

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES
Of the
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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June 27, 2017
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm., 16th fl.

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Annabel Palma
Fernando Cabrera
Ruben Wills
Vanessa L. Gibson
Corey D. Johnson
Ritchie J. Torres
Barry S. Grodenchik
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
Ben Kallos

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

Steven Banks
HRA Commissioner

Beth Simone Noveck
NYU Professor

Robert Roderick
Intuit Product Leader

Andre Monait [sp?]
NYU Langone Family Center

John Robertson
Columbia University School of Social Work

Raysa Rodriguez
Vice President of Policy and Planning at WIN

Brenda Riley
Safety Net Activist

Johnathan Sunshine [sp?]

Wendy O'Shields
NYC Safety Net Activist

Giselle Routhier
Coalition for the Homeless

Kathryn Kliff
Legal Aid Society

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

Catherine Trapani
Homeless Services United

Stephanie Gendell
Citizen's Committee for Children

Joel Berg
Hunger Free America

Yvonne Pena
Community Service Society

Emily Marano
Single Stop

Matt Bishop
Open City Labs

Sarah Wilson
Safety Net Activist

Lynsetta Moore [sp?]
Safety Net Activist

Mercedes Jennings
Partnership for Homeless

Alexandra Brandes
Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

Olivia Meier
NYC Veterans' Alliance

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

Elana Duffy
Pathfinder Labs

Tukawia Kamatsu [sp?]

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good afternoon,
3 everybody. Thank you very much for being here today.
4 I'm Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the
5 Council's Committee on General Welfare, and I want to
6 thank everybody for coming out to today's important
7 hearing. I want to thank my colleagues for being
8 here, Council Member Annabel Palma of the Bronx,
9 Council Member Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx, Council
10 Member Ben Kallos of Manhattan, Council Member Barry
11 Grodenchik of Queens, and we're expecting more
12 committee members and bill sponsors to be here
13 throughout the course of the hearing. I also want to
14 welcome Commissioner Banks and his team for being
15 here. Today, our goal is focus on how families with
16 children move through the Department of Homeless
17 Services system. As the hearing title implies, from
18 PATH to Permanency, this committee is interested in
19 hearing more about how families interact with the
20 system from the moment they enter PATH to apply for
21 shelter to moving out of shelter and into permanent
22 housing. In addition to today's oversight topic, the
23 committee is also going to be considering six pieces
24 of legislation which aim to improve areas where low
25 income and homeless families contact the City system,

1 including public assistance applications and rental
2 subsidy vouchers. Proposed Intro. 855A which is
3 sponsored by Council Member Ben Kallos, and I'll ask
4 him to say a few words in a moment in relation to
5 notification of public assistance, Intro. Number 1461
6 sponsored by myself in relation to requiring the
7 Department of Social Services to provide customer
8 service training twice per year to all employees that
9 interact with members of the public. Intro. 1577
10 sponsored by myself as well in relation to
11 establishing an Office of Case Management. Intro.
12 1597, also sponsored by myself in relation to
13 requiring that Department of Homeless Services
14 recognize time spent in foster care as homelessness
15 for the purposes of meeting rental voucher
16 eligibility requirements, and Intro.-- excuse me, two
17 more. Intro. 1635 sponsored by Council Member
18 Johnson in relation to HRA job centers, and Intro.
19 1642 also sponsored by myself in relation to
20 extending the rental assistance vouchers that are
21 time limited into a permanent application. I'm very
22 gratified to be conducting this hearing today. Since
23 last September, I have been working with a
24 constituent and her daughter who have been going
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1 through the family homelessness process, from losing
2 her home to sleeping in her car, to going to PATH, to
3 going to temporary shelter in a hotel, to going into
4 a DHS run family shelter, to waiting for a rental
5 assistance voucher for three months while in shelter,
6 to finally receiving a rental assistance voucher,
7 only to find out exactly how difficult it is to find
8 an apartment for the level that the voucher affords.
9 Today, nine and a half months after first beginning
10 to work with her and after a significant amount of
11 time with me as Chair of this committee, personally
12 working with her, calling DHS and HRA on her behalf,
13 she remains in shelter, hopefully, a little closer
14 today than she was yesterday to finding a permanent
15 apartment. The thought occurs to me and it should
16 occur to everybody here listening, what about the
17 12,405 other families who don't know the Chair of the
18 City Council's General Welfare Committee? How
19 difficult must it be for them? At this hearing we
20 will examine the family homelessness system from soup
21 to nuts. We at this committee want to know what the
22 system looks like from the client's perspective.
23 What are the stresses that families go through? What
24 is their experience trying to keep their children in
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1
2 their schools when there's an over 40 percent chance
3 that they will not even be placed in the same
4 borough? What are the difficulties holding down a
5 job when you're in shelter? Are shelter staff
6 helpful when you are in need? Our clients'
7 experiences similar across the board, or are they
8 markedly different depending on where you are placed,
9 whether you're placed in a hotel, in a Tier II, who
10 runs the Tier II, a DHS facility, cluster site? What
11 are the obstacles in obtaining a voucher? Once you
12 obtain a voucher, how long does it take to find an
13 apartment? Does DHS or the provider agency assist
14 you in finding the apartment, or are you on your own?
15 These are some of the questions that we have, and
16 while we are eager to hear from DHS and HRA, we are
17 more eager to hear from clients who are going through
18 it or who have gone through it? We'll also be
19 looking at the subsidy framework developed by the de
20 Blasio Administration, LINC and CityFEPS, now that
21 they have been in existence for some time. With over
22 58,000 people including over 22,000 children still in
23 shelter and the average length of stay in shelter
24 still at 430 days, the question begs are these
25 programs working? If the Administration believes

1 they are, we would like to know why. If not, we want
2 to know why and how and what can be done to make them
3 better? Is it because of source of income
4 discrimination? Is it because the vouchers are time
5 limited? Is it because the vouchers themselves
6 require a maximum rent capped at a level
7 significantly below the market rent in most
8 neighborhoods throughout the City? Perhaps it is all
9 the above, maybe more. This past week I asked my
10 staff to go on Craigslist and try to find an
11 apartment for the price that the subsidy allows in 10
12 randomly selected neighborhoods, two in each borough,
13 throughout the City. I asked them to look at these
14 same neighborhoods then at the subsidy value plus an
15 additional 350 dollars. They looked for a one-
16 bedroom apartment with a LINC subsidy for a level of
17 a family two, which would be a mother and a child in
18 a one-bedroom apartment, and I asked them also to
19 look for a two-bedroom apartment with a CityFEPS
20 subsidy for a family of three, a mother with two
21 children in a two-bedroom apartment. The results
22 were dismaying, but they were also instructive. What
23 we found is that while most neighborhoods were
24 entirely out of range for the subsidy level, if we
25

1 added an additional 350 dollars to the existing
2 subsidy level, the number of apartments available
3 opens up significantly. This isn't a scientific
4 survey. This is just my staff going on Craigslist,
5 but what we found, and I'll share it with you, in
6 Rossville for the LINC voucher for one-bedroom/two
7 people we found one apartment. And that number
8 didn't increase when we added 350 dollars. For the
9 CityFEPS level we found no apartments available, and
10 that level increased to one apartment available plus
11 350 dollars. In Borough Park we found no apartments
12 available for LINC, and no apartments available for
13 LINC plus 350 dollars. We found no apartments
14 available for CityFEPS, and four apartments available
15 when you add 350 dollars to the CityFEPS level. In
16 New Lots, they found two apartments available at the
17 LINC level and still two apartments available when
18 you add 350 dollars. By the way, the LINC level was
19 for a one-bedroom would be \$1,028. If you add 350
20 dollars it's \$1,378, the CityFEPS two-bedroom for
21 three people, \$1,515. If you add 350 dollars that's
22 \$1,865. So for CityFEPS that numbers goes from one
23 apartment available at the CityFEPS level, but if you
24 add 350 dollars, the number increases to five
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2 apartments available. In Park Chester, the numbers
3 at the LINC level, two apartments available, that
4 number increases to four, so it doubles when you add
5 350 dollars, and at the CityFEPS level for a two-
6 bedroom for three people, no apartments available.
7 If you add 350 dollars, two apartments become
8 available. I won't go through all of these, but at
9 the end when you add up these 10 randomly selected
10 neighborhoods, for the LINC level at 10-- \$1,028, two
11 people one-bedroom, there's seven apartments
12 available across 10 neighborhoods on Craigslist. If
13 you add 350 dollars to the LINC level, it becomes 22
14 apartments available. Not great, but triple the
15 number from seven. From-- at the CityFEPS which is
16 1,515, that's three people for a two-bedroom
17 apartment, there are six apartments available in
18 those 10 neighborhoods on Craigslist. If you add 350
19 dollars, 27 apartments are available. So, what does
20 that show us? That shows us that the value of the
21 vouchers are not cutting it in most neighborhoods in
22 New York City. We must also keep in mind that the
23 rent cap associated with LINC and CityFEPS apply to
24 the rent, not just the subsidy. So, if a family has
25 a little more income that they can spend on the rent,

1 they can't simply add it to the subsidy to make the
2 rent if it's just a little bit higher, like 350
3 dollars. Perhaps there is good reason for this, and
4 if there is, we would like to hear it articulated and
5 discussed, but it does in fact preclude us from
6 placing families in most of the neighborhoods in New
7 York City, and that is not acceptable, nor is it
8 sustainable if we want to change the trajectory of
9 homelessness in New York City. We expect to have a
10 hearing in the fall about what HPD is doing to
11 address homelessness in New York City, but the fact
12 is that we cannot build our way out of it. We need
13 to give homeless families with a LINC or a CityFEPS
14 voucher a fighting chance to get an apartment in our
15 existing housing stock in the neighborhoods that they
16 want to live in, and if it costs more money or
17 requires us to rethink how we approach this issue,
18 then let's do it.

19 [applause]

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [inaudible] So,
21 before we begin today, I'd also like to thank my
22 staff of the General Welfare Committee on Andrea
23 Vasquez [sp?] and Senior Counsel Tanya Cyrus, Senior
24 Policy Analyst Dohini Sompura [sp?], Unit Head,
25

1 Nameera Nuzhat, Finance Analyst, Stacy Ward [sp?],
2 Legal Fellow for putting this hearing together. I'd
3 also like to thank my Chief of Staff Jonathan Bouche
4 [sp?], and Budget Director Edward Paulino for helping
5 to prepare this hearing, and I'll turn it over to my
6 colleague Ben Kallos here to speak on his
7 legislation.
8

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, Chair
10 Levin and Committee Members Grodenchik and Palma for
11 being a part of this, and of course, Commissioner
12 Banks for your partnership, and Steve, thank you for
13 being a leader on this and being a strong partner.
14 Approximately one in six Americans do not have enough
15 money for food or other essential needs. Almost as
16 troubling here in New York City and across the
17 country, public assistance programs are substantially
18 under enrolled. Residents eligible for assistance
19 are not participating in these programs, some out of
20 pride or the stigma associated with welfare. Many
21 others either because they are unaware these programs
22 exist, they don't know how to apply, or they don't
23 know how to navigate the bureaucracy and paperwork
24 required to receive assistance. I'll omit the
25 obscenity, but as Senator Gillibrand said at a

1 conference and spoke at a personal democracy forum
2 about the role of government, "If we're not helping
3 people we should go the bleep home." Fortunately,
4 helping Americans in need can be as simple as using
5 the tax information government already has to provide
6 assistance to lift them out of poverty. While a
7 fully integrated and interoperable public assistance
8 system between federal, state and municipal
9 government that provides seamless, opt-out
10 registration into all qualifying public assistance
11 programs based on income and other information the
12 government already has is the ultimate goal. These
13 are still big steps and we as a city can still take
14 some small steps even without federal or state
15 cooperation. Introduction 855A automatic benefits,
16 as I've been calling it, is the first step towards
17 re-imagining how government thinks about and
18 administers public assistance programs. It provides
19 automatic notices to recipients and applicants of one
20 public assistance program one they are likely to
21 qualify for additional programs along with the copy
22 of the other applications and instructions; automatic
23 pre-filled applications and renewals using
24 information from previous applications to pre-fill
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1 other program applications for which they are likely
2 to qualify; assistance completing application over
3 the phone through 311, online or even in person; and
4 then annual goals and planning by Department of
5 Social Services to enroll all individuals eligible
6 for public assistance with reporting on the number of
7 individuals enrolled, offered assistance with
8 breakdowns by program type. Through this legislation
9 New York City can create a "no wrong door" approach
10 and provide a seamless experience of residents so
11 they receive increasing amounts of government service
12 through minimal interaction with government
13 bureaucracy. About half year ago I had the privilege
14 of working with Gov Lab Robin Hood Foundation's
15 Stewards of Change to collaborate on a memo. At the
16 time we couldn't tell anyone who it was for, but at
17 this point with the change in Administration, it was
18 actually working with the Whitehouse laying out that
19 the framework for this had already been laid out and
20 that states can take advantage of existing funding to
21 build these systems. In 2015, software giant Intuit
22 launched Benefit Assist, offering 30 million
23 Americans who file taxes with TurboTax an opportunity
24 to determine if they are eligible for government
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1 benefits such as SNAP. 2016 Benefit Assist was
2 expanded to include Federal Communications
3 Commission's Life Line program which offers discounts
4 on service, and once upon a time it was going to
5 offer discounts on broadband services. I believe in
6 universal broadband. This Administration, the
7 federal level, does not. Amazingly, though, Intuit
8 actually released the source code for this so any
9 government can use it, adapt it, and get residents
10 the assistance they qualify for as free and open
11 source software that anyone can use. I want to thank
12 almost a dozen folks who are in the audience today
13 and groups that are here to testify. If you haven't
14 already, there are these witness slips that the
15 counsel will just hold for a moment, and you can get
16 that from the Sergeant at Arms. Please make sure to
17 complete it. I also want to thank former Comptroller
18 Liz Holtzman, 1199 SEIU, Jacob Solomon from Code for
19 America, Daniel Beeby from Benefits Kitchen, and
20 others who are submitting testimony electronically.
21 And again, I want to thank the Chair for his
22 determination to hear this bill after the initial
23 postponement which was very good reason, and
24 congratulations on the birth of his child and for
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1 taking paternity leave, which more men should be
2 doing, and I'm glad that we're able to get it onto
3 today's calendar. I want to thank the advocates who
4 are here to testify and who have been fighting for
5 this for much longer than I've been in office, and of
6 course, Commissioner Banks for his great work and his
7 openness to new ideas and his support for what we're
8 trying to achieve here. Look forward to today's
9 hearing and getting this done as quickly as possible.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
12 Council Member Kallos. Council Member Johnson also
13 wants to speak on the legislation that he's hearing
14 today. Thank you, Chair Levin. For New Yorkers who
15 rely on our City's safety net of social programs to
16 keep a roof over their head and food on their table,
17 the path to stability and self-reliance is typically
18 full of pitfalls. Every appointment or slip of paper
19 can mean the difference between getting the help one
20 needs and falling through the cracks. We must take
21 every step possible to ensure that our social safety
22 net doesn't fail those who depend on it. New Yorkers
23 navigating the social safety net system are asked to
24 remember who they meet with, when and where they meet
25 with them, that staff person's contact information,

1 what documents they produced, and so on. This can
2 certainly present a barrier to keeping people
3 connected to city services. My bill would
4 consolidate all that information that a person needs
5 from their visit onto one receipt, putting everything
6 they need into one easy-to-find location. We also
7 need to make sure that those seeking services are
8 listened to if they feel their needs aren't being
9 met. If a person who needs assistance knows his or
10 her frustrations are being heard, they're less likely
11 to leave without receiving the help they need.
12 They're more likely to stay connected to services,
13 openly informing them with clear signage of their
14 ability to give feedback on the progress and
15 adequately tracking those complaints will help our
16 city do an even better job, and it's also the right
17 thing to do. I'd like to thank my friend, General
18 Welfare Chair Steve Levin for hearing this bill, my
19 colleagues who already lent their support to this
20 legislation, and those working every day to help
21 their fellow New Yorkers get back on their feet.
22 Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good to see you,
23 Commissioner.
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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
3 Council Member Johnson. Before I ask the
4 Commissioner to speak, I also just want to
5 acknowledge my interns who help put together this
6 spreadsheet from Craigslist, so I want to acknowledge
7 Michael Brittanham [sp?], Cameran Crain [sp?], and
8 Adele Clemmons [sp?] for their work on it.

