

**Testimony of Steven Banks, Commissioner
Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on Finance and Committee on General
Welfare**

NYC Department of Social Services Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Hearing

May 10, 2021

Good morning. I would like to thank the City Council's Finance and General Welfare Committees and Chairs Dromm and Levin for giving us the opportunity to testify today about the Department of Social Services' Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget and our work to improve services for New Yorkers in need.

My name is Steven Banks and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS). In this capacity, I oversee the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Joining me today are DSS First Deputy Commissioner Molly Murphy, HRA Administrator Gary Jenkins, DHS Administrator Joslyn Carter, DSS Chief Program Planning and Financial Management Officer Ellen Levine, and DSS Chief of Staff Scott French.

My testimony today will highlight the major facets of the DSS/HRA/DHS FY22 Executive Budget, which reflect our efforts to address income inequality, fight poverty and homelessness, and help New Yorkers in need get back on their feet.

At the outset, I want to highlight policy changes at the federal level that will benefit New Yorkers served by our agency, including: support from the American Rescue Plan, a \$1.9 trillion relief package that includes \$12.6 billion in direct aid for New York State, and \$5.98 billion in direct aid for New York City. The package includes funding for enhanced unemployment benefits, direct cash payments, and nutritional programs such as P-EBT and SNAP. The American Rescue Plan also includes a critical appropriation of additional rent relief to bring the total funding for New York State to \$2.4 billion for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

At the State level, DSS has worked closely with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the Legislature to ensure our clients can access ERAP. As part of the State budget process, the Legislature enacted legislation to implement the federal ERAP initiative. The framework for the rent relief program provides help for households that include a member who has qualified for unemployment, or has had a drop in income or other financial hardship due to COVID-19 and demonstrates a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability and has a household income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income. New Yorkers, including New York City

residents, will be able to access this funding through a statewide portal that is being created by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). We expect this OTDA portal to be live by the end of this month. To help New York City residents apply for and receive this essential rent relief, DSS is using federal funds allocated to us in the federal relief appropriations to procure outreach and application assistance from community-based organizations in all five boroughs. The final State budget also included an Excluded Workers Fund, which will provide critical support to New Yorkers who may not have been eligible for pandemic-related benefits due to their immigration status. And just last week, with our continuing advocacy on this issue, Senator Kavanagh, the Chair of the Senate Housing Committee, has introduced legislation (S.6573) to require the State to permit DSS to set the rent levels for the State FHEPS rent supplement program at the Fair Market Rental levels as determined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and to reimburse us for payment of these rent levels in accordance with traditional public assistance funding streams.

In addition, prior to enactment of the State budget, by an overwhelming margin, the Senate and Assembly passed legislation that will make permanent our COVID-19 waiver allowing clients the option to have telephone interviews to apply and recertify for Cash Assistance, without the need to go into one of our offices. This change will provide Cash Assistance clients with the same option that SNAP clients have had since 2016, following DSS obtaining a waiver in 2015 from the Obama Administration to make it possible for all clients to choose to apply and recertify for SNAP by phone without the need to travel to an office to do so. Since receiving our temporary State Cash Assistance waiver during the pandemic, 85% of Cash Assistance applications have been submitted online with about 162,000 interviews conducted by telephone. The bill is currently on the Governor's desk, and we are continuing to work with the Legislature to ensure it is signed – which will dramatically improve the client experience.

Budget Overview

An important component of the City's overall recovery has been an infusion of federal funds, most recently as part of the American Rescue Plan as well as other COVID-related relief. Federal funds were added to the DHS and HRA budgets in the Executive 2022 plan to bolster key priorities, such as in Legal Services for Tenants, Anti-Hunger Programs, Rental Assistance, Street Homeless programming, among others. This additional federal investment will allow HRA/DHS/DSS to more quickly rebound from the pandemic-related fiscal belt tightening over the past 14 months, and these investments also allow programs that are key elements of agency goals to remain in place while the local economy improves. However, these federal funds are time-limited, and therefore it is critical for the city to have a strong recovery.

HRA/DSS

The FY21 HRA/DSS budget is \$10.6 billion, \$7.9 billion of which are City funds, and consists of 12,781 positions, of which 9,309 are City-funded. The FY22 budget is \$11 billion, and \$8.46 billion are City funds, with 13,618 positions, of which 10,133 are City-funded.

The DSS/ HRA budget increases between FY21 and FY22 by \$421 million in total funds and \$584 million in City funds, primarily as a result of Medicaid funding adjustments, including a shift of

funds from Health + Hospitals to the Medicaid budget to cover new Medicaid initiatives, including the Upper Payment Limit initiative (UPL), as well as enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) savings from the State.

The DSS/HRA budget increased by \$927 million in total funds and \$619 million City funds between the January and Executive Plans due primarily to the Medicaid adjustments as well as additional funding for rental assistance and federal funding for services and programs during the pandemic. The DSS/HRA City-funded headcount is higher in FY22 than in FY21 due to one-time vacancy savings that occurred in FY21 only.

The primary initiatives funded in the FY22 HRA/DSS Executive Budget are as follows:

- **Housing Anti-Discrimination:** \$2 million in total and City funds in FY22 and the outyears were added to expand enforcement of housing discrimination laws, including source of income discrimination within DSS's Source of Income Discrimination Unit.
- **Access to Counsel in Eviction Cases:** \$23 million in total funds in FY22 and the baseline, were added to fully fund universal access to legal services for tenants facing eviction. This brings the based-lined amount to \$166 million.
- **Case Management Services:** \$3.5 million in total and City funds in FY21 and \$10.7 million in total and City funds in FY22 were added for case management services for families who formerly experienced homelessness who have transitioned to permanent housing through our cluster conversion initiative.
- **Information Technology:** \$8.98 million in total and \$4.6 million City funds in FY21 and \$42.9 million in total funds (\$29 million City) in FY22 for maintenance and support of the DSS/HRA and DHS information technology operations.
- **Food Assistance:** \$32 million in FY22 in total funds to fund the Pandemic Food Reserve Emergency Distribution, including 13 positions and \$4.9 million in the baseline to fund the Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Office of Food Policy.
- **HASA Housing:** \$47.9 million in total and \$34 million City funds in FY22 to support HASA emergency housing costs.
- **Janitorial and Security Prevailing Wage:** \$13.5 million in total and \$7.1 million City funds in FY21 and \$23.8 million in total funds (\$12.5 million City) in FY22 for prevailing wage increases for janitorial and security services.
- **Master Lease:** \$4.7 million in total and City funds in FY22 for new master lease units and support services.
- **Immigrant Affairs:** \$2 million in total and City funds in FY21 for Low Wage Worker Legal Services and \$2.6 million in total and City funds for other initiatives, including Action NYC, Know Your Rights, We Speak and Rapid Response.
- **Indirect Cost Rate:** \$8.3 million in total funds in FY21 and the outyears to fund the indirect cost rate restoration to not-for-profit providers which will provide financial stability for hundreds of nonprofit human service providers as they continue to partner with the City on a recovery for all of us.
- **Rental Assistance:** \$161 million in FY21 and \$168 million in FY22 in total funds for the additional projected costs of City rental assistance programs which are added to the rental assistance budget to true up projected expenditures for new shelter move outs in the coming year and the ongoing actual costs for clients who moved out in prior years. This brings the

FY22 budget for City-funded rental assistance to \$325 million – and we will continue to move out as many clients as possible.

- **Hart Island Capacity Study:** HRA is procuring a vendor to continue operating Hart Island as the City's public burial grounds in the next fiscal year as well as a vendor to evaluate the ongoing capacity for burials on the Island. The FY22 Executive Budget includes \$112k in FY21 and \$426k in FY22 in total and City funds for this capacity study of Hart Island; additional funds will be added to operate the burial ground on the Island when the RFP process is complete.
- **HRA Clean-Up Corps:** \$29 million of total funds in FY22 to fund HRA Clean Up Corps, part of a New Deal-style, Citywide jobs initiative.

Savings Initiatives:

To further support our budget through savings, HRA/DSS will leverage several efficiencies to maximize resources. These savings include initiatives such as:

- **Enterprise Licensing:** a \$3.1 million reduction in total and City funds in FY21 only for an adjustment associated with a realignment of the Microsoft Enterprise Licensing Agreement citywide, utilizing capital funding where possible.

And the Executive Budget plan also includes COVID related savings:

- **Carfare:** a reduction of \$11.3 million in FY21 in funding due to Carfare expenditures less than expected during COVID 19.
- **JTP DCAS:** a reduction of \$226k to DCAS Jobs Training. Participant expenditures were lower than expected due to a pause in referrals during COVID 19.
- **JTP DSNY:** a \$1.3 million reduction because Department of Sanitation Jobs Training expenditures were lower than expected due to a pause in referrals during COVID 19.
- **Child Support Processing:** \$833k in FY21 only savings due to the impact of COVID-19 on court activity.

DHS/DSS

The FY21 DHS budget is \$2.8 billion, of which \$1.2 billion are City funds. The budget supports 2,101 positions including 2,044 which are City funded. The FY22 DHS budget is \$2.2 billion, and \$1.3 billion are City funds, and 2,158 positions are supported, of which 2,102 are City-funded.

The DHS budget decreases by \$681 million in total funds from FY21 to FY22, primarily due to Federal COVID-19 relief funds that were added in FY21. For example, there is \$615 million in FEMA funds in FY21 primarily related to the pandemic hotel sheltering program. (There are also CRF and pandemic ESG-CV funds in the FY21 budget). The FY22 budget will be adjusted for FEMA impact as the COVID-19 crisis develops and health guidance is updated.

This decrease in FY22 due to the Federal revenue in FY21 is partially offset by American Rescue Plan funds added in FY22 to support programs including the Journey Home, Street Outreach, Safe

Havens, and Street Medicine. Additional funding may be added in FY22 depending on COVID-related program needs, as determined by public health guidance.

New DHS funding for FY22 includes:

- **EAF Revenue:** \$85 million of City funds in FY21 and FY22 for an EAF Revenue Shortfall related to NYS changes in EAF eligibility requirements.
- **Healing NYC Expansion:** 1 position and \$101k in FY22 and \$96k in total and City funds in the outyears to expand the Healing NYC program for outreach.
- **DHS IT Maintenance:** \$1.3 million in total and City funds in FY22 and the outyears for ongoing DHS technology maintenance.
- **Janitorial Prevailing Wage Adjustment:** \$5.9 million in total and City funds in FY21 and the outyears to fund previously approved prevailing wage increases for janitorial services.
- **DHS Clean-Up Corps:** \$3 million in total funds in FY22 for DHS Clean Up Corps, as a part of the same Citywide initiative mentioned above.
- **Journey Home:** \$76.9 million in total funds in FY22 to fund the Journey Home programs, including safe havens, street outreach, and street medicine.
- **Street Outreach Programming:** \$4.6 million in total funds in FY21; \$15.2 million in total funds in FY22 and \$9.4 million in total funds in FY23 and the outyears for street outreach at subway stations and rapid response.
- **Indirect Cost Rate:** \$9.6 million in total funds in FY21 and the outyears to fund the restoration of indirect cost rate in not-for-profit contracts

The investments presented here today, as well as the reforms made over the last seven years, provide a framework on which to build to continue to support New Yorkers in need in future Administrations. Looking back at our work over the last seven years, much of which was accomplished through our collaboration with the City Council, we see many lessons learned that we hope can help inform future social services policy in New York City.

