER PINDER: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair Levin and all the members of the Committee and

1
2 thank you for your continued support Chair Levin and
3 your kind words about YGB.

4 My name is Jennifer Pinder, I am the Executive
5 Director of You Gotta Believe. I would also like to
6 thank Bianca for her powerful testimony and all the
7 work that she does at YGB, which would not be
8 possible without the support of the City Council
9 funding.

10 You Gotta Believe has submitted an ask to the
11 City Council discretionary fund to continue to
12 support a nobody ages out program. We have received
13 support from the City Council since 2015, with the
14 advocacy and backing of Council Members Johnson,
15 Levin and Treyger. YGB was given a lifeline after
16 having our ACS contract discontinued after over a
17 decade of service to the systems vulnerable youth.

18 We continue to support. We continue to receive
19 support rather from City Council until last year when
20 we were unfortunately zeroed out. It seems as though
21 this may have just been a result of the chaotic
22 situation during budget development and the budget
23 shortfall but only a fraction of our previous level
24 was restored after that, thankfully with the help of
25 Council Member Dromm and others.

1
2 Our request this year is to assist YGB in making
3 up for that loss as we continue to conduct the nobody
4 ages out program. A program which was even more
5 intensive and costly than usual as a result of the
6 adjustments required with the pandemic in place.

7 For 26 years, we have been laser focused on
8 finding, loving and unconditionally committed
9 parents, specifically for kids in foster care, who
10 would otherwise age out to be essentially alone in
11 the world. YGB is very unique with this focus. We
12 find people interested in becoming parents and we
13 train them to parent traumatize children. Everyone
14 on our program staff as Bianca mentioned, are
15 credible messengers. Meaning they are either parents
16 of older youth from foster care or survivors of the
17 foster care system themselves.

18 This gives our staff an advantage in being able
19 to both train and support our parents in youth and to
20 help them maintain their relationship and avoid the
21 typical destructions that older youth experience.

22 You Gotta Believe does applaud all the work
23 that's being done first to keep families together
24 through preventive services. Secondly, the increased
25 efforts made to reunify families and finally, the

1
2 extensive accomplishments in increasing numbers of
3 youth being placed with kin.

4 Unfortunately there are still labeled the hardest
5 to place youth who slip into the independent living
6 track and are often relying on services such as
7 coaches and mentors. However, these services do not
8 take the place of a family and our time limited. We
9 have seen from this past year how everyone required
10 the emotional support of their family and many went
11 home to wait out the pandemic. Meanwhile, youth from
12 foster care just became more isolated than ever as
13 they had no home to go to for support.

14 While the situation was somewhat worse for foster
15 youth during the pandemic, aging out is never a
16 positive experience. They face homelessness,
17 continued welfare dependence and often join the
18 pipeline to incarceration.

19 These negative outcomes are avoidable for the
20 youth who we connect with permanent and
21 unconditionally commit of families who serve as
22 lifetime mentors and coaches and who never give up on
23 their kids no matter what. YGB needs the support of
24 the City Council –

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 JENNIFER PINDER: To be able to continue the work
3 with young people who have not been helped by all the
4 other resources that have been provided. Thank you
5 for your time.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much Jennifer.
7 Before we go to the last member of this panel. I do
8 want to give our next panel a heads up that they are
9 next up and that will consist of Beth Goldman, Raun
10 Rasmussen, Arielle Wisbaum, Leslie Thrope. And we
11 will now go to the last member of this panel, who is
12 Nancie Katz of Seeds in the Middle. Nancie, you can
13 begin when prompted.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 NANCIE KATZ: Hello, thank you very much
16 everybody. I have been listening for a long time to
17 the members of the Committee and the Chair and a lot
18 of the testimony that I have never heard before.

19 I am a Director of Seeds in the Middle. We are a
20 small organization that was founded in Crown Heights
21 with a principle there when we recognized in 2010
22 with Michelle Obama that obesity and diabetes and
23 heart disease were killing – well, now we say Black
24 and Brown people at much higher rates than anyone
25 else all over the country but particularly in Central

1
2 Brooklyn, Harlem and the Bronx. And we started a
3 program with Mr. Solomon at PS91 to create a Hip to
4 Be Health School where the kids could actually grow
5 food, market food, learn to cook healthy, play sports
6 and be engaged in the arts.

7 So, it is no surprise to us in our struggles over
8 the last ten years, when COVID came along and
9 suddenly people were, many people of color were dying
10 and suffering disproportionately because of
11 underlying conditions. We have struggled for many
12 years to open more farmers markets and farm stands in
13 neighborhoods of color and we have tried to promote
14 other groups along with ourselves and it has been
15 next to impossible.

16 The funding, the way the funding stream is with
17 the City Council and the Mayor, tends to go to larger
18 organizations who are all doing wonderful work but
19 there needs to be a much more super local effort on
20 the small farm stands, particularly working with
21 schools that can actually change the food environment
22 and build healthy, small businesses while we do it.

23 That's what we are doing. We ask for \$150,000 so
24 that we can open ten of these farm stands run by
25 community leaders. Many of them affiliated with

1
2 schools or green thumb gardens. Who are people who
3 are active in their community, they volunteer their
4 time and scramble for very little money against the
5 millions that go to the other organizations.

6 We are particularly shocked, it's not necessarily
7 the city but it is by the recent USDA boxes, which
8 are full of hotdogs, precooked chicken, American
9 cheese and other processed foods that anybody with
10 diabetes or heart disease should stay away from and
11 we certainly don't feed our children and there needs
12 to be and I heard that from other organizations, a
13 real laser focus on what are we giving people, even
14 if it's free. And we also in our budget, which is
15 very important that goes with Joel Bergs EBT thing,
16 is we want free coupons. We want thousands of
17 dollars to give out free, fresh coupons so people
18 have purchasing power and I agree that it will have
19 an economic effect because if they are spending that
20 money on food, they are spending their other money on
21 tax items.

22 We need more free coupons, more EBT online. We
23 need to give people purchasing power, which is absent
24 right now and over ten years, I have not seen one
25 positive change working in the hood like that.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

NANCIE KATZ: Anyway, I am looking for you know a real look at what we are doing and some changes and allocations of funding. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. We will now go to our next panel, which will consist of Beth Goldman, Raun Rasmussen, Arielle Wisbaum, Leslie Thrope and Kevin Jones.

Beth, you can begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

BETH GOLDMAN: Thank you Chair Levin, Council Members, staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the General Welfare Committee about the FY22 budget.

My name is Beth Goldman and I am the President and Attorney in charge at the New York Legal Assistance Group. NYLAG provides high quality free legal services to New Yorkers experiencing poverty and in crisis to the benefit of 90,000 New Yorkers each year.

I want to focus my remarks today to addressing the role of legal services and dealing with the fall out from the pandemic and the recovery. This

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2 Committee and the whole Council knows the value of
3 legal services so the city has made a deep commitment
4 to funding for civil legal services. It's like no
5 other city in recognizing that but it is now - we
6 need it and we are going to continue to need it.