9 Commissioner, I'll swear you in. Do you affirm to
10 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
11 truth in your testimony before this committee and to
12 respond honestly to Council Members' questions?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I do.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.
15 You may begin.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Good morning
17 Chairman Levin. Now we're in the afternoon. Good
18 afternoon Chairman Levin and members of the
19 Committee. Thank you for inviting us to appear
20 before you today to discuss the services and the
21 reforms we have implemented to improve the transition
22 from PATH back to housing in the community. I want
23 to say at the outset that this is the fourth month of
24 hearings around homeless issues, and I want to
25 acknowledge the leadership of the Committee Chair on

1 this issue. It's been a very thorough series of
2 hearings about different issues relating to
3 homelessness, and today's hearing, I think, is in
4 that same tradition. I view this as an opportunity
5 to provide information to the committee, and we've
6 certainly listened to the testimony and information
7 provided by clients. As you know, we take very
8 seriously feedback from clients, and during the 90-
9 day review conducted a number of focus groups
10 directly with clients. So, we appreciate the Chairs
11 conducting this hearing when this kind of information
12 can be received for us. My name is Steven Banks. I'm
13 the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services
14 which oversees Human Resources Administration and the
15 Department of Homeless Services. Recognizing the
16 growing challenges of homelessness faced by many New
17 York City families, over the past three years, the
18 Administration has implemented and expanded
19 initiatives in order to prevent and alleviate
20 homelessness, including reinstating rental assistance
21 programs and other permanent housing initiatives that
22 have enabled 62,158 individuals in 22,686 households
23 to avert entry into or move out of shelter, through
24 last month. In this testimony, I want to provide the
25

1 context in which our reforms are being implemented. I
2 want to address the topic of the hearing with respect
3 to moving from PATH to back to the community, and
4 then address each of the six bills. I know you have
5 a full calendar, but it's a full presentation that we
6 want to make to have the full information for the
7 record, and making determinations about the
8 legislation. The Administration has made
9 unprecedented investments to address homelessness and
10 the economic insecurity felt by many low-income New
11 Yorkers, many of whom rely upon HRA and DHS benefits,
12 programs, and services. As we testified previously
13 before the Committee, the current shelter census
14 level this weekend of 58,227 did not occur over
15 night. Since the 1980s, the face of homelessness has
16 substantially shifted from the largely single male
17 population struggling with justice system
18 involvement, mental health challenges, substance use
19 disorders and inconsistent employment to what we see
20 today. Seventy percent of those in shelter are
21 families, and 34 percent of the families with
22 children in shelter have a working adult. Since the
23 1980s, homelessness has increased exponentially.
24 There are many factors that contributed to what has
25

1
2 been a 115 percent increase in New York City's
3 homeless shelter population between 1994 to 2014, and
4 the steady upward trajectory of the past 35 years:
5 Stagnant wages resulting in an increasing gap between
6 wages and rent; between 2005 and 2015, the median New
7 York City household income increased by just 4.8
8 percent in real dollars, while the median rent
9 increased by 18.3 percent in real dollars. Systemic
10 reductions to multiple anti-poverty tools such as
11 cash assistance, food stamps and Medicaid; the
12 prevalence of clients experiencing domestic violence;
13 insufficient support and resources to address
14 barriers to housing facing New Yorkers with mental
15 health and substance use disorders, including long
16 periods of institutionalization or incarceration; and
17 the loss of over 150,000 affordable or rent
18 stabilized units. However, one factor led to a
19 particularly stark increase in the City's homeless
20 census and affordability crisis, the abrupt end of
21 City and State rental assistance provided through the
22 Advantage program, which had offered subsidies for
23 people in shelters if they took part in job training.
24 Between April 2011, when the Advantage program ended
25 and 2014 when this Administration reinstated rental

1 assistance and rehousing programs, the DHS shelter
2 census grew by an extraordinary 38 percent, some
3 14,000 people. The homelessness problem we face
4 today is the result of decades of changes in our
5 economy and past choices made here in New York City,
6 Albany, and Washington. Our efforts to date have
7 stabilized the number of people in our shelters,
8 which, without our initiatives, would have reached
9 some 70,000 people instead of the 58,227 this
10 weekend. Since coming into office, Mayor de Blasio
11 has restored the City's rental assistance programs
12 and directed unprecedented resources toward a new
13 comprehensive holistic approach to fighting
14 homelessness focused on prevention, street homeless
15 outreach, expanded transitional housing options,
16 averted shelter entry, improved shelter conditions,
17 expanded civil legal services, and more robust
18 rehousing and aftercare services. The City's
19 prevention first strategy includes an array of tools,
20 recognizing that the path to homelessness is not
21 linear and therefore our approach cannot be one that
22 is one-size-fits-all. Every individual in our
23 shelter census is just that, an individual, and their
24 path towards self-sufficiency must address their
25

1 individual needs. Since 2014 we have enhanced our
2 homeless services and assistance, including these
3 initiatives: Stepped in to immediately fill the gap
4 left by the cancellation of the Advantage program by
5 creating three new rental assistance programs and
6 reinstating rehousing programs, implementing the
7 Living in Communities, City Family Eviction
8 Prevention Supplement/Family Exit Plan Supplement,
9 and the Special Exit and Prevention Supplement rental
10 assistance programs, restoring Section 8 and New York
11 City Housing Authority priorities which have helped
12 51,500 people from the summer of 2015 through
13 December 2016, most of them homeless, secure
14 permanent housing, and an additional 8,860 so far in
15 2017, for a total of 62,158 men, women and children
16 who have been helped through this commitment of
17 permanent housing resources; Provided emergency
18 rental assistance to 161,000 households, helping
19 rent-burdened New Yorkers at risk of eviction stay in
20 their homes. That's a 25 percent increase from
21 before this Administration; launched the largest
22 municipal commitment ever to build and expand
23 supportive housing by committing to building 15,000
24 new units in 15 years, with the first more than 500
25

1 units coming online this year; aggressively expanded
2 free legal assistance for New Yorkers in danger of
3 illegal eviction by increasing funding for legal
4 services for tenants to \$62 million, a more than
5 tenfold increase. Evictions then dropped by 24
6 percent and more than 40,000 New Yorkers were able to
7 stay in their homes in 2015 and 2016; made a
8 commitment to phase in over the next five years the
9 funding necessary to provide universal access to
10 legal services for all New York City tenants facing
11 eviction in housing court; moved ahead of schedule on
12 the largest affordable housing plan ever, the City's
13 landmark Housing New York plan to build or preserve
14 200,000 units of affordable apartments of which over
15 62,000 units have been financed; committed to adding
16 10,000 affordable apartments for seniors, veterans,
17 and New Yorkers earning less than \$40,000 per
18 household; implemented 46 systematic and management
19 reforms to streamline how we address homelessness;
20 conducted almost 16,000 shelter inspections in 2016,
21 an 84 percent increase from 2015—and fixed more than
22 14,000 code violations with help from not-for-profit
23 shelter providers thanks to the work of the Shelter
24 Repair Squad, a multi-agency task force. The number
25

1 of outstanding violations within traditional shelters
2 has dropped 83 percent since January 2016; gotten out
3 of 925 cluster sites, which is 25 percent reduction
4 in the 17-year-old cluster apartment program,
5 prioritizing units with the most serious problems and
6 moved toward ending the use of cluster units
7 altogether by reducing the number of cluster units
8 from 3,658 to 2,733 today; doubled the previous
9 investment in DHS shelter security, with a total
10 annual security budget of 217 million dollars for
11 Fiscal Years 17 and 18 each; put the New York City
12 Police Department in charge of security at DHS
13 shelters, which includes standardizing and
14 professionalizing security, surveillance, staff
15 training and deployment; placed 3,153 homeless
16 veterans into permanent housing, and received
17 certification from the Federal Department of Housing
18 and Urban Development as having ended chronic
19 veterans' homelessness. Through the HRA's newly
20 formed Source of Income Discrimination Unit, taking
21 action to prevent and prosecute housing
22 discrimination based on source of income, and
23 fighting source of income discrimination, through the
24 City Commission on Human Rights filing of five
25

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2 complaints against large landlords and brokerage
3 firms that together control about 20,000 units
4 citywide. In 2015 CCHR quadrupled the number of
5 investigations into source of income discrimination
6 and in 2016 it filed more than 120 source of income
7 investigations, the highest number in its history;
8 and created the Homelessness Prevention
9 Administration housed within HRA to oversee
10 prevention programs to improve program management and
11 effectiveness. Understanding that problems with
12 shelter safety, conditions and services can serve as
13 barriers to shelter entry and exit, the City has
14 redoubled its efforts to provide safe, decent living
15 conditions and high-quality social services to every
16 family and individual living in shelter. Some of the
17 initiatives and reforms we have undertaken include:
18 Creating the shelter repair scorecard to track
19 shelter conditions each month publicly; implementing
20 an enhanced shelter repair program; increasing
21 security at all commercial hotels that house homeless
22 families with children; providing 24/7 security
23 coverage at mental health shelters in terms of
24 additional security; overhauling the reporting on
25 critical incidents; restoring a program for domestic

1 violence services at shelters that was eliminated in
2 2010; initiating the NYPD security review and
3 retraining of Department of Homeless Services Peace
4 Officers; implementing the 17-year cluster closure
5 plan as well as the use-- ending the use of
6 commercial hotel plan; addressing ADA accessibility
7 in shelters through a comprehensive litigation
8 settlement with the Legal Aid Society with a plan to
9 evaluate ADA accessibility in DHS shelter system and
10 implement a compliance plan; expanding programming,
11 including adult literacy, high school equivalency
12 program and employment services, to help clients move
13 forward on a career pathway; getting away from the
14 one-size-fits-all approach by working with providers
15 to develop shelter models in which individualized
16 shelter placements are made in accordance with the
17 client's specific needs; enhancing domestic violence
18 services in DHS shelters through expanded HRA NoVA
19 services in DHS Tier II family shelters and increased
20 training for Tier II shelter staff; Enhancing
21 services for LGBTQI clients; for example, in February
22 of this year, in partnership with Council Member
23 Ritchie Torres, we opened an 81-bed shelter in the
24 Bronx for LGBTQI young adults ages 21-30; eliminated
25

1 the requirement for school-age children to be present
2 at PATH for multiple appointments: By the end of
3 2016, this requirement was eliminated for families
4 who reapply within 30 days at PATH. A second phase
5 eliminating this requirement for families reunifying
6 with children in foster care was launched in March.
7 An evaluation of these programs will occur this
8 summer. In addition to the reforms just described,
9 our April 2017 testimony describes in detail the
10 agency's progress on the 46 reforms adopted following
11 the comprehensive 90-day review of homeless services
12 last year, including reforms aimed at prevention,
13 shelter and rehousing. I would now like to walk the
14 Committee through the client experience from initial
15 application at the Prevention Assistance and
16 Temporary Housing, PATH, intake center back to self-
17 sufficiency in the community. However, at the
18 outset, I want to highlight several considerations in
19 evaluating the current status of our programs. As we
20 testified at the April hearing regarding the status
21 of the 46 reforms we announced just over a year ago
22 after the 90-day review of homeless services, we are
23 well on our way in the implementation phase for these
24 substantial changes in the 20-year-old homeless
25

1 services system, but, of course, we are addressing
2 systemic problems that built up over many years and
3 the full impact of the reforms will not be felt
4 immediately. Moreover, it was just a few months ago
5 that we released the Turning the Tide plan to
6 completely transform the shelter system that was
7 created in a haphazard way over nearly four decades.
8 For clients, this major reform is just beginning. As
9 someone who sued the two agencies that I now run over
10 the course of four decades, I certainly understand
11 both the urgency of making change for clients and the
12 complexity of making the necessary institutional
13 reforms. Let me start with describing the Prevention
14 Assistance and Temporary Housing program. City has a
15 broader array of prevention tools than ever before,
16 including expanded rent arrears, rental assistance,
17 and legal services as well as assistance for family
18 and friends who can provide alternatives to shelter
19 in the community. We therefore encourage families
20 facing potential homelessness to seek help first at
21 one of our Homebase offices in all five boroughs. As
22 a last resort, families can seek shelter at the
23 Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing intake
24 center, which is located at 151st East-- 151 East
25

1 151st Street, in the Bronx. PATH is open 24 hours a
2 day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In City
3 Fiscal Year 2016, DHS Prevention Assistance and
4 Temporary Housing intake center staff handled nearly
5 38,000 applications from nearly 18,000 unique
6 households, numbers which have remained steady since
7 2013. Let me first cover prevention at the PATH
8 family intake process. Upon arrival, reception staff
9 members inquire about the family's reason for coming
10 to PATH. In FY17 through May, we received an average
11 of 2,982 applications per month. When new
12 applications and those families reapplying after more
13 than 30 days arrive at PATH, they are engaged by PATH
14 social workers. These social workers provide crisis
15 counseling, mediation services, and referrals to
16 community-based resources as an alternative to
17 shelter. For those families with housing options
18 still available in the community, PATH social workers
19 collaborate with HRA Homeless Diversion caseworkers
20 on site and Homebase offices throughout the five
21 boroughs to put services in place to help families
22 retain or secure independent housing without having
23 to enter shelter. All families reapplying for
24 services following a break in shelter services of
25

1 less than 30 days, except those who have experienced
2 domestic violence, are referred to meet with an HRA
3 Homeless Diversion Unit caseworker to further explore
4 ways to avoid shelter entry through family mediation,
5 legal services, HRA emergency grants, and rental
6 assistance. In addition to HRA's Homelessness
7 Diversion Unit, co-located at PATH is HRA NoVA,
8 Department of Education family assistance liaisons,
9 Administration for Children's Services liaisons and a
10 contracted medical provider, The Floating Hospital.
11 Many of the families who arrive at PATH have existing
12 medical and behavioral health care providers and thus
13 not all families are referred to the on-site medical
14 provider for comprehensive assessments. However, at
15 PATH, families are referred to the Floating Hospital
16 if a member of the family is pregnant, the family
17 includes an infant under four months of age, or if
18 any member of the family has any hospitalizations in
19 the past month, any acute medical needs, or the
20 presence of a communicable diseases. In addition,
21 families self-reporting or observed to be facing
22 mental health or substance use challenges are
23 referred to DHS social workers for further
24 assessment. At PATH intake, ACS staff stationed at
25

1 PATH conducts a nightly clearance of all families
2 with children who present at PATH to apply for
3 temporary emergency shelter; matches are then
4 provided to DHS identifying families with open ACS
5 cases. DHS staff members also learn of ACS
6 involvement through the standardized intake
7 interview, where a family has the opportunity to
8 self-disclose this information. When PATH staff
9 members learn of a family's ACS involvement through
10 these means, they will contact ACS staff on-site at
11 PATH or the ACS staff assigned to the family to
12 inquire further regarding the family's housing needs.
13 Additionally, shelter staff has access to information
14 fields in the DHS CARES system that identifies a
15 family's ACS involvement. Direct communication with
16 DOE also occurs once a family is assigned to a
17 shelter by way of an automatic feed. The DOE family
18 liaisons as well as the 117 DOE liaisons in shelters
19 assist in working with families to meet the
20 educational needs of children in shelter. If
21 families have no alternative housing options
22 immediately available such that they would qualify
23 for homeless prevention services, they are
24 interviewed by a DHS family worker who obtains the
25

1 family's two-year housing history, which serves as
2 the basis for determining shelter eligibility.