Reforming Social Services

In 2014, I presented our first Executive Budget to the City Council as Commissioner. This presentation provided a summary of our services as well as an analysis of program inefficiencies that we inherited from previous administrations. In particular, our analysis seven years ago identified policies and procedures in need of improvement – and we set out to reform programs so that they would prevent homelessness instead of causing it, that families and individuals would have access to the public benefits to which they are entitled instead of being subjected to punitive policies, that duplication and inefficiencies would be eliminated, that unnecessary financial penalties and sanctions would be avoided, and that employment programs would be more effective in alleviating poverty and fighting income inequality.

We have continued to build on the reforms we set out to accomplish in FY15, and the progress that we have made is reflected in the following key initiatives, among many more that we have implemented which are listed in the attached appendix:

- **Increased access to public benefits and assistance** by ending a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery. In particular, we implemented technology initiatives to streamline administrative processes; eliminated counter-productive case sanctions and reduced unnecessary fair hearings by cutting the number of hearing requests in half; closed Center 71, the “Intensive Services” Center which served a punitive function to cut off assistance for New Yorkers in need; and eliminated WEP, the unpaid Work Experience Program, which required clients to work for no compensation in jobs that provided no valuable work experience and instead implemented new employment programs that emphasize education and training, including an option to count four-year college participation;
- **Reached full implementation of our right-to-counsel program in eviction cases**, with support from the Council. Under this program, coordinated by HRA’s Office of Civil Justice and in partnership with legal service providers, vulnerable New Yorkers facing eviction are eligible for free legal representation, regardless of zip code, immigration status, or, with a waiver, income level. The positive results of these efforts have been clear, with residential evictions by City marshals down by 41% between 2013 and 2019, while nationwide evictions were on the rise during this time, and the percentage of tenants facing eviction in court with legal representation was 38% in 2019, up from 1% in 2013 – and during the pandemic we have been able to assign counsel in virtually every case heard in court;
- **Launched the largest municipal commitment to-date to build supportive housing** by making the commitment to develop 15,000 new units in 15 years, through the NYC 15/15 initiative. Through the ongoing NY/NY and NYC 15/15 supportive housing programs, there have been 12,545 total supportive housing placements from DHS shelter, from January 2014 through February 2021.
- **Through Fair Fares, in partnership with the Council, we designed a 21st Century government benefits program framework** that was responsive to New Yorkers’ needs, and built a model for future social services delivery. Over 223,000 New Yorkers have enrolled in the program, and eligible clients can be enrolled online through Access HRA, and then receive their Fair Fares MetroCard by mail without ever having to visit an office. Moreover, the required eligibility documentation is simple and straight-forward which benefits both clients and agency staff. Modern and agile program frameworks like this one, along with the effective blueprint we developed in pioneering remote access to SNAP via Access HRA, stood us in good stead as the pandemic hit and service delivery changed, and we continue to advocate with the State for permission to permanently provide remote Cash Assistance applications to improve client access. And the streamlined eligibility process and criteria for our Fair Fares program would greatly improve the client experience for the federal and state Cash Assistance, SNAP, and Medicaid programs.
- **Transformed HASA** by ensuring New Yorkers with HIV are able to receive housing, transportation and nutritional support through HASA for All. Prior to 2016, New Yorkers with HIV, in addition to meeting income eligibility requirements, needed to be clinical/symptomatic with HIV illness or AIDS to receive these critical supports. Today, we administer a program grounded in science and compassion that permits individuals to obtain services upon an HIV diagnosis making them eligible for an Emergency Shelter Allowance,

which includes a monthly transportation and nutrition allowance as well as a 30% income contribution cap toward rental costs for public assistance recipients. These changes advance our goals towards individual viral load suppression and achieving decreased disease transmission rates to once and for all end the epidemic.

Reforming Homeless Policies

Homelessness in New York City and jurisdictions across the country is the very real result of decades of changes in our economy – particularly the exponentially increased income inequality – and past choices made in New York City, Albany, and Washington. The shelter census increased 115% between 1994 and 2014 including growing nearly 40% to more than 51,000 in just three years between 2011 and 2014 following the end of the Advantage rental assistance program as a result of State and City cuts.

From 1994-2012, the City suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units, or 16% of the total rent-regulated stock. From 2005-2015, rents increased by 18.4% whereas incomes increased by only 4.8%. While the city's overall rental vacancy rate of 3.5% poses problems for people of all incomes, renters only able to afford an apartment costing \$800 or less must search in a market with a vacancy rate of just 1.15% in 2017, down from 1.8% in 2014.

As we testified at the March Preliminary Budget hearing, we have called on the State to support shelter services and outreach by restoring the State's traditional 50/50 cost split for single adult shelters in New York City, outreach workers, safe havens, stabilization beds, and the cost of homeless services for the overnight MTA initiative. Despite the fact that a Consent Decree enforcing the State Constitution obligates both the State and the City to provide shelter to single adults experiencing homelessness, the State has steadily reduced its support for single adult shelters and services in New York City from 50/50 to a mere nine percent. Additionally, the State provides zero dollars to support the 600 homeless outreach workers and more than 3,000 safe haven and stabilization beds that the City has funded that have enabled more than 4,000 people to come off the streets and subways and remain off since 2016.

Simply put, the State must return to paying its fair share for life-saving services for single adults experiencing homelessness. Even as the overall DHS shelter census and the number of children and adults in family shelters have been reduced significantly as we will discuss later in this testimony, there are record numbers of people in the DHS single adult shelters. In addition to the ongoing affordable housing crisis, one of the drivers of the single adult DHS census growth is the State's failure to invest in reentry services to prevent discharges from State prisons to DHS shelters. Tragically, history is repeating itself. Just as State deinstitutionalization from State mental health facilities without sufficient community mental health services has contributed to modern day mass homelessness for single adults, now State decarceration without sufficient community reentry services is resulting in a State prison to shelter pipeline.

Against this backdrop, we want to discuss the progress that has been made on our commitments to address 40 years of federal, State and City policy failures by focusing on the four pillars of the 2017 Turning the Tide plan – prevention first, providing social services permanent rehousing

programs, transforming the haphazard approach to providing shelter, and addressing street homelessness:

- **Breaking the trajectory of growth in the DHS shelter census:** after nearly four decades of an ever-increasing DHS shelter census in our city, we have finally broken the trajectory of growth, holding the DHS census essentially flat year over year – for the first time in more than a decade – at approximately 60,000 in 2017, 2018, 2019, and then reversing the growth trend with the DHS census now below 50,000, which is less than the DHS census when the Administration began.
- **Significantly fewer children and adults in family shelters:** With our investments in prevention and rehousing, we have driven down the number of children and adults residing in shelter on any given night. – from a peak after the Advantage program ended of 43,208 in December 2014 to 27,463 yesterday – which is a decrease of nearly 15,750 people and the lowest number since 2012. In particular, there are 15,630 children in family shelters, a decrease of 9,860 since there were 25,490 children in shelter in 2014. And whereas there were 18,812 unique families with children who applied for shelter in the 12 months before January 1, 2014 there have been 9,778 unique families with children who have applied for shelter in the last 12 months. This trend has been in place well before the pandemic began but has accelerated while the eviction moratorium has been in place, demonstrating the impact on homelessness when the eviction machinery stops – just as the elimination of the Advantage rental assistance program and the resulting exponential increase in family homelessness illustrated the folly of fighting homelessness with no permanent housing.
- **Ending the 21-year Giuliani cluster program:** We have ended the use of more than 2,800 cluster units as shelter, reducing citywide cluster use by over 75%, and we have been converting hundreds of cluster units into permanent affordable housing for families experiencing homelessness. In January 2016, at the high point of the cluster program, the City was using 3,650 cluster units to shelter families. We are on track to be completely out of clusters by the end of this year.
- **Provided permanent housing to more than 165,000 New Yorkers using our social services tools:** We have helped more than 165,000 New Yorkers exit shelter and transition to permanent housing or avoid shelter altogether, using rental assistance and rehousing programs. We have also streamlined a number of these housing assistance programs into one, to make it easier for clients and landlords alike to secure housing opportunities, and we operate an aggressive, dedicated unit at DSS focused on combatting Source of Income discrimination to ensure landlords are not unlawfully closing doors of opportunity to those experiencing homelessness.
- **Ending the use of more than 260 shelter sites:** We have shrunk the DHS footprint by 41% by phasing out more than 260 shelter sites that did not meet our standards and replacing them with a smaller number of borough-based shelters located as close as possible to the anchors of life like schools, jobs, health care, houses of worship and family support networks – with 89 sited and 46 already operating, with an average of nearly 230 days between community notification and opening.

- **Helped thousands of New Yorkers off the streets and subways:** We have helped more than 4,000 people experiencing street homelessness come inside from the streets and subways and remain off through our HOME-STAT outreach program, by tripling the number of outreach workers from 200 to 600 and increasing five-fold the number of low-barrier safe haven and stabilization beds from 600 in 2014 to more than 3,000 today, with more than 1,200 added during the pandemic and more beds on the way. And during the MTA's overnight shutdown over the past year, we have helped more than 800 people come off the subways and remain inside.

These critical steps are the result of our focused efforts and the aggressive reforms set out in our *Turning the Tide* plan. As the first comprehensive plan to address homelessness presented by an administration, we have worked to address the haphazard system that built over 40 years, and brought program accountability and oversight to support New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. While we know there is much more work to be done to end a homelessness crisis that has built up over four decades, we are making tangible impacts through our focused efforts on prevention first, providing permanent housing and decent shelter, and addressing street homeless. And we believe that, through this model, we've built a foundation for a future Administration to build on and continue to make progress.

For your information, we have included in an appendix a full list of our DHS and HRA reforms.

With that, we look forward to our continued partnership with the Council for the remainder of this year, and I deeply appreciate your support, recommendations and commitment to our clients over the last seven plus years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.