7 So, I want to talk for a minute about how COVID
8 has changed our work. First of all, our existing
9 clients have new needs. The pandemic exacerbated the
10 challenges they already faced. It also created a
11 whole new group of clients who are not eligible for
12 our services before. And it also meant that our
13 clients could not access services in the way they did
14 previously. So, we needed to adapt our intake
15 services, our service delivery models and the
16 substance of work we have performed and I could give
17 you a list of all the hotlines and resource centers
18 that we created.

19 But I think it's important to talk about some of
20 how the work changed. Because I think that's going
21 to effect the future. So, for example, let's talk
22 about employment work, which is actually funded by
23 the low-wage worker funding of this Council to
24 support it.

1
2 We pivoted from doing employment discrimination
3 and wage claims to a very large volume of
4 unemployment insurance matters. We handled 17 times
5 as many UI cases as we did the prior year and it's
6 because we had this funding from the city that
7 allowed us to do that. And the reality is in every
8 area in which we work, we had to shift gears.
9 Whether it was domestic violence, where the courts
10 were most enclosed and there were barriers to people
11 getting orders of protection.

12 So, we shifted gears and started doing family
13 offense petitions by the hundreds, which is not our
14 normal practice. And I could go on with a list of
15 work that changed completely. But I want to now talk
16 in my last few seconds about the importance to the
17 recovery. With more than 800,000 New Yorkers
18 unemployed and of course, COVID has exacerbated the
19 racial and wealth gaps. We need to be thinking about
20 all the ways in which legal services can ensure that
21 people do not go hungry, are safe in their homes, and
22 can get the benefits they need.

23 So, Legal Services will need to be there for
24 public benefits. For housing of course when the
25 moratoria ends. Foreclosure attorneys to deal with -

1
2 so that people can stay in their homes once that
3 moratoria is lifted. Employment lawyers, consumer
4 lawyers are going to have to handle the onset of
5 cases by debt collectors.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 BETH GOLDMAN: When it is safe to recover and the
8 list goes on. So, given the commitment of the city
9 in the past, now is the time to continue that
10 commitment so that we can work on the recovery
11 together. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Beth. We will now
13 move to our next panelist Raun Rasmussen. Raun, you
14 can begin once the Sergeant prompts you.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we will come back to
17 Raun and we will proceed with our next panelist, who
18 will be Arielle Wisbaum. Arielle, you can begin once
19 prompted by the Sergeant.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: Oh, shoot.

22 ARIELLE WISBAUM: Hello.

23 UNIDENTIFIED: Oh, I am sorry. Can you come back
24 to me after she is done? Sorry about that. I didn't
25 realize I was on mute.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure, no problem. Arielle,
3 go ahead.

4 ARIELLE WISBAUM: Thank you. Good afternoon
5 everyone. During this unprecedented public health
6 crisis, I urge the Council today to support renewed
7 funding for the immigrant health initiative, which
8 has saved lives and approved health across the city.
9 My name is Arielle Wisbaum and I am the Equal Justice
10 Works Fellow in the Health Justice Program at New
11 York Lawyers for the Public Interest. Where we work
12 to ensure that undocumented immigrants have access to
13 healthcare.

14 At NYLPI, I help provide holistic advocacy for
15 transgender, gender non-conforming, intersex and HIV
16 positive immigrant New Yorkers, so that they can gain
17 immigration status and access to healthcare through
18 direct legal services.

19 NYLPI is privileged to be a part of the City
20 Council's Immigrant Health Initiative and we thank
21 you for that support. At a time when access to
22 medical care and information is crucial and
23 misinformation can endanger our communities, this
24 support has allowed us to expand our work, educating
25 immigrant New Yorkers with serious health conditions,

1
2 their healthcare providers and legal service
3 providers about how to access healthcare and how to
4 stay safe.

5 We have responded directly to community needs for
6 medical/legal information and partnering with the New
7 York Immigration Coalition, created and staffed a
8 Facebook live educational panel with doctors and
9 lawyers to answer questions on how to prevent the
10 spread of the coronavirus and implications of the
11 public charge rule.

12 In the wake of the COVID-19 case surge this past
13 fall in Sunset Park Brooklyn, NYLPI in coalition with
14 the Academy of Medical and Public Health Services and
15 others hosted virtual townhalls events to hear
16 directly from the community. This offered
17 individuals an opportunity to hear updates on local
18 school reopening and testing efforts directly from
19 representatives from the Department of Education and
20 Test and Trace Corp and gave the local community a
21 public forum to engage directly with city officials
22 on issues of grave concern.

23 Most recently, NYLPI cohosted an important
24 conversation hosted by the New York City Department
25 of Health that provided information and answered

1
2 questions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. NYLPI
3 actively participates in the City's Emergency Partner
4 Engagement Council, addressing the COVID-19 crisis
5 and its impact on our community partners.

6 Your support has also led to increased enrollment
7 by eligible immigrants and state funded Medicaid that
8 improved access to Medicaid has had life changing and
9 often life saving effects on the lives of our
10 clients. In October of 2020 we expanded our reach
11 and launched On Doc You Care TGNCI Plus. A project
12 that aims to break down two major barriers to
13 accessing healthcare. First, lack of immigration
14 status and second, risk of detention. Following
15 NYLPI's holistic approach to accessing healthcare
16 through immigration advocacy and DOC You Care TGNCI
17 Plus provides direct legal services to transgender
18 folks, gender nonconforming folks and intersex folks.

19 I see I am running short on time, so I just
20 wanted to emphasize and thank you Chairperson Stephen
21 Levin and the Committee members for giving us the
22 opportunity to present this testimony today and for
23 this tremendous assistance and we ask that the
24 funding continue into Fiscal Year 2022 for the
25 Immigrant Health Initiative.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

ARIELLE WISBAUM: For NYLPI and for our partners.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your testimony. We will now go back to Raun if you are able.

RAUN RASMUSSEN: I am able.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

RAUN RASMUSSEN: Great. Thank you Chairman Levin and members of the Committee. My name is Raun Rasmussen and I am the Executive Director of Legal Services NYC. Our staff of 600 advocates and support staff fights poverty by providing free civil legal services to more than 110,000 New Yorkers every year.

This pandemic has striped New York City families and children of their jobs, their incomes, their education, their health and in all too many cases, their lives. Most tragically, this crisis has highlighted the compounding impacts that systemic racism in a demic poverty have on the communities we serve. Financial impacts, health impacts and education impacts have all formed disproportionately and devastatingly on communities of color.

1
2 To add insult to injury, many of our clients have
3 been unable to access or use the very technologies
4 that would enable them to apply for public benefits
5 or access their remote learning classes.

6 Since mid-March when we closed the doors to our
7 16 offices, our staff had worked to help our clients
8 get and keep the benefits and services they
9 desperately need to meet their most basic needs,
10 food, healthcare, cash assistance, safety and shelter
11 that safe and affordable.

12 We have educated and represented thousands of New
13 Yorkers to help them get unemployment benefits. We
14 are helping kids with special needs get the
15 educational services they need, so they don't fall
16 further behind. Our immigration advocates are making
17 sure our clients don't get deported or lose their
18 rights to legal status. Our housing and foreclosure
19 advocates are fighting legal evictions and predatory
20 lending scams and our family law advocates are
21 helping survivors of domestic violence who can't find
22 the privacy from their batterer to make the calls
23 needed to find safety.