3
4 During the interview process, families may be
5 assigned a conditional shelter placement while DHS
6 investigates and assesses the family's individualized
7 needs. Conditional placements last for 10 days on
8 average. During this time, field specialists visit
9 the homes of family and friends with whom the family
10 previously resided to verify information provided
11 during the interview. During this conditional
12 placement, social service staff and social workers
13 from DHS arrange in-person meetings, whenever
14 possible, with families applying for shelter and
15 family or friends they lived with previously to
16 further pursue mediation and explain in greater
17 detail available homelessness prevention services and
18 rental assistance programs to return to the
19 community. Once the investigation is completed, an
20 eligibility determination concerning the-- is made
21 concerning the completeness of the application and
22 the availability of other housing is written,
23 reviewed, and provided to the family in the shelter
24 placement. Every household has a right to a legal
25 conference at PATH if they are found ineligible. In

1
2 addition, the family has 60 days after being found
3 ineligible to request a Fair Hearing from New York
4 State. Families determined ineligible for shelter
5 receive follow-up outreach by DHS and HRA staff to
6 direct families to services in their communities,
7 including rental assistance when appropriate. Pathway
8 to Permanency: As of June 25, 2017, DHS is sheltering
9 12,406 families with children, comprised of 16,981
10 adults and 22,117 children. DHS operates and
11 maintains over 160 shelter locations for families
12 with children throughout the five boroughs. These
13 shelters are operated by over 70 providers, most of
14 whom are non-profit social services agencies
15 contracted to provide services. Families currently
16 reside in three types of shelter: Family Tier IIs,
17 Family Hotels, or Family Clusters, individual
18 apartments-- which are individual apartments rented
19 as shelter through the 17-year-old program that began
20 during the Giuliani Administration. Additionally, in
21 order to meet our legal and moral obligation of
22 shelter, we also house families in commercial hotels,
23 a practice that dates back to the Lindsey
24 Administration. As part of the Mayor's Turning the
25 Tide Plan, we've announced that we will exit all 360

1 cluster apartments and commercial hotel facilities
2 and thus shrink the shelter footprint by 45 percent.
3 Once in shelter, DHS begins working with families to
4 develop a specific exit plan and an individualized
5 pathway toward sustainable permanency through their
6 Independent Living Plan, which involves five key
7 steps. Phase one: Upon arrival at a shelter, the
8 family is assigned a case manager in CARES, the DHS
9 system of record. The case manager meets with the
10 family to address any immediate needs and makes
11 appropriate referrals. Case managers also review the
12 documentation given to the client during the initial
13 intake process and explain next steps for eligible
14 and ineligible families. During this time,
15 discussions with clients also focus on the needs of
16 children within the household, including school
17 enrollment. The case manager refers the client to
18 the Department of Education liaison or the DOE
19 Students in Temporary Housing borough contact. While
20 DHS makes every effort to place families in shelter
21 locations that correspond to the youngest school-aged
22 child's school address, due to constraints in shelter
23 capacity this is not always possible. Within the
24 PMMR, we reported that during the first four months
25

1 of FY17, there was a decline in the percentage of
2 families with children who were placed in shelter
3 according to the youngest school-aged child's school
4 address. However, as we continue to implement our
5 new borough-based shelter approach to provide
6 shelters to enable families to be placed closer to
7 the anchors of daily life, such as schools, jobs,
8 health care, and houses of worship, we will be able
9 to create the capacity necessary to address this
10 need. Additionally, referrals are made to the NYC
11 Department of Consumer Affairs and the Office of
12 Financial Empowerment to enable clients to review
13 their credit report, recognizing that a poor credit
14 score or low financial literacy will present
15 obstacles to self-sufficiency. Further referrals are
16 made to appropriate housing readiness services,
17 including, but not limited to, tenancy and housing
18 preparatory workshops. Phase two: Initial housing
19 assessment and exit plan development. Immediately
20 following a shelter eligibility determination, a
21 CARES assessment is conducted and the shelter Case
22 Manager and Housing Specialist work with the family
23 to develop a sustainable, individualized exit
24 strategy. During this process a comprehensive
25

1
2 assessment of the family's current level of housing
3 readiness as well as an individualized and special
4 needs assessment is conducted and applications for
5 public assistance are submitted. During these
6 critical days, the family gathers housing documents
7 and other information such as social security cards
8 and birth certificates as set out in the Independent
9 Living Plan. This time is also used to work with the
10 family to explore the available housing options,
11 including reuniting clients with family and friends
12 in the community. This initial phase is also used to
13 assist the family with completing and submitting
14 housing applications, introducing them to aftercare
15 services, and monitoring their case for public
16 assistance compliance. Phase three: Exit plan
17 initiation. In this step, the client and the
18 household members are linked to available and
19 appropriate resources such as employment and job
20 training opportunities, financial savings, continuing
21 and/or higher education, as well as health and mental
22 health services, as applicable. This time is also
23 used to prepare the client for apartment viewings and
24 interviews. Staff works with clients on approaches
25 to interviewing for private market rental units.

1 Clients are provided information such as how to
2 approach an apartment viewing, including attire and
3 etiquette, so that the client is prepared at the
4 apartment viewing and interview. If necessary,
5 clients are referred to programs such as Dress for
6 Success and the Men's Warehouse Gives Back to the
7 Community Initiatives. Throughout this step of the
8 process, clients are also connected to child care
9 services. Throughout this phase clients participate
10 in monthly housing meetings with staff to review and
11 discuss available housing resources and options as
12 case managers monitor the family's case for public
13 assistance compliance and financial savings, and
14 follow-up with referrals for each client as needed.
15 Phase four, housing search: Clients meet with staff
16 on a bi-weekly basis to review and discuss the
17 Apartment Review Checklist, as well as to assess the
18 client's overall progress with the housing search.
19 Those clients who have been in shelter nine months or
20 longer or have ACS involvement meet with staff on a
21 weekly basis. These efforts are documented in the
22 CARES narratives case notes. At each ILP meeting--
23 that's Independent Living Plan meeting-- case
24 managers review and update the exit plans with input
25

1 from Housing Specialists. If there is a change in
2 the family's status, such as loss of employment or an
3 addition to or removal from a family's household
4 composition, the Independent Living Plan and housing
5 plan are immediately modified. When this happens the
6 client is also re-budgeted at HRA. During the
7 Housing Search, the client may be escorted to the
8 apartment viewing by the Housing Specialist. If the
9 Housing Specialist is unable to accompany the client,
10 the client is provided with a referral to the viewing
11 with all pertinent information, including location
12 and address, date, and time, and phone number of a
13 contact person, written directions by public
14 transportation or car, and given a MetroCard for
15 travel to and from the location. If a client is non-
16 compliant with two or more apartment viewings, the
17 case manager meets with the family to reemphasize
18 best practices associated with apartment searching
19 and address other barriers that could result in a
20 prolonged shelter stay. If a client continues to be
21 non-compliant, a conference with the Program Director
22 and Program Administrator and Client Responsibility
23 Proceedings are scheduled. The average length of
24 stay for families in shelter has declined by six
25

1 percent from 435 days in the first four months of
2 fiscal 2016 compared to 408 days in the first-- in
3 the 2017 period reported in the Preliminary Mayor's
4 Management Report. The housing search for families
5 in DHS is affected by the many factors that lead them
6 to shelter in the first place. For example, as we
7 detailed in the Turning the Tide plan, data from the
8 Rent Guidelines Board reveals that between 1994 and
9 2012 almost 250,000 apartments lost the protections
10 of rent regulation. While some units have been added
11 as a condition of tax incentives and other subsidies
12 that building owners received, there has been a
13 significant net loss of rent-regulated units. Indeed,
14 over those 18 years, the city suffered a net loss, as
15 I said earlier, of 150,000 rent-stabilized units, or
16 16 percent of the total rent-regulated stock.

17 Further in 2015, there were about one million
18 Extremely Low Income and Very Low Income households,
19 defined as households earning less than 50 percent of
20 the Area Median Income for New York City, but there
21 are only a little more than 500,000 rental units
22 affordable to those households. In other words, the
23 City has only half the housing it needs for about
24 three million low-income New Yorkers. New Yorkers
25

1 who can only afford apartments at this rent level
2 thus have few places to turn. While the city's
3 overall rental vacancy rate of 3.5 percent poses
4 problems for people of all incomes, renters only able
5 to afford an apartment costing 800 dollars or less,
6 for example, in the Public Assistant Shelter
7 Allowance must search in a market with a vacancy rate
8 of just 1.8 percent. In 2016, a family of three with
9 a household income of \$24,500, equivalent to 30
10 percent of the Income Limit for the U.S. Department
11 of Housing and Urban Development for 2016 could
12 afford to pay approximately 613 dollars per month in
13 rent and utilities, a figure well under half of the
14 City's 2015 median gross rent of \$1,317. For 2014,
15 more than half of all rental households in New York
16 City were rent-burdened and three out of every 10 of
17 the City's renters were severely rent-burdened, which
18 are households that pay more than 50 percent of their
19 income on rent. Recognizing this, DHS has stepped up
20 its efforts to rehouse families back in the community
21 as quickly as possible. By adding more robust
22 prevention services, housing specialists at every
23 contracted shelter, and additional housing staff at
24 both DHS and HRA we continue to address the issue of
25

1
2 rehousing clients in communities. Phase Five,
3 appropriate apartment identified: When a viable unit
4 in the community is identified, clients are assisted
5 with packing and completing the Transport Request
6 Form, introduced to the Homebase program in the
7 community in which they will be living, the leasing
8 document and other relevant documents are reviewed,
9 and the broker or landlord is contacted to confirm
10 the apartment has been secured, and the housing
11 packet is sent out by the DHS Office of Client
12 Resources. Within seven days of the family
13 identifying the unit, the case worker submits
14 transportation and emergency furniture requests to
15 the Office of Client Resources as needed, and
16 accompanies the family to the lease signing. Phase
17 six, move out: Each week, DHS and contracted shelter
18 provider staff locate and secure apartments for
19 clients to move into. After the lease is signed, the
20 expectation is families move out of the shelter and
21 into their apartment within 48 hours. Shelter staff
22 works to ensure that the family is packed and ready
23 to move out on the scheduled day and time and is
24 present with the family throughout the process. Once
25 the family has exited shelter, the family's case file

1 is updated with the client's new information and home
2 address. However, as described with respect to
3 aftercare below, the agency's interaction with the
4 client does not end there. Investments to enhance
5 services for clients-- for families in shelter: The
6 Adopted FY18 budget includes key investments in order
7 for HRA and DHS to continue to address homelessness
8 prevention, shelter, and rehousing needs. The FY18
9 Adopted Budget includes a 3.7 million dollar addition
10 to fund 61 positions for adult family and families
11 with children intake operations, 20 Head Count Adult
12 Family Intake Center Coordinators, 12 Head Count PATH
13 Social Workers, 19 Head Count PATH intake, and 10
14 Head Count PATH Childcare Workers. Further, within
15 HRA's Homelessness Prevention Administration Unit,
16 the Executive budget adds 17 positions to support
17 rehousing and placements out of shelter, complemented
18 by 13 additional positions in DHS. This investment
19 provides more support to supplement ongoing
20 initiatives to move individuals and families from
21 shelter to permanent housing. Previously in April
22 2016 following the 90-day review, DHS announced that
23 it would rationalize payment rates for shelter
24 providers, to ensure that all contracted shelter
25

1 programs can provide consistent and high quality
2 levels of service and are able to maintain their
3 facilities in accordance with City and State
4 standards for operations, including caseload ratios,
5 resources for special needs and facilitation of
6 housing placement, real-time maintenance and repairs,
7 and funding for health and safety needs, including
8 security and support. To effectuate this rate reform
9 and shelter services enhancements, the FY17 and FY18
10 adopted budgets project \$146 million for model
11 budgets for shelter providers, but the model really
12 includes more than just \$146 million. The rate
13 reform includes a series of new initiatives that must
14 be viewed holistically and that together form the
15 model budget. This includes Thrive, \$34 million for
16 social workers, FY16 and FY17 COLAs, a total of \$11
17 million, and the FY18 provider wage adjustment, \$5.7
18 million in FY18 growing to \$10.7 million in FY19,
19 although this is inclusive of non-shelter providers
20 as well. The January 17 Plan added Adult shelter
21 enhancements of nine million dollars for not-for-
22 profit providers; \$17 million was added for security
23 at mental health shelters in the January 17 and
24 Executive 17 Plans; and five million is provided
25

1
2 annually for one-time shelter maintenance and repair
3 costs that are not capitally eligible. Taken
4 together, these investments for not-for-profit
5 shelters total over \$200 million when fully
6 annualized. Moreover, we expect some benefit from
7 the settlement released in April in the Legal Aid
8 Society's litigation against the State concerning the
9 public assistance program known as the Family
10 Eviction Prevention Supplement that provides a
11 monthly rental subsidies to low-income families with
12 children in New York City. As part of the
13 settlement, the State is approving a new rental
14 assistance plan that we submitted for this program.
15 Under the settlement, a family of three currently
16 eligible for 850 dollars per month in rental
17 assistance through the State-approved program, for
18 example, will be eligible for \$1,515, representing a
19 78 percent increase. Another important outcome of
20 this settlement is that now each year 1,000 survivors
21 of domestic violence, who previously were ineligible
22 for this subsidy, are eligible as part of the new
23 plan that we submitted to the State. Social Workers
24 in shelter: In 2015, the Mayor and the First Lady
25 announced a historic plan called ThriveNYC to guide

1 the city towards a more effective and holistic system
2 to support the mental health well-being of New
3 Yorkers. Recognizing the diverse needs of our
4 clients, as well as the fact that being placed in
5 shelter can distance families from their support
6 networks such as family, friends, neighbors, houses
7 of worship and daily routines, thereby increasing
8 stress, we are onboarding social workers at each
9 contracted shelter to serve as Client Care
10 Coordinators. There are over 100 Social Workers have
11 been hired so far for our not-for-profit providers.
12 These Client Care Coordinators are Licensed Master
13 Social Workers placed in shelter to work with
14 families as they navigate multi-systems and cope with
15 the stressors and anxiety associated with
16 homelessness. Through the use of the Client Care
17 Coordinators, DHS seeks to: enhance the delivery and
18 coordination of services to families with children in
19 shelter; promote and model best practices for shelter
20 social service provider staff; improve linkages to
21 mental health and community-based services; increase
22 the ability of shelter social services staff to
23 address mental health issues in a culturally and
24 linguistically sensitive manner that incorporates
25

1 strength-based, family-driven and youth/child-guided
2 care; strengthen overall permanency outcomes for
3 families with children in shelter. Aftercare:
4 Currently, seven different not-for-profit agencies
5 run Homebase programs citywide to provide aftercare
6 services to families once they've been relocated from
7 shelter. Homebase has been dramatically expanded by
8 the de Blasio Administration, increasing the number
9 of HomeBase locations from 14 in Fiscal Year 2015 to
10 24 today and doubling the program's funding. A total
11 of nearly \$59 million annually starting in FY18 will
12 support an enhanced HomeBase program that will
13 provide coordinated preventive, aftercare, and
14 community support services, including benefits
15 advocacy, budgeting, employment, short-term financial
16 assistance, and help with housing relocation. The
17 new program includes the baseline funding for
18 prevention programs previously at DHS totaling \$39.2
19 million as well as \$18.2 million in HRA that was
20 added to the budget with the advent of the new rental
21 assistance programs and as part of the 90-day review.
22 Between July 2016 and May 31st, 2017, 25,492
23 Households consisting of 70,707 Individuals were
24 served by Homebase, citywide. Over 90 percent of
25

1 these households remain in the community and do not
2 enter shelter within one year of services. Homebase
3 programs craft housing-focused individualized service
4 plans that can contain the following core services:
5 eviction prevention, tenant/landlord services
6 mediation, assistance with the relocation, employment
7 training, social services referrals, flexible short-
8 term financial assistance, rental assistance
9 screening, and application. HRA is currently
10 completing a new RFP process for Homebase non-profit
11 providers that added aftercare supports to households
12 leaving shelter and five new service areas for the
13 Homebase network. These new awards will be announced
14 this summer and the additional services including
15 aftercare services will begin in September.
16 HomeBase's aftercare services are available to all
17 households leaving shelter through a rental
18 assistance program, as early as possible in their
19 tenancy, followed by a thorough assessment, the
20 development of an individualized service plan, and
21 intensive services for the most at-risk households.
22 Services include long-term support as well as
23 engagement with households in the midst of short-term
24 housing crises. HRA workers are also onsite at
25