NYC HRA COVID-19 Waiver Requests And Statuses

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
1	OTDA	CA	Allow CA telephone application interviews	Approved
2	OTDA	CA	Allow CA telephone recertification interviews	Approved
3	OTDA	CA	Remove or defer the requirement for employment and eligibility in person appointments and assignments	Approved
4	OTDA	CA	Extend CA recertification periods	Approved
5	OTDA	CA	Provide flexibility to not take negative action for clients who fail to return the six-month mailer	Approved
6	OTDA	CA	Suspend State requirement for local district to provide clients with a photo on their CBIC Card if vendor not operational or clients cannot travel to site	Approved
7	OTDA	CA	Waive the signature requirement for applications in situations on which a client is receiving assistance on the phone from DSS or CBOs	Partial Approval: Did not receive approval for CBOs
8	OTDA	CA	Reconsider request to suspend the requirements of ISP, including distribution of invoices	Approved
9	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend the SNAP ABAWD work rules and delay implementation of new ABAWD rule	Approved
10	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Emergency Supplement of SNAP Benefits for Current Recipients up to the maximum allotment for the household size	Approved
11	OTDA	SNAP	Waive the signature requirement for applications in situations on which a client is receiving assistance on the phone from DSS or CBOs	Partial Approval: Did not receive approval for CBOs

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
12	OTDA	SNAP	Adjustment to certain SNAP Interview Requirements	Approved
13	OTDA	SNAP	Extend SNAP recertification periods	Approved
14	OTDA	SNAP	Remove or defer the requirement for employment and eligibility in person appointments and assignments	Approved
15	OTDA	SNAP	Provide flexibility to not take negative action for clients who fail to return the periodic report	Approved
16	OTDA	SNAP	Suspend the SNAP ABAWD work rules and delay implementation of new ABAWD rule	Approved
17	OTDA	SNAP	Emergency Supplement of SNAP Benefits for Current Recipients up to the maximum allotment for the household size	Approved
18	OTDA	OPA	Suspend mandatory CA/SNAP and Medicaid data matches	Partial Approval: Some matches have resumed
19	OTDA	OPA	Extend SNAP claim establishment period	Partial Approval
20	OTDA	OPA	Suspend FEDS and EVR investigations	Approved
21	OTDA	Fair Hearings	Suspend fair hearings where ATC has been granted	Partially Approved: Non-aid cases are being prioritized

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
22	OTDA	Fair Hearings	Agency fair hearing reps and clients to participate remotely by telephone	Approved
23	OTDA	Child Support	Suspend all credit reporting after P.A.U.S.E. was put into effect and for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis pursuant to SSL § 111-c(2)(h).	Partially Approved
24	OCFS	APS	Extend timeframes for initial eligibility, visits, ongoing assessments.	Approved
25	OCFS	APS	Extension of eligibility determination from 60 days to 90 days- 18 NYCRR § 457.2(b)(4)(i)	Approved
26	OCFS	APS	Waiving Face to Face contact required under 18 NYCRR § 457.5(b)	Approved
27	OCFS	APS	Permit client contact by telephone rather than in person, but continue to make home visits when necessary to ensure safety of client	Approved
28	OCFS	ODV	Allow DV survivors to remain in DV shelters for up to 180 days rather than the current 90 days without a request for an extension	Approved
29	OCFS	ODV	Permit reimbursement beyond 180 days for DV survivors who are self-isolating or quarantined in a DV shelter until such clients are no longer a public health risk	Approved on a Case by Case basis
30	OCFS	ODV	Allow placement and reimbursement for single adults placed in larger than what a single would normally be eligible for	Approved on a Case by Case basis
31	OCFS	ODV	A waiver of the reimbursement for a sponsoring agency staff person to visit the safe dwelling on a weekly basis and to permit telephone contact	Approved
32	OCFS	ODV	Allow expedited approval of new DV shelter capacity, including hotel space	Approved on a Case by Case basis

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
33	SDOH	Home Care	Waive required nurse visit, social work assessment visit for all service assessments, including immediate needs applications, regular applications and renewals	Approved
34	SDOH	Home Care	Allow case workers and nurses to conduct telephone interview assessments in lieu of home visits for renewals	Approved
35	SDOH	Home Care	Extend required time frames for Licensed Home Care Services nurse Home Visits, Homecare Worker Annual Medical Exams and all trainings	Approved
36	SDOH	Home Care	Extend required time frames for all Personal Care and Managed Long Term Care service authorizations and required CDPAP six-month nurse visits	Partial Approval
37	SDOH	Medicaid	Extend coverage of all Medicaid authorization periods, including for Stenson and Rosenberg clients	Approved
38	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive eligibility documentation requirements and allow attestation. Applicants who receive Medicaid without all required documents would only receive coverage for 6 months	Partial Approval (except non-citizens will be placed on an advanced renewal schedule after PHE)
39	SDOH	Medicaid	Allow approval of full Medicaid coverage for community surplus cases by not requiring clients to pay-in or incur/submit bills	Approved
40	SDOH	Medicaid	Suspend or delay mandatory Medicaid data matches	Approved
41	SDOH	CA	Suspend Child/Teen Health Program (C/THP) oral script that workers are required to read to our clients when processing an application/recertification.	Approved

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
42	OTDA	Child Support	Consider noncustodial parents for services supported by federal funds appropriated for employment and training under Title VIII of the CARES Act (H.R. 748), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 170(a)(1)(B), or any subsequent appropriation to assist them in re-connecting to work and paying their court-ordered child support obligations to support their children.	Pending follow up with OTDA
43	OTDA	SNAP	Permit flexibility in establishing or disposing of new SNAP overpayment claims	Pending
44	OTDA	CA	Suspend special grant repayment time periods and recovery of overpayment	Pending
45	OTDA	CA	Request to allow the Agency to reduce recoupment to 5% for cases that meet certain criteria	Pending
46	OCFS	APS	Extension of timeframe to commence investigation for 24-hour cases (emergency cases) to 48 hours	Pending – Executive Order needed
47	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive recovery of overpayments for coverage that may have been incorrectly paid during the emergency	Pending
48	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify school attendance	Denied
49	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive income and resource requirements for CA and SNAP people who cannot work/ work reduced hours due to quarantine requirements	Denied
50	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend time period required for repayment agreements associated with any special grants	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
51	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend conducting Federal Quality Control reviews and remove the emergency time period from any future reviews	Denied
52	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waiver to extend the period that a household is given to sell real property from six months to twelve months	Denied
53	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the limits on the amount of money that can be exempt for a bona fide funeral agreement	Denied
54	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify the presence of all household members	Denied
55	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify application for unemployment benefits at application for households that contain individuals who recently lost employment, and to provide for systemic check at recertification	Denied
56	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Allow DSS to grant good cause for individuals who are in sanction status for CA/SNAP for failure to comply with a work requirement, or are in sanction status for a voluntary quit situation, and would be deemed unable to reengage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, without the need for an individual determination to be made. Alternatively, DSS requests that OTDA temporarily waive the provisions in such regulations to permit the district to grant good cause without the need for an additional determination.	Denied
57	OTDA	SNAP	DSS asks that the State make a request to the Federal Government for waivers of federal law so that (a) New York City recipients of SNAP may purchase hot food with their benefits and (b) more SNAP vendors be allowed to participate as a "retail food store" so long as the COVID disaster declaration is in effect and (c) the SNAP student eligibility criteria be waived	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
58	OTDA	Child Support	Suspend administrative child support enforcement actions for non-custodial parents	Denied
59	OTDA	Child Support	Temporarily modify both the state and federal Tax Offset Program (TOP) defenses for the 2020 TOP certification under 18 NYCRR 346.9(b)(1) to include a defense that the arrears were due to job loss as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.	Denied
60	OTDA	Child Support	Halt the certification of all Department of Motor Vehicle license suspensions that would otherwise occur after P.A.U.S.E was placed into effect on March 22nd; and grant DSS greater authority to remove individuals currently in the license suspension process pursuant to the latitude in 18 NYCRR §346.12(a)(1)	Denied
61	OTDA	Child Support	Halt the Property Executions (PEX) of bank accounts that would otherwise occur after P.A.U.S.E was placed into effect; or in the alternative, grant DSS greater authority to remove the levy on individuals with frozen bank accounts pursuant to 18 NYCRR §346.11(b) by temporarily changing the threshold for past due support that triggers the PEX process from two months to six months. Alternatively, temporarily suspend CPLR 5205(d)(3) and CPLR 5222 (k) which allow DSS to seize a bank account of any size.	Denied
62	OTDA	Child Support	Request issuance of an Executive Order directing that once the Family Court begins to accept child support petitions for filing, for any modification petitions filed in the 2020 calendar year, support magistrates are required to review whether the NCP had the ability to pay during the COVID-19 crisis, and, if the support magistrate determines that they did not, to vacate any arrears that accrued during the crisis, pursuant to the authority in FCA §451(1)	Denied
63	OTDA	Child Support	Reverse the distribution order selected in the state plan and effectuated in 18 NYCRR 347.13(d) for any tax refund offset stemming from the CARES Act to allow the Custodial Parent of a former assistance case to be paid prior to DSS being reimbursed. This waiver would allow the CARES tax refund offset to be paid directly to the family, providing additional cash support to children during the crisis.	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
64	OTDA	Child Support	Allow, for current assistance cases, a one- time pass-through bonus to the custodial parent for any tax refund offset stemming from the CARES Act and waiver of the required reimbursement to the federal government for 100% pass through by granting a one-time reprieve from section 42 USC §657 (a)(6)(B)(ii). Because the bonus is temporarily exempt from being countable for PA benefits, the client and the family would get additional support when it is most needed.	Denied
65	OTDA	CA	Raise dollar amount of accrued rent arrears issued to FHEPS households	Denied
66	OTDA	Child Support	Lift and suspend child support sanctions	Denied
67	OCFS	APS	Extension of timeframes for the initial supervisory consultation from 24 hours to 48 hours for clients who have refused access during the home visit and may need an OGA -NY SSL § 473-c.	Denied
68	OCFS	ODV	Approve emergency DV shelter per diem adjustments on an emergency basis to account for the facility underutilization due to quarantine, isolation and other factors during the COVID emergency	Denied – Follow up required
69	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive timeframes for eligibility determinations on applications as well Immediate Needs Personal Care Services.	Denied
70	SDOH	Home Care	Allow approval of temporary increased services as needed for at risk clients that will be reimbursed by Medicaid without the required nurse assessment review and documents/ doctor's orders	Denied
71	SDOH	Home Care	Extend time frames for processing new Personal Care Service applications for Nursing Home patients seeking return to the Community	Denied
72	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the State FHEPS eligibility requirement that an eviction proceeding has been commenced in court	Denied*
73	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the 45-day wait period for Safety Net Cash Assistance applications	Denied
74	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the Cash Assistance eligibility interview	Denied

*The State denied the FHEPS waiver in June 2020, but then reversed the denial and granted the waiver in March 2021.