24 That's why it is critical for the Council to
25 increase funding for the broad range of services that

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we provide through the Legal Services for Low-Income New Yorkers program. In Fiscal Year '21, with the pandemic raging and the impact on state and local economy potentially devastating, no end in sight, we fully understood the need to cut back on our funding. As you had to do for so many others. But with significant federal funding soon to arrive, we ask that you reverse that cut and restore funding for the Legal Services for Low-Income New Yorkers Program to Fiscal Year '20 level of \$6.3 million.

We also ask that you restore funding for Legal Services NYC's Veterans Justice program to \$150,000. Also, a return to Fiscal Year 2020 levels. And finally, with the most devastating impacts of the pandemic, because it is potentially life altering in the long term, is the way New York City's children's education have been adversely hurt.

We are working hard to address these issues and ask that you provide \$500,000 to support our Access to Education Project, which will deliver legal services designed to help children catch up and keep up with their educations, so that they are not left struggling by this pandemic.

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These services will help kids with special needs and disabilities, will provide language access advocacy for English Language Learner students and their limited English proficient parents and we will work with the schools to implement restorative healing programs, so that children who have been traumatized by sexual harassment or violence in the schools can be responded to with administrators that are supportive not punitive.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

RAUN RASMUSSEN: We will be testifying this at the Education Committee hearing next week but I wanted to raise it with you here. Because there is nothing more important to our city's welfare than the education of our children.

Thanks for your continued support. We look forward to our continued work together in this moment of greatest challenge.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your testimony Raun. We will now go to Leslie Thrope. Leslie, you may begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: The clock is ready.

LESLIE THROPE: Good afternoon and thank you Chair Levin and the Committee and Staff for taking

1
2 the time to hear our testimony. My name is Leslie
3 Thrope and I am the Executive Director of Housing
4 Conservation Coordinators. One of the five members
5 of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition
6 that includes CAMBA Legal Services, Mobilization for
7 Justice, NYMIC and Take Root Justice.

8 The Coalition was created 17-years-old with the
9 support of the City Council to address the civil
10 legal needs of Working Poor and other low-income New
11 Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the
12 poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible
13 for free legal services. Yet they often are one
14 missed paycheck away from facing eviction or other
15 dire consequences.

16 Legal Services for the Working Poor services are
17 critical in allowing working New Yorkers to maintain
18 financial independence and preserving economic
19 stability in communities across New York City. In
20 Fiscal Year '20, the initiative was funded at three
21 million two hundred and five thousand from the City
22 Council with each of the five coalition members
23 receiving \$455,000. That was cut last year. Reduced
24 in the time of the COVID-19 Fiscal crisis by
25 approximately 15 percent.

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2 Working Poor New Yorkers who often barely make
3 ends meet, can face catastrophic consequences that
4 result as a result of a civil legal problem. Such as
5 not being paid for their work or not being paid
6 overtime, identity theft, the freezing of bank
7 accounts as a result of collection lawsuits they
8 don't even know about or being denied public benefits
9 in which they are entitled. The consequence of these
10 problems can lead to other problems including
11 increased risk of eviction or foreclosure. These
12 working New Yorkers can end up spiraling downward to
13 join the ranks of the poor if they do not have access
14 to lawyers to assist them.

15 Our legal services organizations represent these
16 New Yorkers in all five boroughs in housing,
17 consumer, foreclosure, immigration benefits and
18 employment matters and state and federal courts and
19 other various administrative agencies.

20 As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, working for
21 New Yorkers have and will continue to
22 disproportionately face legal problems in
23 unprecedented numbers. Even before the COVID-19
24 crisis, tens of thousands of New Yorkers were hanging
25 on by a thread to their homes, their families, their

1
2 wellbeing and their dignity. As the crisis has laid
3 bare neighborhoods of color and immigrant communities
4 across the city have been especially hit hard by
5 health and economic disparities. The crisis has
6 resulted in unprecedented problems related to
7 unemployment insurance as well as workplace safety
8 concerns, issuing of stimulus payments, price gouging
9 and scams and has caused many New Yorkers to incur
10 unexpected debt, which will mean an increase in debt
11 collection litigation and for some bankruptcy.

12 These working poor who are adversely effected
13 will need members of our coalition to advise them and
14 help them navigate various complex legal processes
15 and fight their legal battles by representing them.

16 Let me provide you with just a few examples –
17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 LESLIE THROPE: Of the real clients that we serve
19 with this critical funding. I will just give you a
20 few. There is more examples in the written
21 testimony. Client CJ is 47-year-old Napoli man who
22 works and resides in the Elmhurst section of Queens.
23 He arrived in the US in 2016 through the Mexican
24 border seeking asylum from a dangerous political
25 climate in India. He was detained by ICE for six

1
2 months in a detention center and during his time
3 there, he was given a phone number by other detainees
4 to call for bond assistance.

5 We contacted that company called Libre by Nexus
6 and paid the \$15,000 bond to ICE for his release. As
7 the condition of his release, he had to wear a Nexus
8 sponsored GPS bracelet and pay a nonrefundable \$4,500
9 fee as a result of them paying off the bond.

10 He was told that he had pay \$420 a month to Nexus
11 as a fee for the GPS bracelet and to continue to wear
12 that GPS bracelet until he paid off the \$15,000. He
13 diligently paid and in 2017, he paid the debt in
14 full. His asylum application was approved in October
15 2018, which signaled the return of the bond money and
16 subsequently the return of the \$15,000. Money that
17 he would use to continue to build his life in New
18 York City with his new status.

19 They had him sign a refund authorization form,
20 which he promptly did and returned to them. They
21 said it would take 90-120 days for a refund. This
22 was in 2018. Two years later, he had not received
23 that funding, that money.

24 In November, he came to Take Root Justice and
25 they were handling his matter with the goal of

1
2 getting his \$15,000 returned to him promptly.

3 Another example, just one last example.

4 In September 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19
5 pandemic, Mr. S. a 56-year-old man, sought assistance
6 from housing conservation coordinators to return to
7 the apartment he was illegally locked out of in the
8 midst of a crisis just two days after the death of
9 his terminally ill mother.

10 He had been living in the apartment with his
11 mother and was her primary care taker. Upon the lock
12 out, Ms. S. filed a prose order to show cause and
13 after sleeping in his care for days while trying to
14 plan his mothers funeral, he was convinced by the
15 landlord to -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 LESLIE THROPE: Enter an agreement surrendering
18 the rights to the apartment exchange for letting him
19 back in the apartment to retrieve his belongings and
20 a dress to burry his mother in.

21 ACC filed a motion to vacate the stipulation and
22 judgement and successfully negotiated a settlement
23 vacating the stipulation and returning him to the
24 posture he had before the illegal lockout. These are
25 the clients we serve with life threatening problems.

1
2 This Council's funding for legal services for the
3 Working Poor is the only funding that specifically
4 targets the civil legal needs of working people to
5 ensure continued self-sufficiency for families
6 struggling to survive in New York City.