1 HomeBase to assist with the tenants' public benefits
2 issues and emergency rent arrears grant applications.
3 HomeBase also offers regular workshops, inviting at-
4 risk community members, including former shelter
5 residents, and providing information on affordable
6 housing, subsidies, employment, work supports, and
7 financial empowerment. Many people do not reach out
8 for help before they lose their homes—in part because
9 they never knew help was available. That is why the
10 Administration has deployed a multifaceted outreach
11 strategy to reach the individuals and families most
12 at risk of losing their homes. Posters on subways
13 and buses, supplemented with printed brochures, are
14 accompanied by social media marketing as well as
15 television and radio spots. These campaigns also
16 focus on local houses of worship, community events,
17 schools, and elected officials, who can help make
18 important connections between prevention services in
19 their communities and the people who need them, and
20 we're happy to give you posters and flyers. Homebase
21 staff also conducts outreach by going directly into
22 the city's neighborhoods to engage people in public
23 spaces, outside supermarkets, check cashing
24 businesses, and nail salons, or at other buildings
25

1 with many eviction notices. They attend community
2 events, speak at places of worship, and build close
3 referral relationships with neighborhood schools.
4 Together, Homebase's efforts are a powerful component
5 of the City's strategy to reduce the number of
6 families and individuals in shelters. For example,
7 earlier this month, I joined Brooklyn Borough
8 President Eric Adams at New Bridges Elementary School
9 in Brooklyn in an effort to reach families that come
10 from zip codes that have high rates of shelter entry
11 to let them know about the services available for
12 them so they can continue to live in the community
13 and avert shelter entries. We know that every year
14 when the last school bell rings in June families who
15 are holding on in unstable housing to ensure
16 continuity in their children's education have
17 difficulty continuing to stay in precarious
18 situations. We want families to know before they
19 seek shelter that resources to remain in the
20 community are available to them. Available resources
21 include legal services to address wrongful evictions
22 and unlawful actions by landlords, rent arrears
23 payments to stave off an eviction case, or rent
24 payments for family and friends who are making rooms
25

1 available in their homes as the New York Times story
2 on the outreach where the Borough President
3 described. Putting clients first: In totality, the
4 goal of this Administration and all of our reforms is
5 to remove real barriers to accessing vital City
6 services and to ensure that clients have unencumbered
7 access to these services when they need a helping
8 hand. At HRA for example, we have reengineered
9 access points for our benefits and services and
10 expanded the use of technology for online
11 transactions, and recently launched HRA's mobile app.
12 At DHS, through a comprehensive review of
13 homelessness program services and restructuring our
14 agency to improve the delivery of our services to
15 clients, we are focused on improving client outcomes
16 by recognizing that each family in need of our
17 assistance has unique challenges. By adding
18 additional social workers in shelter and increasing
19 daytime programming in shelter, we are improving our
20 ability to connect our clients to critical resources
21 to help them move forward on their path to
22 permanency. As our work continues and we implement
23 our reforms, we look forward working with this
24 Committee as well as advocates and clients in this
25

1 room to ensure we are serving the families and
2 individuals within our system effectively so that
3 they can return to the community and self-
4 sufficiency. Responding to the Introductions: In
5 each instance, regarding the package of bills before
6 the Committee today, we look forward with working
7 with the sponsors to address the concerns that
8 underlie the proposed legislation. Intro. 855A: The
9 bill would require the Human Resources Administration
10 to determine if public assistance recipients may
11 qualify for additional forms of public assistance.
12 When HRA determines that an individual may qualify
13 for other benefits, the bill would require HRA to
14 notify those individuals that they may qualify for
15 additional forms of public assistance and send those
16 individuals applications with instructions on how to
17 apply for that assistance. The bill would also
18 require HRA to pre-fill the application with any
19 information HRA already has from the recipient's
20 original application. HRA has undergone significant
21 modernization efforts since 2014 with respect to
22 benefits access. To improve access to benefits and
23 information on a pending or active case, we developed
24 an online portal available to New Yorkers anywhere an
25

1 internet connection is available. ACCESS HRA is an
2 innovative tool that allows New York City residents
3 to retrieve benefit information and apply and
4 recertify for SNAP and other benefits. This portal
5 allows clients to create an ACCESS HRA account to
6 gain access to over 100 case-specific points of
7 information in real-time, including application and
8 case statuses, upcoming appointments, benefits
9 account balances, and documents requested for
10 eligibility determinations. Additionally, clients
11 can make changes to contact information, view
12 eligibility notices electronically, and opt into text
13 message and email alerts. Clients can also request
14 budget letters online. We continue to improve this
15 tool to add new functionality and will soon allow
16 recipients to submit their required Periodic Report
17 in addition to reporting changes in circumstances.
18 As of May 31, 2017 there are more than 300,000 HRA
19 online accounts for SNAP households, and we receive
20 over 33,000 submissions each month. However, HRA's
21 ability to utilize these approaches is the result of
22 multiple Federal and State waivers in response to
23 complex Federal and State regulations. As the City
24 is focused on the reauthorization of the federal Farm
25

1 Bill, including recently testifying before a House
2 Subcommittee on our technology innovations to expand
3 access to benefits and promote program efficiencies,
4 we are continuing to monitor the status of provisions
5 of federal law that enabled us to obtain the waivers
6 so that we can continue to receive them. Given the
7 continuing developments in Washington that can impact
8 our benefits and services, we look forward to
9 discussing with Council Member Kallos and the
10 Committee steps that we can take to address the
11 concerns that gave rise to this proposed legislation
12 at this uncertain time. We also want to make sure
13 that the proposed legislation takes into account the
14 greater reliance we are placing on online
15 transactions rather than paper transactions. Intro
16 1461: The bill would require the Department of
17 Social Services to provide customer service training
18 twice per year to all employees that interact with
19 members of the public. As part of our reform
20 initiatives, HRA has a robust training curriculum no
21 in place for all front line staff which includes a
22 full day of client service training. Additionally,
23 HRA conducts agency-wide trainings such as our new
24 LGBTQI training. Taking into consideration what we
25

1
2 have already implemented to address the concerns
3 reflected in the proposed legislation, we stand ready
4 to discuss whether additional efforts are needed and
5 feasible. Proposed Intro 1577: The bill would
6 require the creation of the Office of Case
7 Management. The Office would be tasked with
8 developing recommendations on how electronic case
9 management systems used by City departments that
10 provide direct services can be upgraded to facilitate
11 information, sharing among departments and increasing
12 the use of digital tools to best serve clients. The
13 Office would also develop recommendations on how
14 systems, which are required by the State, may be
15 updated to facilitate further information sharing.
16 The bill would require the director of the Office to
17 submit an annual report on all recommendations. This
18 proposed legislation broadly impacts many City
19 agencies that provide case management services. In
20 each instance the agencies and their case management
21 systems are subject to different governing statutes
22 and regulation from multiple levels of government.
23 Additionally, agencies may be subject to different
24 rules in respect to client confidentiality. The
25 Administration and the Department of Social Services,

1 in the instances in which HRA and DHS are impacted,
2 are open to further discussions on what structures
3 would make the most sense to move such a
4 modernization effort forward, and we are always open
5 to exploring technology solutions to better
6 streamline client solutions. Intro. 1597: The bill
7 would allow youths who have spent time in foster care
8 to be eligible for rental assistance vouchers that
9 would allow them to obtain stable housing.
10 Eligibility would be limited to those 24 years old or
11 younger. As we have reported previously at the
12 hearings over the past several months, we're in the
13 process of streamlining our rental assistance
14 programs in light of the recent FEPS settlement in
15 litigation against the State. We expect the
16 streamlining process to be completed this summer and
17 we will consider the issues raised by the legislation
18 as we do so. We also have to evaluate whether this
19 well-intentioned legislation presents any legal
20 issues. Intro 1635: The proposed bill would require
21 the Department of Social Services to create and issue
22 a job center visit receipt for all individuals who
23 visit job centers. The visit receipt would include
24 the staff member's name, staff member's contact
25

1 information, any documents received by the agency
2 from the visitor, the reason for the visit, and a
3 time stamp indicating the time and date a visitor was
4 present at the job center. The bill would require
5 the department to semiannually post to its website a
6 report of the average constituent wait times at each
7 job center. The bill would further require the
8 department to display in job centers information on
9 how to make a complaint and would require the
10 department to issue a tracking number to track the
11 status of a complaint. The bill would require the
12 department to post semiannually to its website, a
13 report of all complaints aggregated by job center and
14 complaint type. HRA looks forward to working with
15 this Committee to address client service issues that
16 are the focus of the legislation. However,
17 consideration of the legislation should take into
18 account the reforms in this area that we have already
19 implemented. For example, HRA currently provides
20 clients with receipts of visits at job centers and
21 regularly reports on wait times. The Confirmation of
22 Contact with your Center form was created to provide
23 an individual who visits or contacts a Job or SNAP
24 Center with a document that indicates the nature and
25

1 date of the visit or contact. As we have testified
2 previously, we've also rolled-out on-demand telephone
3 interviews citywide, which allow clients to conduct
4 their SNAP recertification applications at their
5 convenience, rather than the old system of waiting
6 for a call during a four-hour window, or having to
7 come into a center and wait for an interview. In
8 May, the current average wait time for an on-demand
9 telephone interview was just a few minutes. As an
10 additional enhancement, we plan to introduce on-
11 demand telephone interviews for new SNAP applicants
12 by the end of this year. The bill would also require
13 the department to semiannually post to its website a
14 report of the average constituent wait times at each
15 job center. We already post this information on the
16 HRA website,
17 <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/about/facts.page>. For
18 example, in April the Southern Brooklyn Center had a
19 22 minute wait time. The average wait time for all
20 Job Centers in April 2017 was 42 minutes and the
21 average wait at Non-Cash Assistance SNAP Centers was
22 30 minutes. And I want to give a shout-out to the
23 safety net activist who met with us to help us move
24 forward with that initiative. An HRA Client Rights
25

1 and Responsibilities poster is already in use and
2 outlines the client complaint process by phone and
3 email, and we can provide you with a copy of that
4 during this hearing. There is also signage which is
5 prominently displayed in applicant/client waiting
6 areas that addresses concerns such as "resolving a
7 problem," "what you should know if you have an
8 emergency," and how to contact the HRA Central
9 Complaint unit and advises clients on how to file a
10 complaint. Further, HRA's website provides
11 information on how to initiate a complaint with the
12 Commissioner and a SNAP discrimination complaint. In
13 addition, for SNAP discrimination complaints the
14 Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
15 requires that a Food Stamp Complaint Procedure poster
16 be posted, which it is. And finally, one of the
17 State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
18 required information booklets, "What You Should Know
19 about Your Benefits and Your Rights and
20 Responsibilities When Applying for or Receiving
21 Benefits," includes information on filing
22 discrimination complaints. HRA has a tracking system
23 for client complaints to make sure that they are
24 addressed timely. Intro. 1642: The bill would
25

1
2 require that any individuals or families receiving
3 rental assistance vouchers established by the
4 Department of Social Services, such as the current
5 LINC, CityFEPS and SEPS vouchers, would continue to
6 receive the assistance so long as the household
7 continues to meet any other eligibility requirements.
8 The bill would also require that the maximum rent
9 toward which rental assistance vouchers may be
10 applied annually increases at the same rate as the
11 fair market rents set by the United States Department
12 of Housing Preservation and Development. The
13 requirements set by the bill would be subject to
14 appropriation. Currently, various of the City's
15 rental assistance programs that are City Tax Levy
16 funded, including LINC IV, City FEPS, and SEPS for
17 households with a disabled member or a veteran, have
18 no time limit. In contrast, LINC I and II are joint
19 City/State programs and would require State approval
20 to change the program and eligibility requirements,
21 including the rent levels. In addition, the recent
22 settlement in the FEPS litigation against the State
23 sets forth the rent levels for this rental assistance
24 program, which must be taken into account when
25 evaluating whether City Tax Levy-funded rental

1 assistance programs should have rent levels set that
2 are different than those for the State-approved
3 programs. As we complete the process of streamlining
4 our rental assistance programs in light of the recent
5 FEPS settlement in the litigation against the State,
6 we will consider these issues raised by the
7 legislation as we do so. Again, we also have to
8 evaluate whether this well-intentioned legislation
9 presents any legal issues. Thank you for this
10 opportunity to provide comprehensive testimony about
11 our reforms, about the process, and information for
12 you that I know you've been interested in receiving
13 and our position on the bills.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you,
16 Commissioner. Can I ask just as we proceed in this,
17 and this goes for my colleagues as well, to speak up
18 because they have trouble hearing us over in the
19 overflow room and since so many people have come to
20 attend this hearing? We want to make sure that
21 everybody's able to hear it. So, okay. I'm going to
22 have a few questions, and then turn it over to my
23 colleagues, and then I'll probably come back for more
24 questions. So,--

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I'm
3 here. I'm not going anywhere.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: One, you know, one
5 thing that struck me in listening to the testimony is
6 it's presented as-- it's presented as kind of a
7 fairly clean process, you know. We're in this phase.
8 We're in the next phase. We're in the next phase,
9 and you know, these services are rendered at this
10 point in time, and those services are rendered at
11 that point in time. And it doesn't really match up
12 to what I hear from constituents who have gone
13 through the system, and you know, that's just an
14 anecdotal thing. I have constituents that I talk to.
15 I'm texting with one as we speak, saying, "Hey, do
16 you have a therapist on site?" Oh, you know--

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Is it the same
18 constituent that I know?

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Different one.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Oh, okay.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Different
22 constituent. And the fact of the matter is I, you
23 know, people that I know are going through the
24 system, and so my first question is, does DHS has a
25 mechanism to obtain feedback and criticism from

1 families that have gone through the system in any
2 official way that you're able to then report out and
3 put into some kind of action.

4
5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, let me answer
6 your question, but I actually want to address what I
7 think is an important aspect of your question, which
8 is families and individuals come to us in emergency
9 circumstances. The process that I laid out for you
10 is a series of very intentional intervention points
11 and services that we have, but as I said in the
12 testimony, we're dealing with human beings that don't
13 fit into neat boxes, that have emergent needs that
14 arise at different points in time, and services can
15 be provided in ways that are different than the way
16 that I've laid out here depending on what's happening
17 with an individual family. Secondly, I want to
18 emphasize a point that I made at the outset which is
19 there are major changes being made even as I'm
20 testifying right now, and I want to just make clear
21 of something I made at the beginning of this
22 testimony which is there's a real urgency to make
23 changes, but these are changes that have been needed
24 for a very long period, and the investment at 200
25 million dollars in the Tier-- in the not-for-profit

1 shelters that is beginning in this fiscal year to be
2 able to have the social workers and have the kinds of
3 things that you might be texting with your
4 constituent about whether they have them or not, it's
5 important to understand the moment that we're in.
6 You're--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I hear
9 you. I'm saying that I-- nobody's, you know, maybe
10 not everybody's fitting into a neat box, but I would
11 say most of the time if someone is not receiving
12 services exactly how it's presented here, it's
13 probably the receiving of services less
14 comprehensively instead of more comprehensively.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, but I think
16 that's exactly why we're making additional
17 investments. I mean if I-- your test-- the testimony
18 that you've heard from us today is not to say we've
19 completed the process. Very intentionally we
20 announced just over a year ago a major reform of a
21 20-year-old system, and just a couple of months ago
22 and even further reformed that system.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And major investments
25 in the Adopted Budget that are intended to address

1
2 many of the issues that I think appropriately, so you
3 may hear from clients at this hearing, and that you
4 and I talk about. Look, when I speak to clients
5 myself-- and I want to come back to actually
6 answering your question. When I speak to clients
7 myself at PATH and in Bellevue and in the single
8 system or in other places of the shelter system I
9 hear very compelling circumstances which is driving
10 the reason why we make these reforms.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you, but are
12 you--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] One of--

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you talking--
15 not,-- I mean, because it's great to talk to folks at
16 PATH. Are you talking to folks that have been-- that
17 are in day 475 of their stay in the family system,
18 and you're like, "Why are you still-- why are you
19 still here? Why-- what is keeping you in the shelter
20 system on day 475?" Because the average was 420. I
21 guess it's now 409. There are plenty of people that
22 are still in the system for more than 400 days. Are
23 you finding out, "Hey, why are you still here?"