2020 HRA Reform Highlights

Improve Access to Benefits and Services:

Short-Term Achievements:

- From its onset and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, HRA has advocated for and received significant temporary waivers of State and federal requirements to provide clients greater access to benefits and services by:
 - permitting online submissions of Cash Assistance (CA) applications via Access HRA from anywhere
 - launching a CA telephone interview option for clients to conduct their CA application or recertification eligibility interview by phone without having to leave their home
 - eliminating the SNAP interview requirement for SNAP applicants and recipients who have verified all mandated eligibility criteria through documentation
 - permitting telephonic signatures on applications so that HRA staff can take CA and SNAP applications over the phone for clients who lack internet access or internet-ready devices or have challenges using technology
 - suspending CA work requirements and in-person appointments for the safety of staff and clients
 - eliminating negative case actions if clients do not submit their 6-month CA mailer and SNAP periodic reports
 - extending the certification periods of SNAP and CA cases coming due to temporarily eliminate the need for clients to submit recertifications and potentially lose benefits if not completed timely
 - allowing verbal authorization from clients to disclose confidential health information over the telephone
 - extending the 180-day limit on domestic violence emergency shelter stays
 - permitting certain Adult Protective Services (APS) client home visits to occur via alternative means of communication such as, facetime, skype, or video conferencing.
 - extending Medicaid renewals for one year without full eligibility review

Long-Term Achievements:

- Successfully advocated for the State to end the eligibility finger-imaging requirement for Cash Assistance (CA) applicants/recipients
- Worked with the State to remove the photo requirement on NYS Common Benefit Identification Cards (CBIC), and implemented a referral process from Job and SNAP Centers to IDNYC so that our clients can continue to have photo IDs if needed
- Implemented a citywide process to offer clients temporary “Vault” Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards which can be used to redeem SNAP and Cash

Assistance benefits until they receive their permanent CBIC from the State through the mail

- Revised the “You Must Submit Documents for Your SNAP Case!” (FIA-1146) notice to help clients better understand what documentation must be submitted to complete the SNAP application
- Obtained State approval for a revised New York State (NYS) Client Notification System (CNS) Expedited-SNAP Servicing notice, so clients are reminded that additional documentation is needed to establish eligibility for ongoing SNAP benefits
- Expanded the Internet Quorum (IQ) inquiry/complaint tracking system, which allows HRA to better handle client complaints and issues and offer faster turnaround
- Expanded the SNAP Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) process to permit SNAP households with participants aged 55 and older or with disabilities without earned income to recertify through IVRS
- Implemented an easier security voucher redemption process for landlords of deceased CA clients whose tenancy was in effect on the date of death
- Implemented more self-service Kiosks at the Rider, Jamaica and Crotona Job Centers, which reduce initial waits to get into the center waiting area
- Conducting waiting room sweeps to find people that can utilize some of our self-service options (Scanners, PC Banks, etc.) and similarly deploying staff to canvass lines, if any, at centers to assist and educate clients on such tools
- Expanded the number of On-Demand agents to 350-400 daily and created a rotation for them to have one day out of every ten conducting other non-telephone business for better employee retention and morale
- Enhanced service delivery (clinical assessment, vocational services, wellness planning and federal disability advocacy) for WeCARE clients through full implementation of the new Self-Sufficiency, Employment, Assessment and Management System (SEAMS)
- Launched the electronic Fair Fares application process which expanded access to all NYC residents who believe they qualify to apply and submit documents for review by the Electronic Application processing unit.
- Integrated Access-A-Ride for eligible paratransit users into the Access HRA/Fair Fares system
- Through the Restaurant Revitalization Program, received 62,000 donated free meals for individuals facing food insecurity
- Simplified the Emergency Food Assistance Program’s (EFAP) eligibility criteria and application
- Expanded eligible items for funding through the EFAP Administrative Reimbursement Grant
- Increased the Burial Allowance from \$900 to \$1700 and increased the required cap on funeral cost to qualify for the program from \$1700 to \$3400

COVID-19 Reforms and Operational Changes:

- Implemented an agency-wide remote services model, allowing the vast majority of HRA staff to work and serve clients safely from home
- Mobilized, trained and implemented remote work for FIA and redeployed DSS staff to work from home handling Cash Assistance and SNAP-only applications
- Implemented a drop box for clients to submit their completed CA or SNAP-only applications at the 7 open HRA Centers citywide
- Incorporated over a thousand DSS/HRA staff from other program areas to assist Cash Assistance and SNAP Operations to handle the surge in additional applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic and local shutdown
- Began accepting Burial Services applications via email and fax
- Implemented voluntary & virtual appointment processes for all aspects of WeCARE
- Implemented a new outreach process to Home Visits Needed/Homebound (HVN/HB) clients to ensure well-being and food security during the pandemic
- Implemented virtual field visits for SROs/Master Leased and Senior program move-ins
- Developed strategies with contracted providers (Master Leased, SROs and Seniors) aimed at reducing COVID-19 cases in their buildings and collaborated with DOHMH and H+H on response plans and COVID testing for vulnerable tenants
- Waived all in-person engagements for survivors of domestic violence and set up call-in numbers for assessment and crisis counseling
- Distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to staff working in open HRA centers and enforced social distancing measures to promote a safe environment for staff and clients
- Maintained 6 open HASA Centers (at least one in each borough) to continue providing emergency services (including emergency housing) to clients during the pandemic; safety initiatives included the installation of document drop boxes for use by clients and sneeze guards in the client service areas
- Developed a new model for delivery of HASA case management services which included a weekly wellness check protocol to monitor client well-being during the pandemic
- Implemented a Medicaid program “Batch Buy- In Process” at the end of 2020, which has allowed us to enroll over 14,000 clients in the Medicare Savings Program, and expanded the process to enroll Cash Assistance clients.
- Implemented a process for clients in the Surplus Income program to maintain their coverage by calling to request an extension even if they are unable to submit a bill or payment due to the COVID health emergency.
- Implemented an initiative for the Medicaid program to use e-Faxes for the submission of new applications, which was not available prior to COVID.

- Provided clients in the MBI-WPD program with a grace period extension for unemployment for 6 months at a time for the duration of the COVID emergency.

Reduce Homelessness:

- Implemented a Streamlined Rent Arrears Process in which Job Centers handle all Emergency Assistance / One Shot Deal (EA/OSD) rent arrears requests for amounts less than \$7,200 and less than 6-months of arrears without the need for referral to the Rental Assistance Unit (RAU)
- Developed a Homelessness Prevention Administration (HPA) approval process for Congregate Care residents who have excessive rent arrears
- Established a case assignment system to provide right to counsel (RTC) legal services to all tenants at risk of eviction in Housing Court
- Created an auto-renewal process for CityFHEPS rental subsidy recipients
- Added 141 new units of HASA supportive housing for persons with a history of mental illness and/or substance use as well as homelessness

Modernizing Services and Processes:

- Added PC banks and Kiosks at the Rider, Jamaica and Crotona Centers.
- Successfully sought a State waiver for and implemented an online Cash Assistance application process using ACCESS HRA (AHRA) at 14 participating CBOs
- Implemented the ACCESS HRA online application for Single Issue (SI) grant applications to obtain various supplemental and Emergency Assistance subsidies
- Added the SNAP Case Change Reporting form to ACCESS HRA to allow online submission of case changes
- Permitted clients to submit the CA Periodic Mailer form electronically through Access HRA and the HRA Mobile Document Upload apps
- Continued system enhancements to better service clients, including ACCESS HRA and other system upgrades to better process applicant information and ensure accurate and timely processing
- Rolled out SNAP Telephone Interview Processing Services (TIPS) On-Demand satellite units to five in-person SNAP Centers to ensure that telephone interview services would be available at various locations in case a site goes down
- Implemented On-Demand “Processing Pods” in SNAP TIPS On-Demand Centers, allowing On-Demand staff to vary their work and understand the processing part by spending every fifth workday processing SNAP applications, increasing work satisfaction and decreasing processing errors
- Fully implemented the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) to increase efficiencies for referrals and placements into supportive housing
- Fully implemented the clinician portal, Electronic Medical Record (EMR), for Visiting Psychiatric Services (VPS) to prevent evictions and address urgent clinical needs

- Enhanced the Fair Fares Web application to allow for clients to report cards lost, stolen, or lost in the machine via web; upgrades also included opting-out options, auditing and administrative reviews, and enhanced reporting tools

Additional Accomplishments:

- Standardized training curricula for Office of Support Services (OSS) New Hires, and trained current OSS staff on unit procedures and Cash Assistance and SNAP program eligibility
- Revised Cash Assistance Periodic Mailer Form M-327H to simplify CA interim reporting requirements and remind participants to sign the form (pending OTDA sign-off)
- Completed specifications to migrate additional Office of Central Processing (OCP) tasks, including Landlord Security Voucher redemption, Utility Grant payments, and Child Support Payments into POS
- Implemented an Income Clearance Program (ICP) module in the POS to assist staff in processing actions and to better monitor unit workload
- Established a quarterly convening between HRA/DSS and the Columbia University Center for Justice to help streamline access to benefits and services for formerly incarcerated clients
- Published a new procedure outlining the actions to be taken by management, staff, HRA Police, and Contracted Security Guards in responding to Center incidents, while ensuring all clients are treated with courtesy, compassion, and respect
- Developed an anti-bias and trauma-informed training program
- Retrained and provided enhanced training for the HRA Office of Police Operations (HRA OPO)
- Completed the roll-out the Body Worn Camera (BWC) initiative for HRA PD staff
- Launched the Restaurant Revitalization Program (RRP) to support restaurants across the city by offering \$2.01m million worth of wage-reimbursement funding to cover up to \$30,000 of labor costs per business; a total of 68 restaurants were funded, selected based on their location in the hardest hit communities and whether they were a women or minority-owned business
- Launched the Work Progress Program's (WPP) Workplace, an online service that serves as a platform for WPP providers to share resources and employment/training/educational opportunities and discuss best practices
- Launched a new child support debt reduction program which allows noncustodial parents (NCPs) to reduce up to \$10,000 in child support arrears assigned to the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) by completing a state-certified substance use treatment program
- Launched the lift sanctions initiative for custodial parents on Cash Assistance, which allows custodial parents to inform the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) of their intent to comply with child support requirements in the future; once sanctions have been lifted, the client's full cash and medical benefits are restored

- Revised the child support summons package by adding information to the package aimed at clarifying expectations and softening the tone of the court summons
- Expanded ACCESS HRA to allow HASA clients to report address and income changes.

Client-Centered Reform

As we reorganize services to improve and streamline how we connect our clients to benefits/resources, it is important to note the channel shifts we are seeing in how New Yorkers are now accessing their benefits via the ACCESS HRA platform:

- Pre-pandemic, citywide SNAP in-center foot traffic had declined by more than 50% since 2014, largely driven by the increased use of ACCESS HRA.
- The percentage of SNAP applications submitted online increased from 23% in 2013 to 88% in 2019.
 - 80% of those applications are submitted out-of-center, with the remainder submitted online at DSS-HRA kiosks and PC banks within HRA centers.
 - Meaning approximately 70% of all SNAP applications are submitted online and out-of-center.
 - The percentage of SNAP applications submitted online increased in 2020/ In February 2020, 76% of SNAP applications were submitted electronically outside of DSS-HRA centers, with this figure increasing significantly to approximately 98% in May and June, remaining in the 90s (94.2%) since then/through December 2020.

Taken together, these client-centered reforms have helped reduce wait times and eliminated or reduced the need to come into a Center. Digital service delivery and modernization of the Agency's processes improves the experience for our clients as it is more efficient and frees staff to focus on cases that require more in-person contact.

DSS is seeking to make permanent a COVID-related waiver allowing telephone interviews for the application for and recertification of Cash Assistance as well as for DV and substance use screenings and assessments. The current waiver expires on March 31, 2021. Making the current waiver permanent through language in the State budget will prevent a gap in coverage if the waiver is not extended while legislation is being considered. We are grateful for the partnership of Senators Persaud and Krueger and Assemblymember Rosenthal for introducing S3223-A/A5414 which allows persons applying for or receiving public assistance the option to be interviewed by phone.

Prior to COVID, New Yorkers could only apply for Cash Assistance (CA) in-person at one of HRA's Job Centers unlike SNAP clients who since 2015 have been able to apply by telephone without having to come to an office. The change we are seeking is subject to State approval and absent that approval we are seeking legislative solutions in order to align our service delivery model.

To reiterate what we outlined at the beginning of this report, at the outset of the pandemic, DSS-HRA was granted a State waiver so that New Yorkers could apply for CA online and conduct their interview by phone. Throughout the pandemic, we've had to request waiver extensions multiple times in order to protect the health and safety of staff and clients and align the CA program with the client- and dignity-centered remote/mobile service delivery that we've had for SNAP clients since 2015. **Since receiving the waiver, 85% of Cash Assistance applications have been submitted online with about 162,000 interviews conducted by telephone.** And as we've noted, in that time, we have seen the number of Cash Assistance applications nearly double.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic with increased uncertainty, COVID cases on the rise, and stay-at-home orders newly implemented, we made Cash Assistance available via online ACCESS HRA for the first time. We saw record applications for Cash Assistance in March and April 2020 and during the time period of May through September, applications returned to lower-than-average levels before climbing back up beginning in October.