7 We ask that you restore the funding to the 20
8 levels which we had received as we considered the
9 choices that we will have to make in representing the
10 Working Poor. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Leslie for
12 your testimony. Before we get to the last member of
13 this group, I want to announce the next panel for
14 their awareness. We have Jin Kwak, Elaine Rita and
15 Yazmin Harris for our next panel.

16 Before we get there though we have Kevin Jones.
17 Kevin, you can begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: The clock is ready.

19 KEVIN JONES: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair
20 Levin and members of the City Council Committee on
21 General Welfare. My name is Kevin Jones and I am the
22 Associate State Director of Advocacy for AARP New
23 York. Representing 750,000 members of the 50 plus
24 community in New York City.

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I want to thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. Over the course of the past decade, New York City's population of older adults has become one of the fastest growing demographics in New York City. According to the Center for Urban Future, there are \$1.7 million residents in New York City above age 60. Among that group, 141,000 residents are above age 85. Over 136,000 individuals are homebound and nearly one in five are living below the federal poverty line.

As aging residents continue to make up a greater share of the city's total population in the coming years, the city will need to pay more attention to the needs and livelihoods of this group. All of us at this hearing already know the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the health and wellbeing of New York City's aging community and has created new and unprecedented challenges for the livelihoods of 50 plus New Yorkers.

Throughout the pandemic, AARP has heard countless stories from other adults who have struggled to access meals and groceries, health care and caregiving services, broadband and other programming opportunities that reduce social isolation and help

1
2 them through the crisis. As New York begins to enter
3 the recovery phase of the pandemic and the months
4 ahead, the city will be required to address a number
5 of living challenges, especially in the areas of
6 housing stability, rental arrears, employment
7 opportunities and access to vital social services.

8 AARP New York calls on the city to make the
9 following investments in the critical social service
10 programs that will protect the wellbeing of older
11 adults as well as ensure that 50 plus New Yorkers can
12 age with dignity in their communities all across New
13 York City.

14 First, AARP New York encourages the city to
15 expand funding for HRA administered programs that
16 protect the wellbeing of vulnerable adults,
17 specifically the Community Guardianship program,
18 Adult Protective Services and the Homecare Services
19 program. As the demand for these critical services
20 has increased over the pandemic, the city needs to
21 ensure that senior providers are properly supported
22 and have the staffing levels needed to meet the
23 increase in demand for services as well as guarantee
24 that more aging residents can receive services and
25

1
2 continue living in their communities safely after the
3 pandemic concludes.

4 Second, we recommend that the city increase
5 funding for the Right to Counsel program, in order to
6 protect 50 plus New Yorkers from the threat of
7 evictions and displacement. As the status and
8 timeline of New York's eviction moratorium remains
9 unclear, the city needs to ensure that all New
10 Yorkers who have fallen behind on their rent as a
11 result of the pandemic have access to a lawyer in the
12 event that they are brought to Housing Court in the
13 coming months.

14 Given that Right to Counsel has been proven to be
15 an effective tool in addressing New York City's
16 eviction crisis, the city should continue to invest
17 more resources into the program in order to keep New
18 Yorkers in their homes and prevent a massive wave of
19 evictions in the year ahead.

20 Third, we urge the city to maintain full funding
21 for the construction of new units of supportive
22 housing. Although the city's funding allocated for
23 the creation of units of supportive housing has been
24 threatened by a budget cut throughout this pandemic.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 KEVIN JONES: We believe it is imperative for the
3 city to continue this investment. And lastly, we
4 call on the city to maintain full funding for all HRA
5 administered housing voucher and rental assistance
6 programs.

7 Thank you for providing me the opportunity to
8 testify today and I am happy to take any questions.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Kevin for your
10 testimony. We will now go to our next panel. Our
11 first panelist will be Jin Kwak. Jin, you can begin
12 when prompted by the Sergeant.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

14 JIN KWAK: Good afternoon Committee Chair. My
15 name is Jin Kwak and I am an Outreach Worker for
16 LGBTQ People, the sex trades for the New York City
17 Antiviolence Project, also known as AVP.

18 AVP empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,
19 queer and HIV affected communities and allies to end
20 all forms of violence through organizing, education,
21 counseling and advocacy.

22 Yesterday, at the Public Safety hearing, my
23 colleagues spoke about how resources must be diverted
24 from policing to support services for sex workers.
25 Today, I am advocating for resources to continue to

1
2 go to the important work that AVP does with the LGBTQ
3 people in the sex trades.

4 LGBTQ people, especially trans, gender
5 nonconforming and nonbinary people disproportionately
6 participate in the sex trades by choice, circumstance
7 and coercion. LGBTQ youth in New York City enter the
8 sex trades at seven to eight times the rate of the
9 cisgender and heterosexual peers. Nearly 40 percent
10 of Black trans respondents in an actual survey said
11 that they had participated in the sex trades.

12 Many LGBTQ sex workers are also survivors of
13 violence. Poverty, criminalization and stigma make
14 LGBTQ people in the sex trades extremely vulnerable
15 to violence. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many LGBTQ
16 people in the sex trades had lost work and have seen
17 an increase in violence against them in person and on
18 the streets during this pandemic.

19 AVP supports survivors of violence with services
20 that attend to emotional, legal and social needs as
21 they heal from violence and develop strategies to
22 move forward. As an outreach worker at AVP, I have
23 deep roots in this community and work with LGBTQ sex
24 workers in connecting them to services and resources.

1
2 This work is important because this community hyper
3 criminalized and already lacks resources.

4 People in the sex trades need resources such as
5 legal services, housing services, medical services,
6 childcare services and other support and resources.
7 We at AVP strive to offer free social services to
8 LGBTQ sex workers, which includes legal services,
9 counseling services and connects to other resources.

10 We know the city is in a challenging financial
11 position but we strongly urge the City Council to
12 restore the funding to at Fiscal Year 2020 levels.
13 Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Jin for
15 your testimony. We will now go to Elaine Rita.
16 Elaine, you can begin when prompted by the Sergeant.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

18 ELAINE RITA: Thank you. Good afternoon
19 Committee Chairs. My name is Elaine Rita Mentas[SP?]
20 and I am a Community Member of the New York City
21 Antiviolence Project.

22 As you know, AVP empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual,
23 transgender, queer and HIV affected communities and
24 allies to end all forms of violence through
25 organizing, education, counseling and advocacy.

1
2 Generally and especially this past year though,
3 homeless New Yorkers have been left out of
4 conversations when it comes to offering resources
5 that are accessible and that offer long term impact
6 on their lives.

7 New York City is facing a problem of growing
8 homelessness crisis that is getting worse as the
9 pandemic winds down and the eviction moratoriums put
10 in place by the state face there end.

11 Our city and state have been on their knees
12 praying to the golden cap of real estate for years
13 now. Gentrification has been consistently ignored
14 and many neighborhoods are being cleared out of local
15 residents while landlords can sit on property and
16 speculate value.

17 Our shelter system is notorious as a place of
18 violence. So much so that many choose to exploit the
19 MTA and use it as a rolling homeless shelter. The
20 transit workers, commuters and law enforcement
21 officers of our city are not mental health
22 professionals and they are not equipped for handling
23 these situations.