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Let me-- the answer
25 that I give, maybe not as long as the answer I gave

1
2 to you in this testimony, is you have about a million
3 people chasing every half a million apartments. Let
4 me finish, please.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, okay.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's part of what
7 the overall issue is. So, yes, I interact with
8 clients in shelters as well, but even more
9 importantly through our meetings with the safety net
10 activists. We're creating a working group with
11 shelter residents. We think that'll be helpful to
12 get feedback, and again, I think they've been a very
13 helpful group that we work with in terms of giving us
14 feedback when I implemented the reforms at HRA, and
15 now they're giving us feedback on the things we're
16 doing at--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And
18 that's an opportunity for people that have gone
19 through the system--

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: to give direct
22 feedback. So like, to make-- so you're hearing from
23 them.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes. We--
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] What do
3 you hear? What's the number one complaint you're
4 hearing from people that have gone through the system
5 about the system?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: New York City is in
7 the midst of a huge housing crisis, that's the number
8 one complaint.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because the number
10 one-- alright. Because the number one complaint that
11 I hear, I'm going to paraphrase. In fact, I'm going
12 to direct quote Ms. Hale who was at our press
13 conference earlier who's gone through-- that went.
14 She said, "Being homeless sucks. Because homeless
15 sucks, it does."

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm not--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] There--

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]
19 Senator Gillibrand, I can't use that language.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It is-- there are--
21 being homeless, every day spent in a homelessness
22 shelter is a trauma. Every day is a trauma.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: There's no question
24 about it from representing families going back to
25 when Kerry was the Governor and Koch was the Mayor.

1
2 I am acutely aware of how difficult it is for people
3 to lose their home, be without their home, and be
4 waiting to get a home. That's one of the reasons why
5 I actually make an effort to interact with people to
6 understand what they're going through. You know,
7 when Ms. McCain was my client before McCain versus
8 Koch, she said much the same thing as families say
9 now, "I can't find housing in the City," but she said
10 it for a different reason than the families do now.
11 When Ms. McCain came to me it was because the City
12 wouldn't give her rental assistance. Now, the
13 problem is that there's been a loss of so many
14 housing units, that there are some very significant
15 systemic problems, but you-- you ask me ask me what's
16 the number one complaint, and you very colorfully--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] About
18 the system, about-- my question is what's the number
19 one complaint you hear about being homeless?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, but I think
21 the issue--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Of being
23 in a homeless shelter.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But the issue that
25 I'm taking from the urgency here is our number one

1 task is to try to keep people from becoming
2 homelessness and moving out as quickly as possible.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you. My
5 question though is, what is the number one complaint
6 that you're hearing about going through the shelter
7 system?

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the number
9 one complaint I hear is exactly how you describe it.
10 I don't want to use your colorful language, as I can
11 see that my colleague over there will quote me. I
12 think--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] It's
14 true.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think that clients
16 complain about the traumatic circumstances of losing
17 their home and having to negotiate a system instead
18 of having a home. Our change is to change our entire
19 approach to homelessness in New York City. Our
20 approach to homelessness is built up over four
21 decades, and we're making major seat changes. Some
22 of the people in the system have already felt the
23 reforms. Others have not. The 40,000 people who
24 didn't get evicted because we increased investment in
25 the legal services have felt the reforms. The 60,000

1
2 people that have gotten out of the system or didn't
3 go in through rental assistance and rehousing have
4 felt the reforms. Yet, when I was at PATH on last
5 Thursday and I spoke to some individuals. They have
6 not felt the reforms in the system yet, because it
7 takes-- these reforms can't be put in place
8 overnight. So, I'm acutely aware of the kind of
9 input you're getting from constituents because I'm
10 getting that input, too.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean, I
12 think what it's important to-- I think it's important
13 to talk to the families that have been in the system
14 for extended periods of time. I think that that is--
15 that's what I-- that's where I want to focus a lot of
16 our energy. So, there have been--

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] But let
18 me just emphasize. I just want to say again, I hear
19 directly from the safety net activists. It's a very
20 good group. We agreed with them to set up a working
21 group. We are going to do that to institutionalize
22 that kind of input. I meet with them periodically.
23 I know you'll hear from some of them later, I'm sure.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And they're very
3 eloquent in describing to me what their concerns are,
4 and their concerns we try to reflect in the reforms
5 that we're making.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I-- there have
7 been a number of reports that have come out in recent
8 months, and you know, they have, you know, various
9 levels of critique, and I'd like to-- just one. Aced
10 [sic] out in Tier II shelters, are you familiar with
11 that one.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The one that came
13 out on Saturday?

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, this came out--
15 this was by the Basuk [sp?] Center.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, Saturday.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, let's
18 [inaudible]. And I realize it's a very critical
19 report, but it says in its executive summary, and I
20 just want to make sure-- I want to ask does DSS as an
21 agency or HRA/DHS, do we agree with the basic
22 principle that is put forward in this executive
23 summary that very long stays with few services have
24 harmful impact on the development of children's
25 brains, negatively affect their physical and mental

1 health in the near term and throughout their lives
2 and increase the likelihood that they'll experience
3 homelessness as adults.
4

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, I just got the
6 report on Saturday. I'm going to read it carefully.
7 Obviously, we're making major changes in the shelter
8 system in order to have better outcomes for families
9 with children.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How about this one,
11 "In shelters, mothers are most commonly parenting two
12 children and have high rates of serious depression
13 and co-occurring disorders such as PTSD that are not
14 acknowledged or treated well in shelter."

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: From my prior work,
16 I know there are-- I know for a fact that depression
17 is very prevalent among homeless heads of household.
18 I also know that that's one of the reasons why the
19 First Lady and the Mayor gave us funding to add
20 social workers, and we're in the process of hiring
21 them through the Thrive initiative in order to
22 address very real problems that children and heads of
23 household have who are suffering from depression.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many social
25 workers will that be when fully hired out?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: IT's a one to 25 ratio.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because right now it's 100 social workers to one to 400 ratio, right?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: The--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] It's 40,000 families-- 40,000 individuals in the family shelter system.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, but the--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And there's 100 social workers hired,--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] The amendments--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] one to 400.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: The funding for this had just been provided to the providers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And the first hundred are now on board, but every Tier II shelter will have a ratio of one to 25 social workers.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, that means 40,000--

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] One to
3 25--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: is 1,600.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: One to 25 families.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: One to 25 families.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The ratio of one to
8 25 families.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so 12,500
10 divided by 25 is 500. So, there's going to be 500
11 social workers then hired up?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's a model of--
13 I think your math is little off, but I can tell you
14 that at all the Tier II shelters there will be a
15 ratio of one to 25. That's what that 30-plus million
16 dollar allocation is. The amendments are being
17 processed now with our shelter providers to start
18 that hiring, and 100 are already on board.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are those available
20 to families in the Tier II system as well as families
21 that are in-- placed in hotels and clusters? I see
22 somebody shaking their head.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, as we work to
24 phase out those locations, we're going to have
25

1
2 address what the needs are in those locations as
3 well.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, they're not?

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The initiative is
6 very much focused on the families that are in the
7 Tier II's and we have to focus on the needs of the
8 families and the other facilities as well, but it's a
9 C change [sic] in the provision of services for
10 families in the Tier II's.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, that actually
12 speaks to my next question which is the level of
13 social services-- so, I think one thing that bothers
14 me about the system is that it's a bit of a
15 crapshoot, and if you are-- if you go through PATH
16 and you get a placement at a WIN shelter or at Henry
17 Street Settlement House, there are resources-- a Tier
18 II shelter that's well-run and has a long track
19 record and is well-established in its community and
20 is able to privately fund raise, and make-- you know,
21 and bring in a significant amount of outside funding.
22 You have access to not only the array of services
23 that can be brought in through philanthropy, but then
24 also the array of something like this where it's if
25 there's only available at the Tier II, but if you are

1
2 unfortunate enough to get placed at a hotel or at a
3 cluster, you know, you're SOL, as they say.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think that
5 you've very clearly articulated the motivation
6 between closing down the 360 locations that we're in,
7 the new--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But
9 we're still going to be hotels, for sure.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: If I could just
11 finish. The contracting process that we're
12 undergoing to bring the hotel system to contract,
13 something that we had announced back in December, is
14 going to provide us with increased social services
15 for the families placed in hotels. Within the
16 cluster system, we've eliminated 25 percent of them,
17 and we're going to continue to eliminate them and
18 evaluate what other steps we can take to improve
19 services there, but we thought it was most important
20 to highlight the services in the Tier IIs, but you're
21 right, if you look at how the system is developed. I
22 mean that's what--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] So
24 you're saying--

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's
3 why we had to eliminate. Look, look at the providers
4 who have been slowly-- who had been targeting and
5 methodically eliminating, We Always Care, Housing
6 Bridge, Bed Co. We're continuing to work through
7 providers that have been in place for many years who,
8 as you quite eloquently said, there's a range of the
9 ability of people to provide services. On the one
10 hand there's WIN and Henry Street and Bronx Works and
11 Samaritan Village. Some of the places that I
12 understood were looked at in Doctor Basuk's report,
13 by the way, there's a range between those places and
14 the places that we've gotten out of, and we're going
15 to continue to get out of those kinds of providers
16 who have been providing services for many years in
17 the City--

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I--

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] And I'm
20 going to address, I think, exactly what your point
21 is, which is both the Mayor and I have said, the
22 shelter system developed in a very haphazard way, and
23 we're re-imagining the shelter system.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood. But, and
25 I hope that you are Commissioner for another four

1 years and six months, right? That'd be great. But
2 what I want-- in four years and six months, would you
3 be able to say that across the family shelter system,
4 the array of services, mental health services, social
5 services, support services for families will be
6 uniform across the board and at a higher standard
7 than what exists today.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's absolutely
10 what we laid out in the plan released only a couple
11 of months ago to do that. By four years and six
12 months we will have either completed or almost
13 completed with the cluster closures. We'll be well
14 on the way towards opening additional replacement, a
15 smaller number of replacement shelters, and it's a
16 multi-year plan to do exactly what you are
17 articulating, because frankly, that's what our
18 clients have articulated to us, which is that we need
19 to have a system that has uniformed services at a
20 higher level. Having said that, as you point out,
21 and I want to be careful to say this, I know housing-
22 - Homeless Services United has been a good partner
23 for us too in trying to affect reforms in the shelter
24 system. We do have excellent providers. We have
25 providers that we are methodically eliminating as

1 well for the very reasons that you're describing, and
2 the aim of the Turning the Tide plan is to have a
3 consistent level of higher services than are
4 currently available. That's why we're hiring social
5 workers. That's why we're taking the steps we're
6 taking.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, okay--

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's
10 why we're investing 200 million dollars including
11 model budgets to be able to give the providers the
12 opportunity to have the kind of staffing that they
13 want to have.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, this committee
15 also oversees ACS. In the ACS system there's
16 preventive services. Preventive Services are, you
17 know, broken down to general preventive, and then
18 there's evidence-based preventive services that are
19 much more intensive, and those-- there's been a lot
20 of care and consideration and resources put into
21 evidence based preventive services for those children
22 that are very-- that are facing very high needs. For
23 those social workers that are being hired up through
24 ThriveNYC, is there an evidence based program that
25 they're working with around trauma-informed care that

1
2 is, you know, that has a set curriculum that has been
3 applied in other jurisdictions that we can point to
4 and say this is what they're going to be doing? You
5 know, and MSW, you know, without a curriculum is--
6 would that be effective? I mean, so what's the
7 curriculum? What's the-- are we looking at trauma-
8 informed care?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The aim is to do
10 exactly what you're suggesting which is to focus on
11 trauma-informed care. I also want to highlight that
12 about 25 percent of the families in shelter are ACS-
13 involved.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood, but that
15 aside--

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] No, but
17 it--

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Because
19 they might be receiving preventive services
20 otherwise.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, but this
22 provides-- I'm just saying, it provides opportunities
23 when we add additional social work staffing when
24 there wasn't social workers, to enhanced services
25 across the board because some families already have a

1 level of intervention and other families don't have
2 that kind of level of intervention. So, part of what
3 I hear you asking me, and I'm agreeing with you is
4 that we want to make sure that curriculum is
5 consistent with the kinds of families that we've got
6 throughout the shelter system.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But it's got-- I
9 mean, so the curriculum hasn't been identified.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's focused on
11 trauma-informed care. That is, all the research we
12 now see is very focused on that kind of support,
13 addressing the kinds of things that people are
14 identifying in terms of the impact on children of
15 being in this kind of traumatic situation.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'd like to see some
17 more detail on that, exactly, you know, what, where
18 the model is coming from, where it's been developed,
19 you know, which academic institutions it's been
20 associated with if it has been, if any. You know,
21 we'd like to get a little bit more specific on that.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Happy to sit down
23 and talk with you. We have the summer. So, happy to
24 work with you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For-- does every
3 family in the shelter system have access to a kitchen
4 or kitchenette and a refrigerator in the family
5 system when they're placed in their shelter unit?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, some of-- the
7 basic standard for Tier II shelters is kitchen and
8 bathroom in the room. Clusters include kitchen and
9 bathroom in the room. There are some shelters,
10 smaller based shelters which have been in place for
11 many years that don't have that, and they have more
12 of a group living situation.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hotels?

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I was getting to
15 hotels. And then there are hotels where there's
16 bathroom and not those kind of-- not that kind of
17 availability of things. There are refrigerators.
18 There could be microwaves, but not as you're
19 describing a full kitchen.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How about a DHS-run
21 family shelter?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Some of those
23 shelters were-- in prior administrations the cooking
24 facilities were taken out of them, and they were
25 originally built with cooking facilities, and in

1
2 prior administrations the cooking facilities were
3 moved, and we're evaluating. Those are among the
4 kinds of shelters-- remember, a part of the plan
5 talks about looking at existing shelters and
6 renovating them. So we're looking what's feasible
7 for some of those sorts of locations. I mean, place-
8 - some of those shelters, again, were built with
9 cooking facilities and they were taken out.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because you would
11 agree that being in shelter for an average length of
12 stay of 407 days without access to anything to cook
13 on would add additional stress, both monetarily-- you
14 can't buy food and then-- you know, it's much cheaper
15 to buy food and cook it yourself, but also the
16 nutritional value of that food. If you're-- I mean,
17 you know, dollars to doughnuts. If you're
18 microwaving all of your food or hot-plating all of
19 your food, it's going to be much higher in sodium.
20 It's going to be much higher in saturate fat. It's
21 going to be much less healthy.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's exactly why
23 we're closing down 360 locations, many of which don't
24 provide the kind of services that you--

1 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Well,
2
3 but the cluster is actually-- ironically, in the
4 cluster unit you probably would have a kitchen and a
5 refrigerator, because presumably those exists,
6 they're apartments.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, although we
8 think prioritizing, getting out of the clusters first
9 was--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I'm not
11 saying that. I'm not saying that you're not supposed
12 to do that, but--

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]
14 Theoretically.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm saying that
16 there's thousands of people in the hotel and thous--
17 and any number of people that are in these city-run,
18 DHS-run shelters that don't have access to a cooking
19 facility. It's, you know, it's-- it has serious
20 health consequences. If you have a much higher sodium
21 intake, higher risk of stroke, higher blood pressure,
22 higher-- greater risk of diabetes. Serious, you
23 know, these are serious conditions on top of the
24 toxic stress, the toxic stress that comes along with
25 living in shelter.