2020 saw the highest December applications in over a decade.

- In March 2020, the Agency received approximately 12,740 more CA applications than March 2019, a nearly 53% increase.
- In April 2020, the Agency received approximately 7,980 more CA applications than April 2019, a more than 31% increase.

Between February 2020 and December 2020, there was an approximately 48,500-person (+14.8%) increase and a more than 27,000-case (+15.1%) increase in the CA caseload.

In addition to the telephone interview waiver, which made benefits more accessible, DSS-HRA requested and received waivers from the State to temporarily suspend many of the ongoing engagement requirements, required for continued eligibility for federal and State benefits. Waivers allowed us to suspend requirements such as employment program engagement and/or substance use services rules. Under prior Administrations, failure to engage in such requirements would have led to case closings in the normal course. With these factors taken into consideration, as CA cases have been closed at historically low rates due to the waivers, and the historic application increases, there has been a steady increase in the CA caseload since the beginning of the pandemic.

No Wrong Door – Modernizing HRA's Offices and Locations

The agency's long-term goals include ensuring HRA is in the communities of the greatest need by right-sizing our current client-facing locations and relocating into areas of highest need. In executing this strategy, we are implementing new service delivery models to better meet client needs. Further, as we move away from a specific program-focused (each program operates separately) service-delivery approach to a more client-centric, "no wrong door" approach we are increasing opportunities to co-locate with other agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) to leverage community-based

outreach and resources. And finally, we are continuing to maximize use of technology wherever possible.

2020 DHS Reform Highlights

Procedure Development

- Interim Reasonable Accommodations (RA) Process (Butler): DHS provides RAs to clients consistent with applicable laws except where doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of DHS services. DHS will not discriminate or retaliate against any client for requesting an RA, nor will DHS make an adverse determination regarding shelter eligibility or benefits as a result of a disability when the failure to comply relates to a disability requiring an accommodation that has not been provided.
- Selected Infectious Diseases Investigation and Outbreak Prevention: this policy outlines the roles and interactions between DHS facilities, Outreach teams, DHS Office of the Medical Director, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the event of an individual case or potential outbreak.
- Service Coordination with No Violence Again (NoVA) staff for PATH and AFIC: the purpose of this procedure is to delineate the requisite actions that DHS staff at Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) and Adult Family Intake Center (AFIC) sites must take when individuals possibly experiencing domestic violence present at these locations.
- Medication Storage and Self-Administration: this procedure establishes a uniform practice for offering optional medication storage and monitoring to clients as they self-administer their medication. This procedure does not apply to medical clinics that may operate within a DHS facility.
- Single Adult Bed Management: the purpose of this procedure is to clarify and establish consistency regarding the management of bed assignments and vacancies in the Single Adult shelter system.
- DHS' Guide to Improving Services for LGBTQI Clients - Frequently Asked Questions: DHS created this guide to share information about homelessness in the LGBTQI community and to highlight resources that staff should use to better support LGBTQI clients.
- DHS released a Transgender, Non-binary, and Intersex Clients policy applying to all providers and staff that includes: guidance for appropriate service delivery; background on terminology and purpose; an introduction of gender pronouns and chosen name to Agency procedures; and a script for modeling respectful introductions to clients.
- DHS added a field in CARES for preferred/chosen name, a name that clients may use that is different than their legal name. CARES nightly rosters print preferred name over legal name, which prevents clients from being "outed" as transgender during roster checks.
- To ensure clear and consistent standards of social service delivery across the agency, the divisions of adult services, family services and street homeless solutions are developing models of practice, which include:
 - What must be done: All service delivery actions from entry to exit, including case management efforts, operational actions with client interaction and adherence to regulations, policies and procedures.

- How to do it well: Descriptions of how to complete each action with quality, a person-centered approach, a trauma-informed lens, transparency and accountability.
 - What is to be measured: Standardizing how and what we measure by ensuring anything currently measured is noted in the model and all standards in the model are measured, and updating the twice annual Monitoring Instruments to reflect these measures.
- Developed the HOME system, which functions as a rehousing wrap-around to CARES, providing the following functionality:
 - Subsidy eligibility and letter generation.
 - Apartment stock and viewings through the Public Engagement Unit.
 - Transportation requests for viewings and shelter move outs.
 - Veteran rehousing (including non-DHS clients).
 - As of August 2020, DHS program staff use HOME to submit CityFHEPS packages and HPD's Homeless Housing Applications.

Training & Development

- Transgender, Gender Non-Binary, Intersex (TGNBI) Procedure Training: this provides a learning experience designed to help staff understand the experiences, needs, and concerns of TGNBI clients seeking or receiving services at a DHS facility.
- DHS Language Access: this provides information to staff and providers about language access requirements and policies for serving clients who speak languages other than English. Staff learn tools for providing services to our diverse client base. Training covers interpretation services, CARES and manual forms, and translation services.
- DHS has partnered with CUNY's School of Professional Studies to develop a series of trainings that provide a system-wide framework for engaging and supporting our clients. The 10 introductory-level trainings provide guidance on skills such as using a trauma-informed approach, understanding mental illness, and being culturally sensitive. The courses are: Using a Trauma-Informed Approach; Motivational Interviewing; Cultural Sensitivity; Mental Illness and Substance Use; Understanding Violence; Crisis Intervention; Suicide Assessment and Prevention; Self-Care; Key Activities; 5 Steps to Home.

Initiatives

- Influenza vaccination: DHS made the flu vaccine available to all congregate shelters last fall/winter, including all single adult and adult family shelters, all Safe Havens and Drop-in-Centers, Stabilization Beds facilities and selected Families with Children shelters with shared bathrooms. The medical providers who offered COVID testing administered the flu vaccines.
- Overdose Prevention: DHS continues to focus on opioid overdose prevention and in particular, reduction of deaths due to overdoses, by making naloxone available at all its facilities at all times. In CY2020, DHS trained over 2,100 clients and 3,000 staff to administer naloxone, distributed 14,352 naloxone kits, and administered naloxone 730 times, reversing over 90% of overdoses.

COVID-19 Response Reforms

- Conducted shelter de-densification at all our Single Adult Shelters.
- Hold monthly COVID testing at all our Single Adults and Adult Family Sites.
- Conduct daily COVID testing at all our Single Adult Intake locations.
- Opened our own DHS Vaccination POD to service all our congregate shelters, clients and staff.
- Implemented a mobile vaccination program in conjunction with our mobile testing initiative.
- Hosted Town Halls for both clients and staff to combat vaccine hesitancy.



**David A. Hansell, Commissioner
Testimony to the New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare and Finance
May 10, 2021**

“New York City Council Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Hearing”

Good afternoon, Chair Levin, Chair Dromm, and members of the Committees on General Welfare and Finance. I am David Hansell, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me today are Winette Saunders, First Deputy Commissioner, and Michael Moiseyev, Deputy Commissioner for Finance. We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committees today. I know that today is ACS's last budget hearing with you both as Chairs, and I want to thank you for your tireless commitment to children and families, and for being such valuable partners in our work to protect children and support families.

I also want to start on a celebratory note by acknowledging that 2021 marks ACS's 25th anniversary! We have come a long way as an agency, rethinking and reshaping the ways in which we have served children and families over the past 25 years. I am grateful to have been a part of this work over the past four years as Commissioner. I am inspired every day by my colleagues within ACS and our partners and colleagues, including parents, youth, provider agencies, attorneys, advocates, and of course the City Council. Together we are building a system that strengthens and supports families; removes barriers for parents and caregivers to access what they need to keep children safe and well; and invests in the potential of New York City's children.

Today, I will update you on the critical investments that NYC and ACS have made to achieve these goals, and I will highlight the exciting new investments that we are making to further enhance our ability to support children and families, particularly at this pivotal time as the City moves forward with pandemic recovery.

Investments in NYC Children and Families

Providing the Right Child Protective Response, and Enhancing Race Equity

We are proud of the many reforms we have made in our child protection work, which have enhanced our ability to conduct high-quality child protective assessments that identify when safety concerns may be present, so that we can quickly connect families with needed resources and supports, while minimizing more intrusive interventions.

Race equity remains a critical lens for this work. As you know, we had been urging the State to require implicit bias training for mandated reporters, such as teachers, doctors, and social workers, like the requirement that we have in place for all ACS staff. It is crucial to guard against implicit biases that may influence our perceptions and interpretations, and we want to make sure that when mandated reporters contact the Statewide Central Register (SCR), their reports are objective and based on true child safety concerns and not influenced by a family's race, ethnicity, or other factors. I'm pleased to share with you that, as required by the new state budget, the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) will be updating its mandated reporter training to include implicit bias training. Additionally, OCFS is now required to implement implicit bias procedures when screening SCR reports. We are thrilled to see this change go into effect, as it is one more step towards a more equitable system.

As we work to curb unnecessary investigative involvement with families, ACS is continuing to expand CARES, ACS's alternative, non-investigatory child protection response to reports where there is no immediate or impending danger to children or

allegations of serious child abuse. Through CARES, specially trained child protection staff partner with families to assess child safety and family needs to identify supportive services when needed. Since November 2020, ACS has added 7 new CARES units and expanded to all five boroughs. We are on track to have 32 CARES units citywide by the end of 2021.

It remains essential that that our frontline child protective staff are equipped with the necessary experience, skills, and supports to conduct high-quality safety assessments and respond to families' needs. During my time as Commissioner, we have focused on lowering Child Protective Specialist (CPS) caseloads and improving CPS retention. After years of moving in the wrong direction, we now see fewer CPS leave the agency after a short time in service. We equipped all CPS with smart phones and tablets, and implemented the Safe Measures dashboard, which helps CPS and their supervision team track and manage key case milestones and metrics. By enhancing our technology, CPS can be even more responsive to the families they serve, quickly locate resources and information for families, and of course, this technology has been even more critical during the pandemic.

As Commissioner, I have focused on building ACS's culture as a learning organization so that we can continually address challenges and improve our work. We have dramatically expanded continuing professional development for CPS through our Workforce Institute and the James Satterwhite Academy, in partnership with CUNY. ACS has also implemented and continued to build a safety-focused culture in our child protective practice and when reviewing critical incidents, using a nationally recognized approach that draws from the same knowledge base and critical incident protocols that

safety-critical industries such as healthcare use to improve systems. Through this approach, ACS has promoted a culture of openness among staff and managers, and establish shared agency-wide accountability, all of which strengthens our investigative practice and the child welfare system as a whole.

The jobs of our frontline staff are among the most difficult in the City, and it is imperative that our staff receive the specialized training they need to do their complex work. We are particularly excited to move forward, after a pause due to COVID-19, with our state-of-the-art simulated training sites that will allow staff to train in apartments and courtrooms that replicate a real-world environment. A new class of 100 CPS joining ACS later this month will get to experience these new training sites for themselves, working with our team of practice experts and skilled actors to experience what the day-to-day work is like prior to going out in the community to work with families. Later, these sites will be used not only for onboarding new CPS, Youth Development Specialists (YDS), and provider staff, but also to work with them to build their expertise throughout their careers.