24 I would like to underscore that the LGBTQ plus
25 community, especially trans people are especially

1
2 vulnerable to homelessness. For many in our
3 community, New York City is a place as a beacon of
4 hope and a sea of doubt. As a formerly homeless
5 transgender woman I was warned very early on to avoid
6 DHS shelters and I knew many who felt safer in
7 private facilities or on a subway car.

8 New York City needs to work for New Yorkers
9 regardless of their income bracket. We need more
10 shelter spaces specifically for LGBTQ people that are
11 immediate and permanent and we need some designated –
12 sorry, stop forcing our transit workers to moonlight
13 as social workers. Our police are not therapists and
14 our residents are not caregivers. If you feel that
15 this is a burdensome request, perhaps now is the time
16 that City Hall will finally stop giving handouts to
17 developers and landlords.

18 We have a crisis that is waiting to boil over
19 further. As soon as these eviction moratoriums end
20 that have been put in place by Albany, many tenants
21 will be evicted. Therefore it is imperative that
22 City Hall works to not only provide safe shelters, it
23 must work to provide actual and affordable housing.
24 Stop giving the real estate cartel all that it asks
25 for. I yield my time.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your
3 testimony Elaine. Before we get to our last panelist
4 of this group, I will like to announce the next batch
5 of panelists. We have next up Bill Baccaglioni,
6 Lakshmi Sanmuganathan, Becca Asaki and Mon Yuck Yu.

7 Before we get to our next group of panelists, we
8 have Yaszmin Harris. Yaszmin, you can begin when
9 prompted by the Sergeant.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

11 YASZMIN HARRIS: Good afternoon Committee Chair
12 and members. My name is Yaszmin Harris and I am a
13 Community Member of New York City Antiviolence
14 Project. AVP empowers lesbians, gays, bisexual,
15 transgender, queer and HIV affected communities and
16 allies to end all forms of violence through
17 organizing, education, counseling and advocacy.

18 Today, I am advocating for more resources to
19 those who address violence against our community.
20 Many forms of violence are increasing during the
21 pandemic including hate violence. Violence against
22 LGBTQ New Yorkers has not stopped during the
23 pandemic. In fact, 2020 was one of the deadliest
24 years for hate violence against the transgender
25 nonconforming and nonbinary community, especially

1
2 Black trans women. Yet in the middle of the pandemic
3 last year, the Council cut the hate violence
4 initiative with rising violence against Black, Brown,
5 Asian and LGBTQ across the community.

6 The initiative focused on community-based
7 approaches to building spaces including rapid
8 response mobilization at the violent incident,
9 community education, community reporting and
10 bystander intervention training.

11 Having many community members, friends and loved
12 ones being effected by hate violence, I understand
13 the importance of this initiative and its necessity
14 to help combat hate violence that my community faces.
15 Many of our community members do not feel safe going
16 to the police when they face violence. We need to be
17 diverting and reinvesting in the NYPD enormous \$6
18 billion budget, especially eliminating the \$18
19 million budget for to find community based solutions.

20 That's why it is important to have alternative
21 safety approaches like the Hate Crime Prevention
22 Initiative. Organizations that AVP to build safe
23 ways to report and mobilize members to combat hate
24 violence in the community.

1
2 We know the city is in a challenging financial
3 position but we strongly urge the City Council to
4 restore this funding to a Fiscal Year 2020 level. We
5 appreciate past support and look forward to working
6 with you and thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Yaszmin and this
8 whole panel for your testimony. We will now go to
9 our next group of panelists beginning with Bill
10 Baccaglioni. Bill, you can begin when prompted.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready. Mr.
12 Baccaglioni, we do not hear you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You are still muted.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You have to accept the unmute.
15 There you go.

16 BILL BACCAGLINI: Okay. Chair Levin, Committee
17 Members, thank you for this opportunity. I am
18 testifying today as President and CEO of the New York
19 Foundling. 20 years ago, I was looking at these
20 issues from a different perspective as Director of
21 Planning and Policy Development for the State Office
22 of Children and Family Services. What we were seeing
23 back then was a system that had been in place for
24 years that was not producing the results we all
25 wanted. There were too many children in foster care,

1
2 too many adolescents caught up in the juvenile
3 justice system, too many family torn apart, too many
4 communities suffering.

5 We believe that if we changed our approach and
6 pushed resources into preventive services, we would
7 have a better shot at moving the needle and getting
8 better results for children and families. I am proud
9 to say that I was the lead Architect at the
10 development of a new funding formula ultimately
11 approved by the legislature, through which the state
12 would match local spending at \$0.65 on the dollar for
13 preventive services. Our intent and hope was the
14 dis-enhanced state share would incentivize localities
15 to spend more on preventive and it worked. The
16 change still in place today at the beginning of a
17 major shift toward preventive services. Now, looking
18 back, we find that if we had predicted that the
19 number of children in foster care in the City of New
20 York could be reduced by more than 80 percent, people
21 would have shaken their heads and called us
22 unrealistic but that is exactly what has happened.
23 With the foster care population having dropped from a
24 high of 50,000 in the 1990's to as low as 7,000 today
25 and it has been done by strengthening families,

1
2 strengthening communities, keeping kids in their
3 homes and getting them the support they need to
4 succeed.

5 Through a comprehensive community and home-based
6 system of preventive services led by the
7 Administration for Children's Services and implement
8 it by non-for-profit agencies, families in New York
9 City are eligible for a range of services including
10 housing support, job training, medical care,
11 therapeutic and treatment services. These programs
12 include safeguards to protect the privacy of the
13 families seeking assistance.

14 The overwhelming success of ACS's primary
15 preventive services is something New York City should
16 be proud of. Particularly the family enrichment
17 centers and community partnerships that are located
18 throughout the five boroughs and are helping them
19 protect children and keep families together.

20 I strongly believe the reduction in spending on
21 preventive services that is currently being proposed
22 in Albany is a serious mistake. These cuts on top of
23 the cuts made a few years ago to \$0.62 on the dollar
24 will place more children and families at risk. There
25 are thousands of childrens and families who will

1
2 undoubtedly go unserved because a lack of funding.
3 Tens of thousands of children who a generation ago
4 would have been taken from their homes and placed in
5 foster care, possibly for extended periods of time
6 are now staying in their homes with their family.
7 Tens of thousands of families have benefited from
8 evidence based therapies that made them stronger,
9 more self-sufficient that are able to take care of
10 their children.

11 Could we do better? Always but ACS is already
12 working hard to rid the child welfare system of the
13 unconscious prejudices that may lead to over
14 reporting of families of color. We must remember
15 that our primary mission is to keep children safe and
16 to place their wellbeing front and center. ACS and
17 it's not-for-profit partners take that mission very
18 seriously and the preventive services they are
19 spearheading have proven most successful.

20 I urge the Council to support ACS in this
21 important work. I would be remiss if I concluded
22 without mentioning another program, Fair Futures.
23 Which is one of the most exciting game changing
24 programs I have ever seen. It has the potential to
25 change the trajectory of children's lives, using a

1
2 very simple but effective method. Providing a coach
3 and a tutor to every child in foster care beginning
4 in middle school. The 60 entities that are part of
5 the Fair Futures Coalition represents some of the
6 leading organizations and experts in the field. We
7 have accepted for too long that it is okay, even
8 normal for youth in foster care to drop out of high
9 school, rarely go to college and enter adulthood
10 without any of the social supports most of us take
11 for granted.