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COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, that--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Very unhealthy.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's what the urgency is of us, of our plan to address years of problems that are built up in the system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Does DHS do an assessment of every family member that comes into, that is in the system of a trauma-based assessment of mental health? I know that, you know, there's the care system you referenced, but is there a specific model of mental health assessment that is, you know, that is well-established that is used on every family member, every person coming into the family shelter system?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think as we said during the reforms, your question highlights the challenge here. There's been an assessment system that's been in place through the care system for many years, and as we're moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach, we have to enhance the kind of assessments that we do. The kind of assessments we do now, though, are still pursuant to the care

1
2 system. We've made lots of changes. We haven't made
3 changes in that area yet.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. How--

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] We also
6 have very good-- I want to-- and you highlighted
7 something. We have very good providers who are
8 giving us good examples of how to make reforms in the
9 assessment process.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. For mental
11 health assessment?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah, let's--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You can
14 try to qualify, you know, the traumatic impact that's
15 happening to families and children in the shelter
16 system.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, part of the
18 assessment process that goes back to the state
19 regulations from the 1980's is designed to make sure
20 the families can be connected with appropriate
21 services. The kind of assessments that are--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But
23 there's been advancement since the 1980's in terms of
24 mental health assessments.

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2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I totally understand
3 that. I was just going to add that the system relates
4 back to that regulatory system. The state's making
5 some changes in the regulations, and that will help
6 us as we move forward determine the best way to
7 proceed.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You don't need the
9 state's permission to implement across the board in
10 the DHS system, you know, mental health assessment.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, but they
12 regulate-- there are new regulations coming for
13 other-- the regulations pertain to only Tier IIs
14 currently, and they've announced that they will be
15 regulating other parts of the shelter system, and so
16 we're going to want to take a look at what the
17 overall regulations look like and make sure that we
18 have a uniform approach, and we would expect the
19 regulations to come from the state shortly.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How shortly?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I focus on the agency
22 I'm running, so--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Wait,
24 wait, but nothing should-- that shouldn't-- just
25 waiting for the state to come up with regulations

1 shouldn't stop DHS from pursuing, form actively
2 pursuing an evaluative model that they could
3 implement in conjunction with whatever the state regs
4 are.
5

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You're absolutely
7 right. I'm only highlighting the point that we want
8 to be sure that we're going to do is consistent with
9 what we're required to do. We can certainly do more
10 than what we're required to do.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We want to make sure
13 that what we're doing is at least consistent than
14 what we're required to do.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I'll be looking
16 forward to hearing an update on that.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll certainly
18 provide it.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Couple of
20 recommendations. There was the other report that
21 came out of the center for New York City called
22 "Adrift in NYC." This has to do with family
23 homelessness and the struggle to stay together. I
24 don't know if you saw this report.
25

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2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That one I didn't
3 see.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This one was last
5 month, Child Welfare Watch.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Speaking to--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] This is
9 about reunification issues, or?

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's about the impact
11 that-- the unfortunate impact of going into the
12 shelter system that that impact has on families
13 staying together in the first place.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I see.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And the stress that
16 it puts on a family too, and often times has lasting
17 if not permanent consequences. So, a family breaks
18 apart, family breaks up, you know, a couple breaks up
19 because of, you know, going into the shelter system,
20 and that can create lasting and pervasive not only
21 family impacts, but then mental health impacts. If a
22 child, you know, is broken up from their mother
23 because of the shelter system for some reason, or if
24 they go and live with an aunt for three months, and
25 that type of thing, you know, that has long-lasting

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2 mental health impacts. But they put a few
3 recommendations in their executive summary: Placing
4 families when appropriate in shelters in and near
5 their home communities. This is something we've
6 talked about before.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: They must have read
8 the "Turning the Tide" plan, which says that's
9 actually what we're going to do, because given the
10 current system which is built in a way which we can't
11 do that--

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah,
13 but--

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] it's
15 really critical to be opening new facilities.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I don't have the MMRs
17 year over year in front of me, but I know that four
18 years ago the rate of families placed, according to
19 their youngest child's school placement, was in the
20 80's in terms of percentage, and now we're down in
21 the 50's or low 60's. And my question is why does
22 that persist if-- I know that you're going to say
23 that it's because of a low vacancy rate in the
24 shelter system, but they had a low vacancy rate back
25 in 2012 when the number was much higher.

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COMMISSIONER BANKS: They were using clusters in a different way, right? So, the ability to-- the ability to open shelters where you're not telling people where the shelters are is reflective of--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] In some ways then that was better because-- because you don't dispute that--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I don't think-- I just have to interrupt you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: some in that way it is, because--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I don't think it's better to have taken units off the housing market in dilapidated buildings to use for shelter. I will never-- I will never agree to that statement.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, no, but what I'll say is that there is-- I think that there is evidence that points to the fact that part of the trauma of going into the shelter system is being disconnected from your support system, whether that's family, neighborhood resources, houses of worship. I mean, it's-- it obviously stands to reason, but there's, you know, there's evidence of that.

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COMMISSIONER BANKS: Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: And so--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's what we--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] the--

COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's what we said ourselves in our own report that that is tremendously disruptive to be removed from the anchors of your life.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Schools, jobs, healthcare, houses of worship, neighbors, and support systems, that's--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] All of that.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: why we're trying to remake the shelter system in order to address that. So, you're absolutely right. Having said that, I don't think that the system in which cluster apartments were used to get better, get closer to those anchors of life, is a better way to approach it than the way we're approaching now, which is to remake the system.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But as a consequence
3 the percentage is much, much lower.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's true, but for
5 example, the shelter that we've opened on Rogers
6 Avenue and Carroll Street in Crown Heights is the
7 first family shelter in that neighborhood that's
8 dedicated to be a family shelter as opposed to
9 clusters. So, we're reducing-- we're closing
10 clusters there and opening a shelter, and it's a much
11 higher quality shelter run by Samaritan Village.

12 So,--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay, so
14 over the next two years, if that number does not
15 continue to climb back up to 80 percent, that's a
16 problem.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, but remember
18 it's a multi-year plan that we put in place in order
19 to address--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I'm not
21 saying it has to--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: that problem.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not saying that
24 it has to jump in one, you know, in one fell swoop,
25 but there needs to be persistent progress.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I agree with that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Revising the "no visitor" policy in homeless shelters is something we've heard pretty consistently. If you can't have visitors, if you can't have loved ones and extended family members visiting you, that creates additional stress.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: It does raise issues for families, but similarly the issues that were raised about shelter security are really important, too. So,--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] So, how do you reconcile that? You go-- I mean, they already have metal detectors.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: In family shelters, no we don't.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You don't have-- no metal detectors?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: No.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, but you can't have visitors?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's the current rule, that's right. I'd be happy to take a look at the report which I haven't read.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This is not only--
3 that's in both reports. It's a recommendation in
4 both reports. Do you see a value in having-- being
5 able to have visitors?

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I know I testified
7 before this committee last March where there was a
8 tremendous focus on how we could keep people safe in
9 shelter, and frankly, that's been a major focus of
10 ours over this last year to make sure--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You
12 could do both.

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: To make sure that we
14 can maintain safety and shelter.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think that it's
16 possible to do both, to have security, adequate
17 security, and also allow for support systems to be
18 able to-- because social isolation occurs. When you
19 are in a shelter where you're dealing with stress and
20 everybody around you is dealing with stress and you
21 can have no access in your home to your loved ones or
22 other people that can support you, that social
23 isolation is then compounded. Everybody's suff--
24 everybody's suffering from social isolation,
25 together.

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2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, I certainly--
3 I certainly recognize the challenge and the problem
4 you're describing, but I also just want to take us
5 back to the problem that of what the focus was in
6 this committee a year ago when we announced that the
7 NYPD was going to be doing an evaluation, and then
8 ultimately a few months ago at the beginning of the
9 year, the NYPD would be managing security. I think
10 we still have a-- we're still continuing to make
11 progress in that area, and I think we need to
12 continue to do so before evaluating making that kind
13 of change in the shelter system. But I'm not-- I
14 recognize the challenge that you're pointing out.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The next
16 recommendation is making it easier for shelter
17 residents to visit family members including overnight
18 stays for children with their grandparents and
19 parents who do not live in the shelter.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, there are--
21 we can certainly always take a look at the report.
22 We could certainly always take a look at them, but
23 there are processes for people to--

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah,
25 but they're not transparent policies. They're pretty

1
2 arbitrary. You have to ask for permission. They may
3 grant you permission. They might not. You know,
4 it's just again, hearing from my anecdotal evidence,
5 people that I talk to that are in the shelter system,
6 it's not uniformly applied. You know, they request
7 it. It's denied for some reason. There's not an
8 explanation as to why it's denied. It's just denied.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll certainly take
10 a look at that, but also remember that, you know, we
11 continually look to see whether there are
12 opportunities to reconnect people back into the
13 community. So, when people say I want to stay here
14 or I want to stay there, it does open up an
15 opportunity--

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Not, not
17 stay, just visit. I want to visit grandma.
18 Grandma's not going to let me live with her, but
19 Grandma will let me stay over for the night.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I don't know
21 if you're always right, because a lot of grandma's
22 when we've offered the kind of assistance that the
23 New York Times recently described, that we had
24 offered one particular woman in order to stay out of
25 shelter, it makes a difference if we can help grandma

1 pay her own rent. It might make some difference.

2 So, I don't want to rule it out.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's another
5 question. It's just--

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Don't
7 rule it out.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's actually-- but
9 that's not speaking to the issue that's identified
10 here. The issue that's identified here is in the
11 instance, which I think is probably more prevalent
12 where Grandma says, "Sure, stay over for a night, but
13 you can't move in with me." Like, we don't-- that,
14 again, it's an arbitrary process. There's no set
15 rules. It's case by case. It involves people-- you
16 know, what if somebody's-- what if somebody's on bad
17 terms with the director of the shelter, and when they
18 ask that person that person's like, "You again? No."

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, that shouldn't
20 be the case, so we'll take a look at what you're
21 raising, but I also just want to highlight that we do
22 want to be continually looking at opportunities to
23 reunite people in the communities. So where there
24 are relatives or friends that want people to visit,

1
2 that's a potential opportunity to reunite somebody in
3 the community.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The last
5 recommendation here, and then I'm going to turn it
6 over to my colleague, and then I have some more
7 questions. "Provide funding and resources to train
8 support shelter staff on how to support parenting."
9 This is something that I do hear a lot as well, is
10 that you know, there's-- there needs to be a greater
11 investment in training for-- this in both reports
12 they mention this, that it's-- you know, it's very--
13 this is quoting from the Basuk Center, "Shelter staff
14 are overburdened, do not receive the comprehensive
15 ongoing training they need to support children and
16 families, and spend most of their time on
17 documentation and paperwork instead of helping
18 families." It's-- I think that that's true. There's
19 not enough professional development when it comes to
20 shelter support staff engaging with families. It's
21 such a stressful world. It's such a stressful world
22 for everybody. It's stressful to work there. It's
23 stressful to be in shelter. It is, and as-- you
24 know, I can see tempers flare, and there's-- I mean,
25 can you describe to me the type, the curriculum of

1 training in terms of how support staff is trained,
2 ongoing fashion? Is there professional development
3 workshops that are-- that DHS provides? I mean, for
4 instance, at ACS they just developed this Workforce
5 Institute, and we talked-- you know, and child
6 protective staff have access to it, and those are ACS
7 employees. And we talked to them, and we said, you
8 know, we're hearing from providers, not-for-profit
9 providers, the preventive program providers, that
10 like they would love to go to be involved in that
11 Workforce Institute, but they just don't have the
12 time to. They're not-- you know, they don't-- they
13 have too much of a workload already. It's like, when
14 are you going to have time to go and spend two days
15 on some kind of, like, continuing education program
16 on trauma-informed care? So, is DHS offering that
17 type of program for support staff, either in our Tier
18 IIs or those that are operating hotels, or those that
19 are in a city-run shelter?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, I think that
22 investments that we're now making in the sector and
23 the contracts that we're now bringing to bear with
24 hotels give us the opportunity to look at exactly the
25 kind of issues that you're raising. I think that some

1
2 of the things that have been developed for ACS
3 frontline workers are models that we should take a
4 look at. I think, again, Homeless Services United
5 has been a good partner, and you know, in the coming
6 years certainly something I welcome your input, and
7 we'll take a close look at what we can do here.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. We'd really
9 like to see curricula, models, you know-- trying to
10 figure out, you know, if it costs money, that's a
11 budgetary process, and we're happy to engage on that.
12 but what we want to hear from you guys is these are
13 the models that we have identified as being, you
14 know, potentially very beneficial, and you know,
15 that's the type of support that will help to
16 meliorate-- I mean, again, toxic stress. I can't
17 emphasize that enough. That stress is toxic. It's
18 toxic to mom. It's toxic to kids. It is ultimately
19 debilitating. It has-- it can lead to despair. It
20 can lead to depression. It can lead to physical
21 ailments, and these are the types of things, and
22 unless they're dealt with, like PTSD, it doesn't go
23 away, and it really has to be dealt with, and it
24 needs support services all the way around. With
25 that, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'd like to echo General Welfare Chair Levin's sentiment. No one wants to be in a shelter. I'm concerned about every day that a child, a family member, an adult are stuck in a shelter wasting their time to go through basically a process when they could be getting the support that they need. I appreciate the workflow that you provided today. Would you provide to myself and committee the guidelines for how long his plan for families to take in each step of the process?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Let me follow up with you after the hearing.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Sure, sure.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: What I want to answer now is on the--

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I have a group of questions on it. So, I'll just-- let me.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay. I'll wait to answer until I hear the questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: No worries. So, I was hoping the answer was yes, but so then the other piece was, would you share how many families exceed guidelines and, in other words, the steps?