The Executive Budget includes the funding for our successful CPS Mentorship program, which we launched in 2020 in collaboration with DC37 and Local 371. This important program gives newly hired CPS the opportunity to receive additional support and helpful insights from more senior CPS colleagues who will serve as mentors and who understand what it is like to be new to this challenging job. Mentors build important leadership skills and are compensated for their efforts to provide this support to new CPS. ACS initiated the program with 120 mentors, and we plan to add an additional 120 mentors in fiscal year (FY) 2022. As we grow this program, we expect it to further

enhance morale, by allowing staff to discuss challenges in a supportive peer environment, help keep our attrition low, and benefit the long-term growth of our experienced frontline employees. All of this in turn helps us better carry out our important mission of making sure children are safe and families are supported.

Prevention Services to Support Children, Youth, and Families at Home

Just last month in April, we acknowledged National Child Abuse Prevention Month with a month-long series of virtual events to celebrate ACS and community-based prevention provider staff and to highlight the array of services we have available to support NYC children and families. We were also able to celebrate an important victory at the state level: the reversal of proposed cuts to prevention services that would have further reduced the state's share of prevention services reimbursement, and that would have harmed our ability to offer essential supports to families that have become especially critical during the pandemic. We are grateful to our state legislators who worked tirelessly to stop these cuts.

Throughout the pandemic, our prevention providers have continued delivering services virtually and in-person to families, and these services include concrete goods like food, clothing, and diapers, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, homemaking services, and more. I am especially proud of the prevention continuum that we have grown and strengthened during my time as Commissioner. We recently took additional steps to build an even stronger portfolio of services for families with teens who are experiencing challenges with behavior, substance misuse, mental health, or other crises that place the young person at risk of out-of-home placement or justice

system involvement. Through the procurement of our Family Assessment Program, ACS and five community-based partners, Children's Aid, The Children's Village, Community Mediation Services, JBFCS, and New York Foundling, are positioned to help parents meet the common challenges of raising young adults through targeted adolescent services that range from family support and resource navigation to more intensive, evidence-based models that offer in-home therapy, skill-building to increase behavioral control, and support to restore positive family interaction.

Transforming Foster Care

When reflecting on ACS's history, these facts always bear repeating as the significant markers of reform: Approximately 20,000 families with roughly 41,000 children served annually through prevention services to support and strengthen families and keep children at home. At the same time, there are fewer than 8,000 NYC children in foster care, the lowest number in decades, and a number that has decreased each year of my tenure as Commissioner. We honor that progress and the hard work it took to achieve, and we are strongly recommitted to our efforts to both ensure that foster care is always the last resort intervention and that children in our care are placed in safe, loving homes with opportunities to flourish and meet their goals.

When children must come into foster care as a necessary safety intervention, ACS is intensely focused on placing them with relatives or other trusted adults with whom the child has a connection. So far this fiscal year, more than half of the children who have entered foster care as a result of possible abuse or neglect were placed with kinship caregivers. By continuously strengthening our work to identify and support

kinship caregivers, we have been able to achieve an overall increase in the proportion of the city's foster children who are with kinship caregivers from 30% in 2017 to more than 42% in 2020.

As you know, ACS has been aggressively implementing a Foster Care Strategic Blueprint that has produced significant measurable results. In addition to fewer children in foster care, ACS has reduced length of stay in foster care; increased kinship placement and kinship guardianship; increased foster home recruitment; and expanded programming for older youth. ACS will soon release our RFP for new foster care contracts to begin on July 1, 2022. We are using the transformational opportunity of this RFP to build on our success and scale best practices and proven strategies to achieve the best possible safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for New York City children and families. We intend to implement a shared framework across prevention and foster care services that aims to shorten stays in foster care, and to provide greater support and stability to families during reunification following foster care. Finally, we are working with New York State to align New York City with the implementation of the federal Family First legislation this September, which includes new assessment and court processes to limit residential care to youth who have a clinical or therapeutic need for a higher level of care, and to enhance the residential care continuum to meet those needs through the creation of Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs).

Supporting youth in foster care is critical to the work we do to ensure youth in care receive the support and services they need. The Mayor and ACS remain committed to the Fair Futures program, which has provided critical coaching and tutoring services to thousands of youth in foster care. There is \$2.7 million of state

funds in the Executive Budget for the continuation of the program, which is a top priority for ACS. We look forward to working with the City Council to ensure that the adopted budget contains sufficient funds to continue the full implementation of the program.

Enhancing Our Juvenile Justice Environments and Programs

During my time as Commissioner, ACS has collaborated with youth advocates, our partner agencies, and the Council to usher in a new era of juvenile justice reform with Raise the Age. NYC now serves youth who are arrested for crimes they are alleged to have committed at age 16 or 17 in our juvenile justice continuum, which has increasingly meant community-based services and links to therapeutic supports. As we continually work to divert young people from justice-system involvement, through programs in ACS's continuum and in partnership with our sister City agencies, ACS must also ensure that our juvenile justice environments are tailored to support the youth in our care. For the two secure detention facilities that ACS manages, Horizon in the Bronx and Crossroads in Brooklyn, this means continuing the critical capital projects that will enhance our youth-centered environment and help ensure the facilities are safe and secure for youth and staff.

The Executive Budget adds \$94.6 million to ACS's capital budget, for a total of \$336 million committed to renovations at Horizon and Crossroads which will provide the essential and comprehensive upgrades that both of our detention facilities require to become safe, state of the art facilities for youth. This work will include critical infrastructure upgrades to HVAC, electric, and safety and security systems, as well as food service upgrades. Additionally, we will expand programming, vocational, education,

medical, mental health, and family visiting spaces, all of which will help us better meet the needs of youth, including the older population of youth we are now serving since Raise the Age. We look forward to keeping the Council updated as this work progresses.

Currently, we are focused in both detention and Close to Home on supporting youth to successfully complete the school year and plan for summer. Like other NYC students, the students in detention and Close to Home are now participating in blended learning schedules, with a mix of in-person and remote learning. In addition to the academic program provided by the Department of Education, ACS is continually adding supports and educational enrichment opportunities for youth beyond the regular school day. For example, to support youth during the pandemic, ACS has partnered with organizations such as the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) and The Kite to offer an array of tutoring services for youth in secure detention, and with Tier NYC to provide similar tutoring and support services for youth in Close to Home. In partnership with CUNY, CCA, and The Kite, youth in secure detention and Close to Home have accessed specially created college and career exploration content during the pandemic. Youth have also participated in college prep and college credit-bearing courses through CUNY College Now and Kingsborough Community College.

ACS offers enrichment and skill-building opportunities for youth in our care, which is crucial to positively engage youth. We have planning well underway to offer a full array of enriching opportunities for our youth this summer. We are excited to once again offer the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School, a six-week summer literacy and enrichment course. Additionally, ACS has begun to share information and facilitate

the enrollment of youth in the Summer Youth Employment Program across our juvenile justice continuum.

Promoting Child and Family Well-Being

ACS's newest division, which I established my first year as Commissioner, represents the future we hope to realize in child welfare. We want all families to have access to concrete resources that address the effects of poverty, social isolation and the stresses of parenting; to feel connected to strong communities that support them in times of need, and to be armed with actionable information about child safety. After a highly successful 3-year demonstration project, ACS recently completed the RFP process and issued awards for our three Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) in East New York (Good Shepherd Services), Hunts Point (Graham Windham) and Highbridge (Bridgebuilders/Children's Village.) The FECs have been co-designed with local families and community members since they were first developed in 2018, starting with each community naming their own FEC. Today, Parent Leaders co-design and share concrete supports and resources with families and community members, who in turn, bring their knowledge, passion, and talents to the FEC. Grassroots planning is at the root of this model, which helps to set it apart from a traditional social service program. These community hubs have proven crucial throughout the pandemic, providing community members concrete goods as well as both an in-person and virtual community to prevent social isolation.

In addition to the 3 FECs, ACS has 11 Community Partnership Programs (CPPs). The CPPs leverage existing services and help to connect the service dots, so

that families are aware of, and can better access, the full continuum of supports in their neighborhoods. The CPPs have also been invaluable throughout the pandemic, providing families with the concrete resources and supports they have needed.

Through the FEC and Community Partnerships models, we aim to disrupt the historic racial disproportionality that we have seen in child welfare, with Parent Leaders, FEC staff, and Community Ambassadors working to connect members to the unique type of family support that they need, when and how they need it. Our goal is to reduce this disparity and decrease families' interaction with child welfare through primary prevention supports.

There is perhaps no greater primary prevention service than child care, which enables families to work while their children are safely cared for in a developmentally appropriate and stimulating learning environment. After more than a year of stress, disruptions, and economic uncertainty, it is critical that NYC families—and especially our most vulnerable families—have enhanced access to child care. ACS is implementing a bold new plan to increase access to low-cost, federally-funded child care vouchers for thousands of additional families, with a number of measures to expand access and eligibility. The Executive Budget includes \$2.5 million in City Tax Levy funding in FY2022 to support ACS's administrative costs needed to process the applications for what we believe will be thousands more families.

ACS is eager to fully leverage federal child care funds to enable more families to receive federally funded child care. ACS's multi-part plan includes seeking New York State approval to:

- Increase the income eligibility from 200% to 265% of the federal poverty level;

- Eliminate the requirement in State law that a family must earn at least minimum wage to qualify for subsidized child care assistance; and
- Increase the length of time an eligible family can continue to receive child care from 12 months to 24 months, without having to recertify.

ACS is also seeking state approval to use federal Child Care Block Grant funding for a demonstration project that will target child care vouchers to high need families, targeting the eleven community districts in neighborhoods that are supported by ACS's Family Enrichment Centers and Community Partnership Programs.

We also want to assure that families most in need of child care have access. We have restored prioritization of post-transitional child care vouchers, so that low-income families transitioning off other public assistance benefits can continue to receive child care. Additionally, we are prioritizing vouchers for families who are homeless and for families who have recently participated in ACS's in child welfare programs, such as families who have adopted a child from the foster care system or received preventive services. We are very excited that income-eligible families who have been receiving child care while their child welfare cases are open, will be able to continue to receive child care after reunification, adoption, KinGAP, and after prevention services end. We are also expanding child-care access to include families participating in an approved substance abuse treatment program. We know that many families rely on home-based providers, and we will be increasing the rate for those providers who participate in at least 10 hours of training annually.

ACS anticipates this plan will enable thousands more New York City families to receive federally funded child care vouchers. Child care vouchers can be used for

center-based or home-based child care options. The Executive Budget also adds funds to ACS's budget for additional staff support to carry out expansion and enrollment activities, making sure that families are supported through the application process; applications are determined as quickly as possible so that families can have child care arrangements in place when starting work or other activities; and providers receive training and assistance to help ensure they are timely reimbursed for their services.