12 We accepted for too long that poor outcomes are a
13 result of their individual capacity, rather than
14 systemic shortcomings.

15 Fair Futures has proven itself. Now we need to
16 expand to reach more children and we can only do that
17 by government funding. I strongly urge the Council
18 to support fully funding Fair Futures and to make
19 sure it is baselined in the city's '21, '22 Budget.
20 Only by doing so will our young people realize we as
21 a city are committed to their successful transition
22 to adulthood and their long-term well-being. Thank
23 you very much for placing this focus on two aspects
24 of our child welfare system that are so crucially
25 important. Thank you for this opportunity.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
3 testimony Bill. We will now go to our next panelist
4 Lakshmi Sanmuganathan. Lakshmi, you can begin when
5 prompted by the Sergeant.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: Good afternoon. My name
8 is Lakshmi Sanmuganathan, I am the Policy Fellow from
9 the Coalition of Asian American Children and Families
10 CACF. I want to thank you Chairman Levin and
11 esteemed members of the General Welfare Committee for
12 providing us this opportunity to testify at this
13 important hearing today.

14 Since 1986, CACF has been the nations only Pan-
15 Asian and Children and Families Advocacy
16 organization. We lead the fight for improved and
17 equitable policies, systems, funding and services to
18 support our most vulnerable community members.

19 CACF also leads the fight for the 15 percent and
20 growing campaign, which brings together over 45 Asian
21 led and serving organizations across New York City to
22 advocate for a fair and equitable New York City
23 Budget that will protect our most vulnerable APA
24 community members.
25

1
2 Our campaign members employ thousands of New
3 Yorkers and serve hundreds of thousands of New
4 Yorkers every single year. The Asian Pacific
5 American population in New York City also comprises
6 of over 1.3 million people and more than 15 percent
7 of New York City's population.

8 We are the fastest growing group in New York City
9 and our population has nearly doubled every single
10 decade since 1970. Unfortunately, current levels of
11 public funding for the Asian Pacific American
12 community remains disproportionate to our communities
13 expansive growth and needs. For example, in Fiscal
14 Year 2021, the Asian led and serving organizations
15 only received roughly 4.65 percent of all
16 discretionary dollars and less than 1.5 percent of
17 all social service contract dollars.

18 COVID-19 over the past year has also left a
19 devastating impact on our APA New Yorker by
20 exacerbating systemic inequities that have already
21 been facing our communities prior to the pandemic but
22 have only increased and become more challenging
23 during this time.

24 We as Asian Pacific Americans in New York are
25 constantly fighting the harmful impacts of the modern

1
2 minority myth, which presents our community members
3 from being acknowledged and understand. And often
4 times, that means our communities as well as the
5 organizations that serve them all lack resources to
6 provide critical services for those in need.

7 For example, in the past year alone, Asian
8 American's have experienced the largest increase in
9 joblessness of all major racial groups in New York
10 City with an unemployment rate of nearly 26 percent
11 as of May of 2020. Nearly 50 percent of APA's in New
12 York City are also living at the hardest hit areas
13 during the pandemic.

14 Asian Americans are also two times more likely to
15 test positive for COVID-19 than White patients, yet
16 less likely to be tested at all. And of course over
17 the past year, we have seen a large increase in anti-
18 Asian related hate crimes. In New York City alone,
19 there has been a 1,900 percent increase of these hate
20 crimes.

21 These statistics are even more painful to
22 acknowledge and speak upon given the recent shooting
23 in Atlanta that took place last night that took the
24 lives of eight women and six of which were Asian
25 American woman. As we can see, people in our

1
2 community are dying. Our community is grieving and
3 we as a community are just trying to survive and stay
4 afloat during this critical time.

5 So, with that in mind, we are urging City Council
6 to stand with us in solidarity to acknowledge our
7 experiences and our strive and to provide this
8 tangible support by supporting the discretionary asks
9 of Asian led -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: Community-based
12 organizations. In order to sustain the critically
13 culturally competent and inclusively accessible
14 services that we provide to our community members.
15 These services have the most impact on addressing the
16 unique needs of our communities and during this time,
17 we have seen the need for our community-based
18 organizations to step up and to step in in order to
19 fill gaps in services that previously had not been
20 available to our community members due to issues of
21 cultural competence and language accessibility.

22 So, with that in mind, we are just urging City
23 Council to provide its tangible support by supporting
24 our discretionary asks in this upcoming budget.
25 Thank you for your time.

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2

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

3

We will now go to Becca Asaki. Becca, you can begin

4

when prompted by the Sergeant.

5

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6

BECCA ASAKI: Thank you and thank you Chairperson

7

Levin and to the Committee who is all here and my

8

name is Becca Asaki and I am the New York City

9

organizer for NAPAWF, the National Asian Pacific

10

American Women's Forum. And I am also here as a part

11

of the 15 percent and growing campaign that Lakshmi

12

just spoke about.

13

NAPAWF is an organization dedicated to building

14

the power of Asian American and Pacific Islander

15

women trans and nonbinary folks to gain full agency

16

over our lives, our families and our communities

17

using a reproductive justice framework.

18

Our New York City chapter is made up of over 100

19

members from across the five boroughs. And like many

20

members of the API community, we have been hit really

21

hard by both the health and economic crisis caused by

22

COVID-19.

23

But in the face of this crisis and in response to

24

NAPAWF members began holding community conversations

25

and launched a survey in six API languages to reach

1
2 far beyond our membership to help identify the needs
3 of our community and from these meetings and the
4 survey and individual conversations, we are seeing
5 that many of our community members are desperately
6 seeking lifesaving support for food, money, to help
7 cover rent, legal support and information and medical
8 care but face huge barriers. Like not having someone
9 who speaks their language or can help them navigate
10 applying for these services or helping to understand
11 if they are eligible at all.

12 Just to give an example, we had a community
13 meeting in Bernes and nearly all of the participants
14 were immigrant women who had lost work at restaurants
15 or other service jobs and were struggling to pay rent
16 and feed their families.

17 So, many rely on other family members to help the
18 access help but they often didn't know what was
19 available to them, especially in this unprecedented
20 crisis and what they are eligible for. So, folks are
21 asking us, is there anything like rent relief? Are
22 we eligible for these benefits if they exist?

23 They ask for navigators that can help explain to
24 them in Bernes how to fill out forms for things like
25 food stamps. And we are also asking for legal help

1
2 to be able to do things like drafting a will because
3 as lots of you are sharing, our communities have
4 really been devastated by this pandemic.

5 You know, the pandemic has meant lost work,
6 dipping into our savings or borrowing money to cover
7 living expenses, wondering if there is support or if
8 we are eligible for things like Medicaid, rent
9 relief, food stamps and our family members helping
10 out each other and neighbors to navigate these
11 complex systems.