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2 How long somebody can be stuck at a stop [sic],
3 before they're considered stuck? And then along the
4 same lines, it's just I don't want another child,
5 family or person to be stuck waiting for process ever
6 again. I think all of us get annoyed when we get
7 stuck, and so I think we share a common goal, which
8 is I think why this is a different hearing than most
9 folks are used to in terms of-- I want to get people
10 the services they need without having to wait,
11 because I know how impatient I can get. I imagine
12 folks waiting for days to get the things that they
13 need, and so I know we've shared draft legislation
14 with you that-- and I would love if you'd also commit
15 to just doing mark-up with me on it on just trying to
16 get the workflow out there with reporting on how many
17 days people are taking in the process so we can see
18 where people are getting stuck, and get you the
19 resources you need for those folks so that they're
20 not spending months or years in the process.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to make sure
22 that-- and this is why I actually wanted to answer
23 the question before you asked the additional
24 questions. I want to make sure you're not taking away
25 from this the wrong impression. The stages that I

1 described for you aren't, you know, this should take
2 five days, this should take one day, this should take
3 two days. They're just part of the process of you've
4 applied for shelter, you're going to be found
5 eligible or ineligible; that's in a 10-day period of
6 time, and then you're in shelter, and different steps
7 that take place to check in with you. But the
8 overriding issue is really the answer that I gave to
9 the Committee Chair when he asked, you know, "What do
10 you hear from client?" The main issue the clients
11 raise is, "I don't want to be in shelter. I want to
12 be in-- I want to be back in the community." And the
13 background that I presented in the testimony, the
14 reason why I spent some time describing it is the
15 background is the one that you and the Chair and
16 others in this committee have been fighting against
17 for many years, the loss of 150,000 rent stabilized
18 units over this period. It's the reason-- it's one of
19 the reasons why we've got, you know, 58,227 people in
20 shelter now. So, there are external factors that
21 have nothing to do with process. That's what I think
22 I just want to make sure that you don't-- and we've
23 met a lot of times, and so it's-- I appreciate the
24 relationship. It's not about, "Oh, if only we had
25

1 three more workers, we could move the client from
2 point A to point B." It's can we find housing
3 resources in the community to reconnect people to
4 those resources? Part of this discussion is
5 happening a little bit in a vacuum for the following
6 reason: We've just made the commitment of 15,000
7 units of supportive housing with the first 500-plus
8 coming online this summer.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: When am I getting
11 them in my district?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I appreciate that you
13 want them in your district. The one's that--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] When
15 will I get them, though? How do I get them?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'll certainly work
17 with you on that with the providers. The first 500
18 are the HRA-administered ones which are scatter site,
19 as opposed to the congregate developed ones. So, I
20 have an idea that the ones in your district will be
21 like the one we were together for the WIN breaking
22 ground. That's through the congregate system, and
23 we'll certainly work with any provider who wants to
24 find a site up there. But my point is that there's a
25 number of new things happening that will and do

1
2 provide additional housing resources that I think
3 will begin to provide some assistance to people who
4 have been waiting for many years for that kind of
5 help.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, I guess in
7 the private sector sometimes you can call a doctor or
8 a specialist or whatever for your foot or what have
9 you, and you'll be like, "I'd like to see this
10 person," and they'll be like, "You can get your next
11 appointment three months or six months or whatever."
12 But I think we can do better than that, and I guess
13 my concern is around phase one. Phase-- the phase--
14 my concern is mainly around phase one and phase two,
15 and just making sure that we get them to a place
16 where they have the LINC voucher in hand and they're
17 actively looking for housing in as few hours, even
18 perhaps days, but get that process short-circuited as
19 quickly as possible and perhaps even to a place where
20 since people are now interfacing with us as we're
21 trying to keep them in their housing. We can get
22 that process even started then if we are looking and
23 talking to our attorneys and they're saying, "You
24 know what? We don't know if we can win this one."
25 And we can hopefully get the people on track for

1 housing while we're working with judges around an
2 eviction order in the rare cases that we end up
3 having to lose so that we can just short circuit the
4 shelter process.
5

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think certainly
7 the conversations we have with the courts is that
8 we're providing rent arears more quickly than ever
9 before.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Yeah.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, I don't-- a 25
12 percent increase in the payment of rent arears is
13 reflective of exactly I think what you would want us
14 to be doing which is to make sure that we are
15 processing rent arears payments more quickly. It's
16 one of the reasons why when I first started at HRA in
17 2014, we eliminated the system of processing rent
18 arears checks that every individual HRA center
19 literally having typists type checks and create a
20 central rent processing unit where the checks are
21 issued in the hierarchy of what the checks-- when I
22 first came to the agency the checks were issued upon
23 receipt of the request as opposed to the due date
24 that the judge had established, and so we totally
25 changed around the processing of rent arears payment

1 checks in order to, I think, do what you would want
2 us to do which is to say we're going to turn them
3 around in a central place, not have it be distributed
4 around the City where it's very inefficient, and
5 we're going to do it in a way in which our primary
6 focus is the date that the judge said that the judge
7 wants to--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I
10 think I'm just concerned about how much time people
11 are stuck in the process and the system. So I
12 appreciate just having those numbers and having a
13 chance to sit down and go over making that work flow
14 a little bit more transparent.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Happy to talk with
16 you anytime.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Perfect. So,
18 talking about the automatic benefits legislation,
19 which is why I'm here today. I like the great work
20 you're doing on Access HRA. In your testimony you
21 state, "Make sure the proposed legislation takes into
22 account the great reliance we're placing on online
23 transactions rather than paper transactions." The
24 prior version of the bill included two sections, and
25 F section and a G section. F said it created a

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mandate that unless federal laws or state laws prohibited you, that all the applications actually had to be accepted electronically or by facsimiles, that a provision you'd support putting back into a future version of the bill?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the challenge that we have with any of this right now is that all the things that we're doing through AccessNYC are subject to federal waivers, and so our major focus right now is on making sure that the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in the Congress doesn't impede our ability to continue to do what we're doing now. I recognize the value of doing more than what we're doing now, but our first priority is to make sure that we continue to have the ability to do what we're doing now.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'm going to touch on that in a second.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I think along eh same lines another section that was in the original version of the bill but came out, but we could perhaps put back in if you'd support it, is just creating the universal application system for online.

1
2 And I guess along that same question what I had
3 thought of as-- as you know, I'm a free and open
4 source software developer. So, whether or not you
5 would support having a goal in the legislation for a
6 simplified, single, unified benefits application
7 system, which it appears you're trying to build that
8 access at HRA.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're certainly
10 trying to build that. There are external
11 constraints, I think as you know, and you've been
12 very helpful in trying to address some of them, which
13 is one constraint is the, you know, the Medicaid and
14 food stamp or SNAP application process is separate.
15 This is something we're working on the state with in
16 order to have it be more in line with I know what you
17 would like to see and I would like to see happen.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: With re-- so, I
19 guess, just hoping with our Committee Counsel that we
20 could restore those two pieces. Along the same
21 lines, and so this is interesting, as I, as the
22 younger person. So, I'm really concerned about the
23 digital divide, which is why there is a mandate for
24 printed and paper applications, because I'm concerned
25 about leaving anyone behind and keeping my feet on

1
2 the ground in the physical world. So, I guess to the
3 extent you have any specific language to ensure that
4 we offer things online, but we still continue to
5 provide things for folks off line, because I believe
6 there's a strong nexus between income and poverty
7 levels and access to internet and these types of
8 apps.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. I would say
10 70 percent of our clients are using smartphones now,
11 and that's why we've seen once we created an
12 application in which clients could submit documents
13 to us off of a smartphone and not have to come to our
14 office, and people could submit applications and
15 recertifications online, we've seen, you know, 70-
16 plus percent of applications coming to us online--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] When
18 did the AccessHRA app launch?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Just a couple months
20 ago.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, it's pretty
23 fresh, but you look at the number of accounts we
24 have, which is pretty significant.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'm seeing 5-
3 10,000 downloads on the Android App Store, and so
4 quick thing just for your staff to know, your link is
5 broken right now. So, nyc.gov/accesshra is not
6 working and neither is nyc.gov/accesshraapp. So, the
7 good news is your website is still online, but the
8 vanity URL is not. So, if you can bring that up to
9 DoITT. And you are not the first agency where I have
10 checked whether or not the link worked and found it
11 didn't. So, please do not feel particularly offense.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I won't actually.
13 The meeting that I have after this hearing ends is
14 with the MIS director, just coincidentally, so I
15 appreciate your asking [sic].

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: No worries. I
17 guess along the fact-- so you built this great new
18 app. Is it possible to release that as free and open
19 source and perhaps have an API because we have a lot
20 of folks who are in this space who want to help get
21 people into that system?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. I think what
23 we found when we looked at this the last time, there
24 were some great excited people out in the world that
25 wanted to do this, but then they created applications

1
2 that didn't actually track the federal requirements,
3 and so we started to get lots of applications from
4 clients that didn't meet any requirements.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Would you open up
6 your rules engine to those folks so that they can use
7 your rules instead of trying to figure it out for
8 themselves? Because we're going to hear from like
9 three or four of them who are trying to do their
10 best, but if you release your rule set, they can just
11 use yours instead of figuring it out on their own.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, I'm sure this
13 is a discussion we had here, but the risk here is
14 that a change in the way people submit things to us,
15 I just remember this very vividly that we received a
16 significant number of applications that were
17 improperly submitted. They started a federal time
18 bar for us to have to process them, but we didn't
19 have any information or submission information to
20 process them, and it created a huge work strain on
21 our staff to check, to re--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I
23 think there's an opportunity to work with folks for
24 it to be a better process, and the best way to do it

1
2 is if you give them your rule set. Then they're not
3 using their own rules, they're using yours.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Fair point. I'm
5 going to urge that we don't do anything until the
6 Farm Bill is reauthorized, because I think that might
7 affect--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I
9 have a resolution in order to support that
10 reauthorization. And so I guess oen key thing I
11 noticed on AccessHRA, you have online applications
12 for SNAP, for cash assistance, emergency cash
13 assistance, often referred to as the "one shot deal,"
14 child care in lieu of cash assistance, and Medicaid
15 renewal, which is a prepopulated form, but not
16 actually online. So it looks like you got the
17 technology questions are whether or not we can start
18 adding things like EarlyLearn, Head Start, UPK,
19 COMPASS NYC. On the housing side we've got SCRIE and
20 DRIE, senior citizen and disabled rent increase
21 exemption, which are actually city programs, and
22 whether it's how is that AccessHRA or AccessNYC or a
23 different piece, just getting all of those together
24 on one centralized tool.

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, that's
3 certainly a conversation to have. As you can see,
4 what we've done is anything that we actually
5 administer directly, we've created a uniformed,
6 combined tool for it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: If we can move
8 SCRIE and DRIE on all the-- if we can just-- is there
9 a working group between the different agencies that
10 administer human service benefits?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Access, there's
12 certainly a significant focus on how to address
13 access. Meanwhile, where we can we're building other
14 functionality with rental assistance renewals and so
15 forth to make sure that anything we can do that we
16 directly are operating, we can make accessible
17 online.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Sure.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: In the way that I
20 know you would want us to and that we want to
21 ourselves.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: One set of
23 programs, so we-- people ask me for two things. They
24 ask me for affordable housing and they ask me for a
25 job. I tell that I'm a reformer, so I don't have

1 those patriot jobs to appoint, but they don't seem to
2 be happy about that, but we do have some great jobs
3 that are available through the City whether it's
4 through civil service, but also youth jobs through
5 Summer Youth Employment, in-school youth, out-of-
6 school youth, youth/adult internship program work,
7 learn, grow, and employment program, if those could
8 be integrated into the system along with using the
9 data you have at HRA, AccessHRA to connect it with
10 Housing Connect so that folks can just have
11 everything in one place. I think both of those sets
12 of tools are actually missing from AccessNYC.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, for our-- for
15 HRA clients, which are DHS clients as well, who are
16 participating in work programs, we have internal
17 processes in which we are connecting those clients to
18 jobs. So, I think, you know, we've eliminated WEP.
19 No more WEP program, and we implemented new
20 employment contracts this past April, Career Pathway
21 and Career Advance and Youth Pathway, and through
22 that system we're connecting our own clients to jobs.
23 We also have Text to Work, which we think is-- we
24 urge our clients to participate in our texting
25 service in which we advise clients directly of our

1 available jobs. So, for our own clients we have
2 systems to be advising them of jobs. If your
3 constituents are our clients, we should make sure
4 that you're aware of all the methodologies we have
5 for our clients to get jobs. If they're not our
6 clients, I would love to help them, too, but my first
7 priority is helping the clients that are on our
8 caseload.
9

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And I think this
11 program is about just helping every single New
12 Yorkers get--

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Fair
14 enough.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: the benefit that
16 they need. And so, you touched on in your responses
17 and also in your testimony, "multiple federal and
18 state waivers in response to complex federal and
19 state regulations." I appreciate some of the
20 conversations we've been able to have. Some of the
21 panelists that will be coming after you I'm
22 incredibly grateful because they help facilitate some
23 conversations at the highest level of government.
24 Coming out of that conversation, I collaborated with
25 Gov Lab Robin Hood Foundation, Stewards of Change.

1 We've put together a legal memo that addressed some
2 of the concerns and even made recommendations for the
3 highest levels of government, and I think one of the
4 things that I keep coming to is that I'm not seeing
5 federal and state regulations that prevent some of
6 the things-- prevent this legislation from being
7 enacted. I have guidance from the President of the
8 United States, Barack Obama, an Executive Order
9 13563. I have guidance from the Administration for
10 Children and Families, the Department of Health and
11 Human Services with a report that details every
12 section of law and every regulation that permits it,
13 and many states that do not complain to be as
14 progressive as New York City do far more than we do
15 in New York. There are states where senior citizens
16 just get an EBT card in the mail prefilled. They
17 don't even have to apply. They just get it just like
18 a lot of senior citizens get Medicare, and I think
19 it's one-third of the states that have that. So, I
20 guess one question is just-- we got this memo. If you
21 could review it and commit to respond with specific
22 concerns on any specific laws, regulations or case
23 law on point or let's move forward.
24
25

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. Remember, and
3 I know you were very helpful with this and involved
4 in it, that our provision of benefits is provided
5 through state systems, and I think you're correct to
6 identify different states do different things, and I
7 think it's one of the promising initiatives that we
8 have, the joint effort with local Department of
9 Social Services including New York City with State
10 Office of Temporary Assistance and Disability
11 Assistance to look for ways to consolidate the state
12 systems and take advantage of potential federal money
13 to do that so that we can do some of the things that
14 you would like us to do. But I think as you know, we
15 have to provide benefits through the state WMS system
16 and we have to provide healthcare through the state
17 of health system, and there are very good
18 conversations going on between the city and state
19 about how to do many of the things that you're asking
20 us to do.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Where is the
22 state on integrated eligibility system, IES?

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: They're continuing
24 to move forward with the various components of it.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: How long have we
3 been continuing to move forward on-- have we put it
4 out for RFP in procurement yet?

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I believe that they
6 are close. They've either just done that or close to
7 doing it. I don't have the latest on it, but I'd be
8 happy to tell you where they are. If it was us, I
9 could tell you where we are, but I need to check on
10 where they are.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: It's been three
12 years, five months, 26 days, and 15 hours, 24
13 minutes, and 55 seconds, and I wait with baited
14 breath, but if I was holding my breath I wouldn't be
15 here anymore.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I just have to note
17 for the record that you're not talking about a city
18 agency.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I understand, but
20 if they're not going to do it, maybe as part of our
21 own upgrades to WMS, and if we release it as free and
22 open source, they can just take that code and
23 implement it too without actually additional cost.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, you know,
25 we've made substantial--

1 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] Yes.

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: changes in Access,
3 and we're interested in making more of them, but like
4 with some of the rental assistance bills that are
5 here, we do things in the context of state approvals
6 for different things.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I look forward to
9 working with you and hope to hear from some of our
10 experts that we have here today. I know our Chair has
11 more questions.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
13 Council Member Kallos. Commissioner, so we have
14 about 20 minutes left, I think, before we want to get
15 you out. So, I'll-- we're going to have-- I have
16 more questions than that time allotted, so we'll be
17 sending you follow up questions--

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Sure.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: to those that we don't
20 get to. So, we're going to get to kind of the back
21 end of the family homelessness system, which is the
22 ability to move out of the shelter system. So, we've
23 been now working with the subsidies that this
24 Administration has developed since 2014. I think
25

1
2 LINC's were rolled out late in that year, is that
3 right?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yes, very late in
5 that year.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The average length of
7 stay has gone down relatively little. I'd say, you
8 know, less than 10 percent, right? And it's, you
9 know, it was at-- I think it was at-- the last number
10 that I saw was at 430. So, it's now-- that was last
11 fall it was at 430 and now it's at 709?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: 406, I believe.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 406. It was 427 the
14 day that Bill de Blasio, I think, took office, is
15 that right? Is that--

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'd have to check.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Why does the length
18 of stay persist? Why would it be the-- why would it--
19 - I understand the difficulty in finding apartments,
20 I get that. But why would it be in the same range as
21 before there was even a subsidy program available?
22 So, the day that Bill de Blasio took office there
23 wasn't even a subsidy to get out of shelter. So why
24 would the length of stay be even near where it was
25 then?

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the metrics
3 of the impacts of the rental assistance programs is
4 not length of stay; it's census. So, the census
5 projection was to be 70,000, and--

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Length
7 of stay could be a metric as well. Why isn't length
8 of stay a metric?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, but the
10 primary metric is are people moving out at all, in
11 contrast to 2011 and 2014 when the shelter system
12 increased 38 percent, right? That's a period of time
13 in which the shelter system increased 38 percent.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear you. I hear
15 you.