Summary of Executive Budget

I have mentioned some the key investments that we are excited to see in the Executive Budget, and I will now share further details. In summary, ACS's Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Executive Budget is \$2.69 billion, including \$983.7 million in City Tax Levy (CTL) funding. We received new need adjustments to our FY2022 budget including \$69.7 million in CTL. Highlights from the ACS FY2022 Executive Budget include:

- Funding for enhanced operational capacity to support ACS's planned expansion in child care access, with additional enrollment and eligibility staff to support Child Care Block Grant funded child care for families, as well as resources to market child care in the communities that are part of the demonstration project (\$2.5 million CTL).
- Funding for ACS to be able to comply with the State mandate to track child care time and attendance by the hour rather than as part-time or full time. This funding will enable ACS to add staff capacity to support providers with training, ensure payments are processed timely, and perform related quality assurance activities (\$2.4 million CTL).

- Funding to partially fund the Fair Futures program with \$2.7 million in FY2022 from prior year state revenue.
- Funding to address the budget gap in FY2022 created by the federal elimination of the Title IV-E waiver and the end of the federal transition funding (\$54.9 million CTL in FY 2022 for the structural deficit).
- Funding to stabilize ACS's residential care providers through a more predictable funding methodology. Specifically, since FY2020 providers have received a higher rate to help offset budget uncertainty, due to federal and state funding structures that reimburse providers based on the number of children in their care each day, which can widely fluctuate. This allocation was baselined at \$9.8 million CTL starting in FY2022, and helps providers address staffing, turnover, and other basic infrastructure issues, which in turn improves agency stability and the quality of services for children in their care.
- Funding for the CPS Mentorship program, which gives newly hired CPS the opportunity to receive additional support and helpful insights from more senior CPS who will serve as mentors (\$272,000 in CTL).
- Additional funding in ACS's capital budget for renovations at Horizon and Crossroads, to support upgrades to infrastructure, and to enhance programming and recreation areas for youth (\$94.6 million).

In addition to the City's important investments in ACS's programs and services, we were pleased that the final enacted state budget did not contain any of the devastating cuts that were initially proposed, including reversing the 20% across the board cut to

many of ACS's services, including prevention, adoption subsidy and detention. We know many state legislators, City Council members, providers and advocates worked hard in Albany to reach this good result, and we are thankful for their support and efforts. Importantly, the state budget also included implementing legislation for the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, and we will continue to work with OCFS and our child welfare partners to implement the new requirements.

Conclusion

I am immensely proud of the progress we have made at ACS over the past four years, and just as proud of the fact that we continue to remain laser-focused on opportunities to better serve children and families. We are grateful to the City Council for your continued support and advocacy on behalf of NYC children and families. I feel personally privileged to have worked throughout my tenure with Chair Levin and Chair Dromm, and I know that each of you has a strong personal connection and dedication to this work, as do so many of your colleagues. We look forward to sharing more details about ACS's 25th Anniversary celebrations this summer, and we hope you will all join us for the festivities.

We are happy to take your questions.



**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Jointly
with the Committee on Finance**

Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Hearing

May 10, 2021, 2:00PM – Virtual Hearing

**Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner
Gonzalo Casals**

Good morning, Chairs Van Bramer and Dromm, and members of the committees. I am Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of New York, here to testify on the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2022 budget for my agency. I am joined today by Deputy Commissioner Sheelah Feinberg and Director of Finance Phillippa Shao.

I will start with an overview of the numbers. Mayor de Blasio's proposed FY22 executive budget currently allocates \$144.9 million in City funds to the Department of Cultural Affairs. This includes:

- \$109.5 million for operating and energy costs at organizations on DCLA property
- \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund
- \$7 million for agency operations and other programs

In addition to these City funding figures, the FY22 budget also includes \$25 million in federal relief funding for the City Artist Corps, which I'll discuss more in a moment.

As you know, these figures do not include any one time additions typically added at budget adoption, like City Council initiatives and member items. By comparison, at this point in last year's budget process, at the height of the pandemic, the agency had an allocation of \$137 million. We look forward to working with the Council toward adopting a budget that invests in our cultural community as it continues to recover and reopen.

Returning to the City Artist Corps announced by Mayor de Blasio last week, this program will include an additional \$25 million in federal aid to support artists working in NYC. This historic commitment will provide relief for our artists, and inspiration and empowerment for all New Yorkers. As the Mayor said last week, "we want to give artists opportunity and we want the city to feel the power of our cultural community again."

After a year full of enormous losses and challenges, the Artist Corps is one component of the City's larger effort to spur an equitable recovery for all by supporting the cultural sector. It

builds on the New Deal-inspired City Cleanup Corps, which will put thousands of New Yorkers to work on the recovery of our city. The Artist Corps will bring cultural experiences to every corner of NYC. The presence of culture in communities correlates to a stronger social fabric, better health and public safety, and improved education. Let me share a couple of examples of how artists have provided crucial support to their communities:

- We saw artists organize for their communities in the worst of the pandemic. The North Bronx Collective, led by artists like Alicia Grullón established a mutual aid network to feed and support their neighbors. Similarly, Queens, artists Xenia Diente and Jaclyn Reyes working with the Laundromat Project built on their connections in the Little Manila community to provide relief.
- In the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd, artists spearheaded murals across the city that brought people together in common cause. Their art distilled, shaped, and amplified collective calls for racial justice. One such mural, on Centre Street in Lower Manhattan, was designed in a collaboration between artists Tijay Mohammed, Sophia Dawson, and Patrice Payne. Dozens of street artists, including Tats Cru collective, brought the mural to life.
- Once the city started reopening, music and performances began to fill the streets. These gave New Yorkers a chance to participate in cultural programming in safe, outdoor settings, and it helped show the world that New York City was as alive and vital as ever. Open Culture NYC, created thanks to legislation sponsored by Chair Van Bramer, has greatly expanded opportunities for public performances even further.
- NYC Public Artist in Residence with the Commission on Human Rights, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, distilled a range of powerful emotions and support into I Still Believe in Our City. This campaign was installed on bus shelters, in subways, on billboards, and was even featured on the cover of Time Magazine. It expresses solidarity with Asian and Pacific Islander communities in New York City in the face of rising bias attacks.

These all show the importance of artists who live and work here. They bring people together and make our city brighter, better, and healthier. They spark necessary conversations and help us make sense of our experiences amid unprecedented upheaval. Along with their neighbors, New York's artists have been devastated by the pandemic in so many ways. The City Artist Corps will invest in their important contributions to our communities, while bringing the transformational benefits of art and culture to all New Yorkers. We're still working out details of the program, and we're looking forward to rolling it out in the weeks ahead.

This program builds on the long term investments that this Administration and the City Council have made in our cultural sector over the last seven years. Before the pandemic, support for culture was at an all time high, and it has remained strong even under the budgetary uncertainties of the past year. The cultural groups and artists that receive support every year from DCLA are the backbone of NYC cultural community. They are hubs for social connection and engagement. We believe that these historic levels of support, and our efforts to build diversity, equity, and inclusion into everything we do have laid the groundwork for a cultural recovery that will touch New Yorkers in every community in our city. With this final budget of the de Blasio Administration, we continue to invest in what makes our city great.

The road to a full, equitable recovery will be long. But we're excited to work with the City Council to make sure our record of investments in culture continue to help the sector recover and, in turn, empower our arts and culture community to drive the city's resurgence in the months ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
FISCAL YEAR 2022 EXECUTIVE BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
COMMITTEE**

May 10, 2021

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, and the members of the committee for their support of libraries and the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Executive Budget.

The City's much-anticipated recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is well underway. While we know this crisis is still far from over, we are excited to be moving forward with the restoration of the programs and services New Yorkers need to bounce back. Today, NYPL launched Phase 2 of its reopening plan, with 26 of the branch libraries currently open for Grab and Go service expanding offerings to include desktop computer use, printing, and limited browsing. The remaining branches will follow later this month while research libraries will provide onsite access by appointment. The Library is also in the process of putting together a plan for outdoor programming, which will focus on children in underserved communities, a robust summer reading initiative (that will include book giveaways), and exhibit installations at our research libraries. On the civic engagement front, NYPL is working with our fellow systems

on voter engagement and education as it relates to citywide elections and the introduction of Rank Choice Voting. We are currently coordinating training sessions with partner Community Based Organizations, planning virtual panel discussions and events, and creating an engaging, non-partisan voter education and outreach campaign with the branding “Read, Think, Vote.” NYPL plans to reopen all of its branches by mid July of this year, with the full complement of services such as general space use, programs, and classes incrementally reinstituted as quickly as circumstances allow. While we are both relieved and thrilled to have finally arrived at this juncture, we maintain that the City’s recovery is not so much a story of “going back to normal” but, rather, one of adjusting to a “new normal.” This is why we will continue to apply lessons learned and innovative new approaches developed during the pandemic as we gradually restore our programs and services.

It is thanks to the support of the City Council and the Mayor that we not only found a way to adjust our services to the challenges presented by the pandemic, but that we are now poised to reopen and play an integral role in recovery. It is your leadership that made it possible for us to quickly pivot to digital services and remote programming, and to gradually reopen 53 of our 92 locations for Grab and Go service during the peak of this crisis. It is that same leadership we rely on now as we look to Phase 2 and beyond.

During this time of economic uncertainty we understand and appreciate the difficult budget choices that need to be made. The Mayor’s FY22 Executive Budget proposes a cut of \$10.3M to libraries in FY 2022, with \$4.5M to the NYPL. The FY21 budget also included \$5.3M in City Council non-baselined funds for the NYPL. The proposed cut combined with the potential loss of City Council funding could impact library services. As noted, the Library is not only in the process of planning the restoration of pre-pandemic levels of service, but also adjusting to the “new normal.” This means initiatives like outdoor programming and maintaining aspects of our

digital and remote services while also managing the new costs of PPE and other pandemic-related accommodations. All of this coexists alongside an expanding footprint in the form of much-needed capital improvements to our aging infrastructure. To do this while also reopening and restoring service in a timely manner will depend on the reversal of the City's cut and a restoration of the City Council's non-baselined funds.

In addition to our pivot to digital and remote services during the crisis, the Library also moved forward with key capital projects. Almost immediately after the March 2020 closure, we advocated for the ability to safely continue with investments in the physical infrastructure of our branches which we balanced with the needs of our communities. Thankfully, the City ultimately restarted priority capital projects such as the renovations slated for Carnegie branches like Melrose, Fort Washington, 125th St, Hunts Point, and Port Richmond. More recently, we have proceeded, along with the City, with our plans to build a new, state of the art library in Inwood and completed construction at New Amsterdam, Roosevelt Island, and an Inwood temporary space, with the latter two opening for Grab and Go service earlier this year. We have also continued the construction of a brand new Charleston branch on Staten Island, which will be completed this year. Looking ahead, we plan to continue with all infrastructure projects aimed at maintaining and renovating our rapidly aging buildings; but this is only possible through sustained funding as part of the City's ten-year capital plan. The NYPL recently submitted details to the City of its new systemwide capital needs totaling \$427.6M. These priorities include complete renovations of the Hudson Park, Edenwald, West New Brighton, Francis Martin, Spuyten Duyvil and Countee Cullen branches, state of good repair projects such as HVAC, boilers and ADA accessibility, technology upgrades, and funding of project shortfalls. While we are grateful for the \$20M in capital funds allocated by the Mayor in the FY22 Executive Budget to specific projects and shortfalls, we are requesting an additional \$50M in capital support from our original ask of \$427.6M. These funds would allow us to cover DDC cost overruns and

arising needs in the interest of the welfare of the communities we serve. Time and time again, we have seen the impact of your investment in branches like Stapleton, Washington Heights, and Van Cortlandt on circulation, program attendance, and visits. We anticipate a similar impact on Macomb's Bridge which was completed shortly before our March 2020 closure. We will continue our discussions with the City around our new capital needs and remain hopeful that we will receive much-needed funding through the ten-year capital plan and from the City Council for our priorities.