12 COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the API
13 immigrant New Yorkers by exacerbating the systemic
14 inequities that were already facing our communities
15 prior to the pandemic. But because of language
16 barriers, our community relies heavily on our API led
17 and serving organizations to fill these gaps in
18 services. And so that's why our members are calling
19 for a significant increase investment in API led and
20 serving organizations through discretionary funding –

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 BECCA ASAKI: And also key citywide initiatives
23 such as for our seniors emergency food, mental health
24 services for vulnerable populations in order to
25 sustain the critical services that they provide. And

1
2 including in particular in language outreach and
3 benefits navigation to address the growing need for
4 immigrant New Yorkers under the pandemic. Thanks.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your
6 testimony Becca. We will now go to the last member
7 of this panel Mon Yuck Yu. Mon, you can begin when
8 prompted by the Sergeant.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 MON YUCK YU: Good afternoon, my name is Mon Yuck
11 Yu, Executive Vice President at the Academy of
12 Medical and Public Health Services AMPHS. Thank you
13 Chair Levin for the opportunity to testify.

14 AMPHS is a non-for-profit organization in Sunset
15 Park that works to bridge a health equity gap among
16 communities of color by providing free clinical
17 screenings and bilingual mental therapy integrated
18 with individualized health education and social
19 services to the immigrant populations of New York
20 City, free of cost in regards to immigration status.

21 We work primarily with undocumented immigrants
22 within the Latino and Chinese communities who suffer
23 high risk of chronic infectious and behavioral health
24 issues due to a lack of health insurance access.
25 Offering wrap around services that address mental

1
2 health and 83.3 percent of people in our Sunset Park
3 community is low English proficient.

4 Across the city, 78 percent of the APA's in New
5 York City are foreign born. During COVID-19 our work
6 has become more important than ever, reaching over
7 400,000 through our outreach and education efforts.
8 Our community health workers offer interpretation in
9 Spanish, Arabic and three Chinese dialects to help
10 community members navigate our healthcare and social
11 assistance systems.

12 Every month we are holding in language workshops
13 and distributing thousands of pieces of literature to
14 community members and over 100,000 pieces of PPE.
15 Now, we are helping 250 to 300 people make
16 appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations every week in
17 their language. And on a weekly basis, our team also
18 distributes 7,500 pounds of food to families
19 struggling with food insecurity. A completely new
20 program area that we have been running for the past
21 year.

22 We are helping community members navigate
23 accessing unemployment and rental arrears assistance
24 through systems that are complicated and often
25 unavailable in other languages.

1
2 Ms. Wong is an ESL student who initially came to
3 us for help with her daughters behavioral issues.
4 She was undocumented and unemployed. Did not speak
5 English and did not qualify for insurance. Because
6 of the ten year relationship with her daughter and
7 the isolation experience from being undocumented, she
8 had been contemplating ending her life. Our team
9 counseled her, helped her get connected to in
10 language family therapy services in Chinese, as well
11 as NYC Well.

12 Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have
13 provided Ms. Wong's family with weekly food
14 deliveries and she is one of the 250 families that
15 receive cash assistance from the \$150,000 that we
16 distributed to date. She is also attending our adult
17 literacy classes weekly, which besides serving as
18 educational space has become a space for solidarity
19 and support.

20 Our Chinese speaking community health workers
21 also checks in with her and offers health coaching.
22 We would like to thank the City Council for
23 historical support of our funding through the
24 Immigrant Mental Health Initiative and Adult Literacy
25 Initiative, which have supported this type of work.

1
2 And I would like to urge the City Council to restore
3 funding for both initiatives, which was cut by 15
4 percent in FY21. And in particular, advocate for
5 restoring State Article 6 funds, which has been cut
6 from 20 percent to 10 percent.

7 Cuts of funding over the past year have been
8 detrimental while demand for services have tripled.
9 Many of our staff are stretched thin and
10 unfortunately, we have not been able to hire new
11 staff to meet the demand.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 MON YUCK YU: Furthermore, we are requesting
14 restoration in funding for mental health services for
15 vulnerable populations to support this work. What
16 has been a mental health stressor in the past has now
17 been exacerbated. And as we previously discussed,
18 Asian communities are feeling the stress of racism
19 and harassment every day when they ride the subway or
20 walk the streets. Anxieties will increase if events
21 like yesterday's painful shootings continue to occur.

22 Unemployment and lack of work has also created
23 financial hurdles and fears of eviction. Families
24 with a history of domestic violence are now facing
25 even more tension and community members experience

1
2 heightened levels of fear and anxiety and depression
3 with the loss of loved ones and financial
4 instability.

5 We have a waiting list of nearly 100 individuals
6 seeking support from our free mental services in both
7 Chinese and Spanish, which we cannot meet with our
8 current funding levels. And we are one of few
9 organizations offering bilingual therapy services and
10 the need is high.

11 Funding from this past year has meant we weren't
12 able to fund two of our therapists positions and is
13 limiting our ability to conduct outreach to address
14 mental stigma. And currently, this initiative only
15 supports mental health services in one Asian serving
16 organization. While other organizations doing this
17 work have not been funded for additional increases.

18 Secondly, we urge the City Council to restore and
19 baseline the \$12 million in adult literacy funding
20 expanding the additional inclusion and the literacy
21 initiative. During the pandemic, our adult literacy
22 classes have served as a lifeline for community
23 members during the pandemic. To not only secure the
24 language skills necessary but as a platform for
25 COVID-19 information and resources as well as a

1
2 community in solidarity and a source for mental
3 support. In this, we even loaned devices to
4 community members that could not afford to access
5 internet, which dipped into our reserves.

6 Seeing a new need for knowledge and technology,
7 we have integrated digital classes into our adult
8 literacy curricula but this is not enough without
9 focused funding, given the majority programming
10 benefits applications are now done in a virtual
11 space.

12 And finally, City Council must restore \$5.659
13 million for emergency food pantries like CBO's.
14 CBO's like AMPHS have stood up during the pandemic,
15 which feeds over 1,500 residents every week through
16 donated food boxes, a mobile hot food unit and food
17 deliveries for homebound individuals that is
18 completely unfunded at this time. We need culturally
19 sensitive produce and staples our communities feel
20 comfortable eating. That can only be met by CBO's
21 that know their communities best. This is not being
22 met by the Get Food program at this time, which often
23 delivers food that does not meet dietary requirements
24 and is not culturally appropriate.

1
2 Many undocumented community members also feel
3 uncomfortable giving their information to government
4 run programs. I humbly thank the City Council for
5 supporting organizations like AMPHS, working on
6 providing the on the ground, culturally competent
7 services during this challenging time. And we look
8 forward to working together to ensure that healthcare
9 is not a privilege but a basic human right.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Thank you to this
11 panel for your testimony and your patience. We have
12 now heard from everyone that has signed up to
13 testify. We appreciate your time, your testimony and
14 your presence here today.

15 If we have inadvertently missed anyone that would
16 like to testify, please use the raise hand function
17 in Zoom and I will call on you in the order of hands
18 raised.

19 Okay, I see Terry Lawson. Terry, you can begin
20 when prompted by the Sergeant.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 TERRY LAWSON: Good afternoon and my name is
23 Terry Lawson; I am the Executive Director of UnLocal.
24 UnLocal is a community centered nonprofit
25 organization that provides direct community

1
2 education, outreach and legal representation to New
3 York City's undocumented immigrant communities. I am
4 also the Co-Founder and Steering Committee Member of
5 the Bronx Immigration Partnership. A coordinated
6 safety net of legal and social services providers
7 assisting Bronx residents with their immigration
8 related needs.

9 I am here today to ask the City Council to expand
10 funding for immigration legal services, community
11 education outreach and organizing. UnLocal provides
12 free, high quality legal services for New York's most
13 vulnerable immigrants. Many of whom are essential
14 workers or ineligible for benefits who are seeking
15 employment authorization, asylum, DOCA, [INAUDIBLE
16 7:51:54] Relief from Removal and much more.

17 Last year, our legal team handled 1,000 cases for
18 people across New York City and in parts of Long
19 Island and upstate. Our Queer Immigrant Justice
20 Project works with LGBTQ plus immigrants who are
21 seeking asylum and the Director of that project was
22 just named one of the best LGBTQ plus lawyers under
23 40 by the National LGBT Bar Association.

24 UnLocal is also part of the Rapid Response Legal
25 Collaborative along with Make the Road New York and

1
2 NYLAG. And the lawyers, paralegal and social worker
3 who serve on our Rapid Response team have been
4 fighting tirelessly during this pandemic to stop
5 deportations and get people out of detention where
6 their physical and mental health are threatened every
7 day.

8 Our rapid response work shows us just how
9 entangled ICE and law enforcement are and continue to
10 be despite the efforts of advocates and community
11 members to explain to the city's law makers how local
12 policing feeds the deportation pipeline. We have
13 been raising the alarm about the dangers and
14 continued harms of city officials collaborating with
15 ICE by telling the story of one of our clients Havier
16 Castillo Maradiaga[SP?]. A 27-year-old Bronx man who
17 came here when he was seven-years-old, was turned
18 over to ICE by the city and after tireless community
19 organizing and legal strategizing, was finally
20 released from ICE custody one week ago today.

21 Over the past year, our education and outreach
22 team has been busier than ever partnering with 140
23 community-based organizations and schools throughout
24 the city, hosting monthly partner calls and rapidly
25 changing law and policy, conducting 68 community

1
2 event, 47 of which were virtual that reached 8,000
3 attendees. And posting online resources in wide
4 ranging topics. Such as DACA, stimulus relief,
5 unemployment, taxes, the census and more. UnLocal
6 recognizes that only by providing accurate up-to-date
7 information are we able to counteract the predatory
8 practices of those taking advantage of the confusion
9 and anti-immigrant rhetoric pervading our culture.

10 Under the new Administration, laws and policies
11 continue to change at a dizzying pace and our
12 education and outreach team keeps the public informed
13 about these changes and their impacts on immigrant
14 New Yorkers.

15 In an era where the Biden Administration
16 continues to deport people –

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 TERRY LAWSON: With 70 removal sites in February
19 alone, detaining asylum seekers in so-called migrant
20 facilities and simultaneously increasing avenues for
21 affirmative immigration relief, UnLocal calls on the
22 City Council to expand funding for immigration legal
23 services and community education and specifically ask
24 City Council to enhance funding for the Immigration
25 Opportunities Initiative to allow additional legal

1
2 services providers to partner with the City Council
3 to provide vital services for our clients and
4 community members. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Terry. I am going
6 to do one last call, using the Zoom raise hand
7 function, if there is anyone that have inadvertently
8 missed, please raise your hand now and we will make
9 sure to get to you.

10 Okay, seeing no one else, I would like to note
11 that written testimony, which will be reviewed in
12 full by Committee Staff can be submitted to the
13 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing
14 by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again,
15 that's testimony@council.nyc.gov.

16 Chair Levin, we have concluded public testimony
17 for this hearing. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Natalie. I want to
19 thank you, Aminta Kilawan, Crystal Pond, Finance
20 Staff Frank Scarno, Julia Harames[SP?], Adina Kroop,
21 Dohini Sompura, Regina Poreda Ryan, our Finance
22 Director Latonia McKinney and members of the
23 Administration who testified and especially members
24 of the public who testified.

1
2 This is my eighth and final Preliminary Budget
3 hearing Chairing the General Welfare Committee. This
4 is every year the most important hearing we do out of
5 this Committee. This is the hearing that we get the
6 most in-depth picture of what social services are
7 looking like in our city. Right now we are you know
8 facing a challenge that 13 months ago was absolutely
9 unimaginable. And this has been a year filled with
10 tragedy and sorrow and grief. Tens of thousands of
11 New Yorkers have lost their lives. Many thousands
12 more have lost loved ones. We have seen and we
13 continue to see our fellow New Yorkers succumb to
14 this virus and I want to encourage everybody to
15 continue to be safe. Continue to social distance and
16 mask up.

17 The variants that are out there right now are
18 scary. Just in the last few days, I have seen a
19 number of colleagues and candidates for Council and
20 Council Staffers have fallen ill with COVID and so,
21 be aware out there and make sure to continue your
22 social distancing. And you know, this is again, this
23 is - I always feel the most informative hearing that
24 we do every year because it is a snap shot of what we
25 have been able to do but more importantly, what we

1
2 could be doing better and it's always a time to
3 rededicate ourselves to the important work that you
4 all do in the communities day in and day out. And
5 so, I commend everybody that participated today. I
6 thank you and one last thing, you know the - in the
7 last week or so we have heard a number of times that
8 the American Rescue Plan Act is changing - it's the
9 most impactful piece of legislation coming out of the
10 federal government in a generation. That's true 100
11 percent. Just the ITC change alone will be bringing
12 tens of thousands of children, hundreds of thousand
13 of children out of poverty in New York City and
14 across the country.

15 But we have this opportunity in our city to
16 utilize the American Rescue Plan funding to have a
17 huge impact locally above those kind of direct
18 actions from the federal government but through the
19 state and local aid, we have this opportunity to make
20 sure that that funding goes to the people that need
21 it.

22 And I am very grateful to my colleagues in
23 congress for their delivering that funding to New
24 York City but now we absolutely must get this right
25 and we need to make sure that we are delivering

1
2 funding to expand services for Legal Services or
3 Children's Services, Homeless Services. Making sure
4 that it gets to the people that need it because we
5 are going to recover as a city but that recovery has
6 to be equitable and it can't be - you know, we can't
7 be leaving people behind.

8 And so, that's going to take a lot of work and
9 it's going to take a lot of work by the people who
10 are testifying at this hearing today. You know and I
11 thank you for that and I am here with you 100
12 percent.

13 And again, I want to than staff. I want to thank
14 the Sergeants at Arms and all of the Council Staff
15 that have Joanna Castro and Rebecca Chasen who have
16 these Zoom hearings have got it down to a science.
17 It's been remarkable the work that they have done.

18 So, and thank you Natalie for directing this
19 hearing and thank you Aminta as well for directing
20 the earlier part of the hearing. And with that, I
21 adjourn the Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal
22 Year 2021 in the General Welfare Committee. Thank
23 you. [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 May 14, 2021