As New Yorkers finally emerge from one of the darkest times in our history, it is important to reflect on NYPL's services, accommodations, and partnerships over the past year. Our digital and remote programming during this time ensured free access to critical information, resources, and programs for the public through webinars, classes, book clubs, live tutoring with Brainfuse, and career and financial counseling that supported schools, job-seekers, and communities, among others. We made it easier to sign-up for library cards and virtually check out materials through our SimplyE app. For researchers, we expanded our remote offerings and made them more accessible, providing a greatly-expanded Scan and Deliver service to allow patrons to request selections of books and scholarly journals for digital delivery. Amid the crisis we maintained not only our commitment to social equity as an institution through initiatives such as the expansion of our digital collections on Black heritage, Black liberation, and anti-racism through our Schomburg Center for Black Culture, but moreover, to equitable service. Initiatives such as the 2020 Summer Reading book kit distribution, leaving our WiFi networks on during closure, and services like ShelfHelp were designed to specifically reach those New Yorkers without internet access, while TechConnect classes, one-on-one career counseling, and community resources on food and housing insecurity aimed to reach those communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Along the way, we partnered with the City on vital initiatives at our closed branches such as Learning Labs, Covid Testing Centers, and Cooling

Centers. And we never abandoned our commitment to civic engagement as we quickly revised our outreach strategy for the Census and played a vital role in National Voter Registration Day. Through it all, we always prioritized the health and safety of our staff and patrons above all else and introduced a new set of health and safety protocols and accommodations at our locations. These protocols will remain in effect as we proceed with our reopening plans.

The New York Public Library is no stranger to supporting the City through crisis. Just as we've been there for previous challenging periods like the Great Depression, 9/11, and the 2008 Financial Crisis, we have also been ready every time the city has bounced back and prospered. We are here and ready to again be central to recovery. But we also know that this time is different. So much of the effects of this awful tragedy, trauma, and fear have adversely impacted New Yorkers of color and those on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. The library must double down in its recovery efforts to restore these citizens to a place of security which includes both the space to learn and find opportunities. But just as before, we can not do this without your help and support, and look forward to working with you as a partner to guarantee yet another historic and unique recovery for this city we all call home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I remain available to answer any questions you may have.



Statement by Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO, Queens Public Library

New York City Council's Committee on Finance, jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Hearing

May 10, 2021

Good afternoon. I am Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL). It is a pleasure to be here. Thank you, Chairs Dromm and Van Bramer, Speaker Johnson, and the members of these esteemed committees for the opportunity to speak with you about the Mayor's Executive Budget, and our budget priorities, for the next fiscal year.

Despite the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that distributed federal aid to New York City, the city's three library systems are still facing significant reductions to our operating aid at a time when we can ill afford it.

Today, 53 neighborhood libraries across New York City began offering expanded services, enabling customers to browse collections and access computers and in-person reference services. Over the next several weeks, additional libraries that currently only offer "to-go" or "grab-and-go" service will begin providing these expanded services as well, while libraries that have remained closed will start to reopen. By sometime in July, all of our available locations will have reopened to the public, and over the summer, we will continue to expand services. As we continue on this road to recovery for all New Yorkers, we strive to safely return to as much of a pre-pandemic normalcy as our new world allows.

However, with the \$4.3 million cut Queens, Brooklyn and the New York public library systems (Tri-Li) have already endured this fiscal year, and the de Blasio Administration's proposed \$10.3 million cut to Tri-Li in Fiscal Year 2022, libraries will not be in a strong position to meet the needs of families, individuals, and our most vulnerable populations. In addition to the Administration's cuts, Tri-Li is facing the loss of \$11.9 million in City Council funding. **In total, New York City's libraries are facing a \$22.2 million cut in Fiscal Year 2022, on top of the \$4.3 million we were cut during this fiscal year.**

A reduction of this magnitude would be devastating, with a significant impact on our ability to deliver critical services. Our staffing levels are barely enough to operate all of our branches six days a week. If these cuts were to go through, more than 100 full-time positions would be eliminated. With the loss of those positions, our hours of operation across the city will be reduced, putting universal six-day service in danger. Our ability to maintain robust collections for our customers will be severely hampered. As e-books and e-magazines continue to gain in popularity, we will not have the ability to meet customer demand. We will not be able to make critical emergency repairs to our buildings, resulting in closures and costlier capital projects. As we look to the future, knowing that libraries are the backbone of every community, how can we truly have a recovery for all when libraries are facing such steep cuts?

Amy, who uses the 125th Street library in Harlem, told us that she moved to New York City right before the pandemic, and that her ability to take advantage of our free e-book lending helped her a great deal with her schoolwork during the lockdown.

Christina, who uses the Brower Park library in Brooklyn, explained that during a year spent almost exclusively at home, e-books and audiobooks allowed her and her family to travel again, and she thanked library workers for unlocking access to enchanting gardens, historical figures, how-to manuals, language lessons, and poetry.

Lorraine, who uses the Peninsula library in Far Rockaway, shared how she was not able to see her four young grandchildren due to the pandemic. Because of libraries though, she was able to order books for delivery to her home, connect with her grandchildren virtually, play dress-up, and read the books to them.

These stories are just a few examples of the tremendous importance of libraries to the people and communities we serve. As we prepare for the City's full reopening and the immediate increase in demand for services this summer and fall, it would be unconscionable to drastically reduce funding to libraries at a time when people like Amy, Christina, Lorraine, and countless others in our communities need us most.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to work with the Administration during budget negotiations to reverse the cuts that have been proposed to libraries, as well as reauthorize the Council's Library Initiative at last year's funding level, at minimum.

Chairs Van Bramer and Dromm, Speaker Johnson, and members of this joint Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. To discuss Tri-Li's capital needs and close out our presentation, I turn the floor over to my colleague and friend, Dr. Tony Marx.

**Brooklyn Public Library Testimony to the
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
Relations, jointly with the Committee on Finance
FY 22 Executive Budget Hearing, May 10, 2021**

Good afternoon. I am Linda Johnson, President & CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. Thank you, Chairs Dromm and Van Bramer, for the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget. We are grateful to you and your committees, to Speaker Johnson and Majority Leader Cumbo, and the entire City Council, for your longstanding commitment to New York City's libraries.

It is hard to believe that this will be our last budget hearing with you at the helm, and we'd like to thank you for your many years of service and devotion to our libraries. Your leadership is especially crucial as our city begins to recover from this unprecedented crisis.

Today, my colleagues and I ask the city's support for its libraries so we can continue to help millions of New Yorkers reclaim their lives.

Our FY22 Tri-Library expense request is simple. Reject the proposed \$10.34 million cut to our libraries and restore the Council's \$11.9 million investment in our systems. All told, more than \$22 million of our collective operating funding is at stake.

Together, our three systems have already absorbed PEGS totaling \$4.3 million in the current year. Taking on \$22 million in further cuts will reduce service levels and jeopardize our ability to meet the needs of our patrons at a critical juncture.

I am thoroughly disheartened to report that once again, libraries were passed over for inclusion in the city's ten-year-capital plan. Needless to say, this outcome continues to disappoint all of us. Though the Executive budget did allocate \$20 million for each system, a welcome addition, it simply doesn't come close to meeting the needs we identified in our ten-year plan proposals. The Council can make this right by pushing for an additional \$150 million capital allocation in this year's budget—\$50 million for each system to compensate for the lack of funding in the ten-year plan.

It has been an extraordinarily challenging year and our library systems never stopped supporting New Yorkers. I speak for all of us when I say that we are incredibly proud of our staff for finding creative ways to provide vital services. Brooklyn Public Library staff have produced more than 9,000 free virtual programs for well over one million attendees, from resume support to grief support groups to Homework Help, and we fully intend to sustain our virtual momentum even as we resume in-person service.

For the half a million New Yorkers without broadband at home, we kept the WiFi on at our collective 217 locations, so that patrons sitting outside could tune into our programs, complete their homework, look for job opportunities, and connect with loved ones. In Brooklyn, we have now installed antennas on the rooftops of 33 branches to extend a reliable WiFi signal 300 feet in every direction.

Eager to help our city through the crisis, our systems partnered with the City, offering 11 branches in total to serve as Learning Labs so that kindergarten through eighth grade students could participate in remote learning and after-school services. We also offered a selection of cooling centers and served as polling locations. Alongside the NYC Test & Trace Corps, we hosted COVID testing and PPE distribution sites, and have now shifted to helping people access vaccines, making appointments, and, like Flushing Library in Queens, serving as Vaccination Centers.

When it became possible in July of 2020, our systems safely welcomed patrons back to our branches for grab-and-go lobby service. For nearly a year, patrons have been able to pick up and return hardcopy materials in person. In Brooklyn, all of our available locations have been open for grab-and-go service and have seen more than 600,000 visits.

With the weather getting warmer, libraries are again offering outdoor services. In partnership with the Department of Transportation, Brooklyn Public Library recently received 5,000 pounds of outdoor furniture to create reading rooms outside more than 25 branches across the borough. BPL Outdoors is offering traditional library services right on the sidewalk, including library card sign up, and book browsing and borrowing. Ten branches will soon pilot outdoor laptop loans for patrons to use on site, paired with our enhanced WiFi.

Popular outdoor programming is resuming, including Storytime and Ask a Tech, as well as voter registration and education. Our newest program, Whispering Libraries, allows patrons and passersby to listen to curated poetry, music, and oral histories. And our Children's Librarians have created Storywalks, which will allow families to read children's books together outside.

In addition to our vast array of outdoor and virtual offerings, I could not be more thrilled to report that today, all three library systems are expanding indoor service at 53 locations across the city. As of this morning, patrons are able to browse our shelves, sign up for library cards, use computers and printers, and catch up with their local librarians and library staff at 13 Brooklyn Public Library locations, 14 Queens Public Library locations, and 26 New York Public Library locations in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. New York Public Library's research collections will also be accessible by appointment.

Of course, we are taking every precaution to ensure the safety of our staff and our patrons, following all social distancing protocols and using time limits to ensure as many patrons as possible can utilize services.

We are working hard to expand indoor, in-person service at additional locations in the coming weeks. With the exception of branches under construction or being used by the City, all of our libraries throughout New York City will be open for book browsing, computer use, and more by mid-July.

This is a milestone in our city's reopening and recovery. Mr. Chairman, just a few days ago, you and I cut a ribbon on the plaza at Central Library, having completed the most extensive restoration and renovation in the branch's history. As I said then, there could not be a better time to begin welcoming people back inside the Library. In the wake of the pandemic and in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, the mission of our libraries is more urgent than ever: to welcome New Yorkers of every race, age, gender, class, and physical ability, and provide them with the educational resources and technology they need to participate in and advance a democratic society.

As you will hear next from my colleague, Dennis Wolcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library, libraries—located in every neighborhood and trusted by every generation—are uniquely positioned to help rebuild a more equitable, more cohesive New York, and we must have your continued support to meet that challenge.

Thank you.