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But
18 that's not my question. My question is why would the
19 length of-- I mean, the length of stay, why would
20 that persist? If you have a voucher now, if you're
21 in shelter, you have a voucher in hand, why would
22 that-- that should-- that should lower that process.
23 If you're only-- if you're getting out after 90 days,
24 then there's 320 days that you're sitting there with
25 a voucher in hand--

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] People
3 leave shelter without being there for 90 days.
4 People leave shelter after 90 days before they--
5 without moving to an apartment.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: SO, then that would--
7 then those numbers would push--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] And
9 then--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: would push the length
11 of stay down.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We've been very
13 focused on some of the larger families in the shelter
14 system that have been there for a number of years
15 predating the Administration, and recently a number
16 of them have been moving out. We've been very
17 focused on what you would want us to be, on long
18 stayers.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But there's 10--
20 there's 12,000 families in shelter. Right? I mean,
21 we're talking about--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That's
23 right.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, this is an
25 average across the board. I mean, yes, you will have

1
2 outliers that are there for three, four, five, you
3 know, six years. Why is-- I mean, anyway. That is
4 a-- that persistence indicates to me that there's a
5 problem.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think it
7 indicates what I testified to earlier which is that
8 there's a challenge in available housing units in the
9 City, but we're going to keep focusing on what we're
10 focusing on, which is people that are staying there a
11 long time and--

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Alright,
13 but the thing that indicates the problem to me is
14 that it's roughly the same length of stay as when
15 there was no subsidy program, average, there was no
16 subsidy program at all. That, to me, that-- I don't
17 know what that means. It means something.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay. But you would
19 agree with me, I think that that trajectory of growth
20 of the system has changed.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, yeah,
22 absolutely, I agree.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that could be
25 because of the legal services. That could be the

1 fact that we're doing a lot more one-shots. That
2 could be the beefing up of the HomeBase system.

3 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think it's--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] It's
5 not--

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] I
7 think it's all of those things--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Right,
9 but length of stay would be tied to it to move out,
10 which is tied to voucher. So, that's where I want to
11 go next here. So, how many unique families since the
12 establishment of the LINC program, how many unique
13 families have been qualified, have been found
14 qualified for a housing subsidy whether it's LINC or
15 CityFEPS, and if you could only-- if you're counting
16 them once. So, if they're qualifying for multiple
17 programs, a LINC I and a CityFEPS, or a LINC III and
18 a CityFEPS, just counting that family one time, how
19 many families have been found to be qualified?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, I can give you
21 LINC, because the SEPS and CityFEPS programs don't
22 work that way. They work on other methodologies.
23 So, let me give you LINC, unless you--

1 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay,
2
3 well then we're going to have to get to CityFEPS
4 because I want to know about CityFEPS, too, so.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's the point of
6 the hearing. We're having a--

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You're asking
9 questions and I'm trying to--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Gotcha.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: give the answers.
12 So, currently, and I'm going to just sort of-- I want
13 to-- I want you to see what the current picture is.
14 Currently, there are 6,368 households that have been
15 certified for LINC. That's about the number of move-
16 outs that we're-- you know, if you look at the number
17 of move-- I'm going to get to the larger number in a
18 moment, but I just wanted to give you that. The
19 number of move-outs that we got-- the total number of
20 move-outs from all of our programs that we got in FY
21 16 was 8,609 households. The number of move-outs
22 that we've got so far this year in all of our
23 programs 8,860; that's through May. So we have
24 another month to go. So, the numbers of people that
25 have active LINC's or the numbers of households-- this

1
2 is households as opposed to people-- is roughly the
3 number of total move-outs that we get in any given
4 year, less than the total number of move-outs that
5 we--

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Is it
7 8,609 in--

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] 8,609
9 in 16; 8,860--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Calendar
11 Year 16?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, fiscal.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Fiscal 16.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: 8,609--

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Oh, I
16 see, okay. Fiscal-- I see. So, that number is--
17 okay. So that number is roughly the-- it's roughly
18 the same as it was in 16.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, that's not the
20 point I'm making. So, for 11 months it's 8,860, and
21 that's against 12 months at 8,609.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So we have another
24 month to go, but the numbers of people that have--
25 certify for LINC is within that number that we're

1 getting an annual move-out number. It's 6,368 right
2 now.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: These are people that
5 have apartments with--

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] No,
7 these are people that are--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] That
9 8,609 and the 8,860, those are the number of people
10 that found apartments with a LINC voucher?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, those are the
12 number of move-outs that we get. We've given you
13 previously charts giving you how many are each one of
14 the LINC's, CityFEPS, NYCHA, Section 8, SEPS,
15 HomeTBRA, all the different elements of it. Let me
16 keep going with you. I know you have a number of
17 questions. I think I'm going to answer them as I go
18 through this.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So, 8,609 is
20 number of move-outs aggregating all of the--

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing]
22 Correct.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: All of LINC and
24 Section 8 and NYCHA, right?

25 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, all of those
3 things. Even people that move out without a voucher?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Move out with
6 some type of subsidy?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Gotcha, okay.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, let me give you
10 now the total households that moved out with
11 something during the time from as you were asking me
12 around December of 2014. That was-- remember,
13 November 2014 is when we increased the rates. So,
14 from that period of time-- again, we're doing
15 households not people-- 22,686 households.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Of which 5,603 moved
18 into NYCHA, leaving 17,083 households--

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Got it.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: that moved out
21 between the end of 2014 and last month using one of
22 our rental assistance programs.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And during that time--

24 -

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] And
3 during-- I'm going to answer that question, because I
4 know what you're going to ask me. During that time,
5 the total number of LINC, unique LINC, was 24,862.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: People that were found
7 qualified for LINC.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct. Now,
9 people can be found qualified for two things. So,
10 for example, the NYCHA move-outs, one of the
11 priorities we have is working families, right? And
12 one of the LINC programs is for working families.
13 So, the number of people qualified, 24,862, is
14 reflective of the number that we actually moved out
15 during that time, 22,686. By the way, I'm giving you
16 these numbers, and then I want to come back and I
17 think make some of the points that you want to make
18 me focus on, which is this tells one story, and then
19 I think there's other information that I want to
20 have. So, I just wanted to spend this part of
21 answering your question, getting out just the facts.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-hm.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And the facts show
24 you that that particular number qualified for LINC,
25 that particular number of people moved out through

1 any of our programs, but the LINC clients are
2 eligible for multiple programs. For example, LINC
3 III clients are eligible for CityFEPS. LINC I
4 clients are eligible for NYCHA. LINC III clients
5 could be eligible for NYCHA. Some of these families
6 are eligible for-- some of the single adults which is
7 included in all of these numbers are eligible for
8 SEPS as well as for LINC. So, the numbers, the
9 numbers are in roughly equivalency. After this
10 hearing, I'm happy to lay this out in a non-testimony
11 way so you can see the numbers, and we can certainly
12 analyze them together outside of the hearing if
13 that's helpful to you. Let me do the flipside of the
14 challenges that we see. You asked me what do I hear--
15 -
16

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Well,
18 sorry. Well, let me--

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] It's--
20 I want to highlight some problems now with the usage.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, alright. I want
22 to--

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] May I
24 do that or not?
25

1 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I mean, can you
2 hold that thought for a second.

3 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure, as long as you
4 give me an opportunity to give you both numbers and
5 some of the challenges that our clients have
6 [inaudible].

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to focus on
8 some numbers here.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many-- how many--
11 so, of-- during that time you're saying that 24,000
12 people were identified, 24,860 were identified as
13 qualifying for a subsidy, and between all of the
14 subsidies, 22,686 were placed, had found some
15 housing, whether through LINC or through NYCHA, or
16 and SEPS--

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Let me--

18 -

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Well, my
20 point is this--

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Let me
22 put it this way, you had 24,000, roughly 24,000
23 people found eligible for LINC and 22,686 people
24 moved out into some form of subsidized housing, and
25

1 among the LINC families there's an overlap between
2 NYCHA eligibility and LINC families, and some people
3 moved out.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So this is a 90-- so,
6 if you get, if you're found qualified for a LINC,
7 there's a 90-- you're saying there's a 90 percent
8 chance that you're going to get, that you will have
9 gotten an apartment?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's what I wanted
11 to answer your-- that's what I wanted to say that you
12 didn't want me to say yet. So, can I now--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sure.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: give the rest of
15 what I was going to say? There are people that move
16 out even when they're qualified for LINC without
17 moving out into subsidized housing. They are able to
18 reunite with friends and family. They obtained
19 employment that's higher than 200 percent of poverty,
20 so they're not eligible and they-- we give them a
21 four-month rent in advance program that we have for
22 people working over 200 percent of poverty. There are
23 people that have moved into other of these programs.
24 There are people currently still looking in that
25 6,368 number that I gave you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Those are the three--
3 6,368 is the number of?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's included in
5 the 24,862. That's why I didn't want you to just do
6 that 90 percent calculation you did.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 24,862, so that
8 includes 6,000 people that have a--

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] But I
10 want to-- I want to correct. That point in time that
11 we did the 24,862 analysis was before in time when I
12 gave you the 63,686-- 63,--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sixty-
14 eight.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sixty-eight number.
16 Some of the people in the 24,862 are in the 6,368
17 number.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The 6,368 number is?

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Just present current
20 people in the shelter system with a LINC
21 certification.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it, okay. And--

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Meet
24 the eligibility criteria, have been certified for
25 LINC.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So, what I'm
3 having trouble putting together here is we read
4 articles about people that have a LINC voucher, and
5 it ain't working. I have constituents who have
6 either, you know, a LINC, qualified for a LINC
7 voucher, qualified for CityFEPS, and the experience
8 that I hear from them, is like, "I can't find an
9 apartment with this."

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So,--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And
12 then, you know, my office did this Craigslist search
13 and found that in 10 neighborhoods, across 10
14 neighborhoods, you can find seven apartments for a
15 one-bedroom, two-person LINC level, and six
16 apartments for a two-bedroom, three-person CityFEPS
17 level, and you know, my eyes don't deceive me. I
18 mean, like, it is-- and my-- and the people that I'm
19 talking to, like, you know, and your staff knows it,
20 because I call them and I bug them, and I say, "This
21 person's been sitting there since October and has
22 been shown three apartments, and they're all in the
23 Bronx, and her daughter goes to middle school in
24 Brooklyn." Like--

2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] So, let
3 me try to--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I don't
5 get it.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Again, this is-- this
7 hearing you wanted to put some facts on the records,
8 so I'm going to--

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah, I
10 do.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: keep giving you
12 facts, but I want you to allow me to come back and
13 give you the challenges that we see, because you're--
14 I'm giving you facts, and you're appropriately
15 saying, "But wait a minute, there are problems." And
16 I don't--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Just not
18 matching up with my--

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] So,--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] what I'm
21 seeing out there in the real world.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But you need to give
23 me the opportunity--

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I'm
25 listening.

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

COMMISSIONER BANKS: to give you some more facts, and the come back to describe some challenges that our clients have which are real. So, we currently have at DHS-- this is in addition to the staff in the not-for-profit shelters. We have 12-- 13 staff at DHS. I know you know Tracy, because you talk to him as the manager over there.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: All the time.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thirteen specialists that are--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] He's good. I just want to say for the record, Tracy Davis is good.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to tell him that you said that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: He can watch it.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to tell him you said-- actually, I'm going to have you come meet all of his staff, the 12 people, because you're going to say they're all good, too. So, they work, and then there's 123 HRA staff working in a team with that group at DHS.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The Hot Team?

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2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The Hot Team is the
3 one at DHS because that's a team that's really very
4 focused on special relocations. There's a mobile
5 outreach team, MOT, which is at HRA which is very
6 focused in cutting through red tape, dealing with
7 applications problems, dealing with public assistance
8 issues, 123 of these staff. And then we have in our
9 Public Engagement Unit, we have 38 people who are
10 calling for apartments. That leads us--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Who are
12 they calling?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: They're constantly
14 calling through brokers, through landlords. They're
15 using data to try to find people that have
16 apartments. Currently, they're working on 715
17 apartments. That is their workload. That doesn't
18 mean they're all available today. That means their
19 apartments that may become available to us soon.
20 We're inspecting them. They need renovations. They
21 need to be fixed, but that's the workload that we're
22 working with to try to get people connected. The
23 apartments that we find for people, here's the range
24 of communities. In the Bronx, High Bridge and
25 Morrisania, Central Bronx, Hunts Point, Mott Haven,

1
2 Bronx Park, Fordham, Southeast Bronx, Kingsbridge and
3 Riverdale, Northeast Bronx and Brooklyn, Northwest
4 Brooklyn, Flatbush, Borough Park. I love interns. I
5 was one once, but we found apartments in Borough
6 Park. Canarsie, Bushwick and Williamsburg, East New
7 York, and--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]
9 [inaudible] because I looked myself in Bushwick. I
10 couldn't find one in Bushwick.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: you need Tracy to
12 train you how he does it.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm serious [sic].

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to have
15 you sit with Tracy.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can find rooms in
17 Bushwick, like rooms, like one room in four-room-- in
18 a four-bedroom apartment.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're moving out
20 both single adults and families.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's for hipsters.
22 These are like hipsters that say, you know, 900 bucks
23 for a room with my three funky roommates.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll take those
25 rooms for about that amount to move our single adults

1 out. That's how we've moved many of those vets out.
2
3 Bushwick, Williamsburg, East New York, New Lot,
4 Southwest Brooklyn, Green Point, Central Brooklyn,
5 Southern Brooklyn, Sunset Park, in Queens, Northwest
6 Queens, North Queens, Central Queens, West Queens,
7 West Central Queens, Southeast Queens, Jamaica,
8 Southwest Queens, Rockaway and Staten Island,
9 Stapleton, Port Richmond, South shore, Mid-island,
10 Manhattan, Chelsea, Clinton, Lower Eastside, in the
11 Village in SoHo-- obviously not that many there, but
12 we've been able to get some-- Gramercy Park, Upper
13 Westside, Harlem, East Harlem, Inwood, and Washington
14 Heights.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: These are at all
16 LINC--

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Upper
18 Eastside.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: at LINC levels?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They're all at LINC's?
22 So, 10-- so, for a one-bedroom at 1,028 you're able
23 to find apartments in every one of those
24 neighborhoods?

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm not sure where
3 you're getting that number for a one-bedroom. The
4 one-bedroom rent--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] The two-
6 person LINC level.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's 1,268.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For-- that's for
9 CityFEPS.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's for CityFEPS
12 level?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's the-- it's
14 1,268.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We're referring to
16 the rules. I can cite them chapter and verse to you,
17 because we have them right here.

18 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'm going to take a
19 guess how much you're looking for, what-- you're
20 looking for what level?

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm looking at a LINC
22 I and II, household size two, maximum rent 1,028,
23 city rules.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We'll have to take a
25 look at that, because I think there's an issue there.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The maximum rent for
3 CityFEPS, two-person, 1,268.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You're looking at
5 the rules before we enhanced them in November 2014.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, then the official
7 rules haven't been updated. We'll follow up on that.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We published them.
9 They were--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] CityFEPS
11 didn't exist before September 2014 or --

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Then
13 I'm not sure where you're getting that number from,
14 because it's 1,268.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Twelve-sixty-- so,
16 LINC and CityFEPS are the same level?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, look, even a
19 one-bedroom for 1,268 in Bushwick ain't happening.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to now come
21 back--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] In
23 Greenpoint it certainly ain't happening, and I mean,
24 I live in Greenpoint. I know.
25

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I want to come back
3 to what I was going to say before. The point of
4 giving you all this information isn't to have
5 information that says the experience that you've had
6 with your constituents, because you and I have talked
7 about some of them, is wrong. I want to actually
8 address the problems that we're trying to deal with
9 clients. I speak to many clients who say I can't get
10 any landlord to take this. I think you-- if you've
11 seen it, I've been in town halls with the Mayor where
12 people have asked me that very question.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, but, no, and I
14 appreciate that, and I appreciate source of income
15 discrimination. It's real. It's very real. I know
16 it's real. I appreciate the fact that the subsidy
17 ends, there's a finite subsidy, and we have a bill in
18 to address that. I am focused, myself, on the value
19 of the subsidy not meeting the fair market rents or
20 close to the real rents in neighborhoods. And so I'm
21 dubious that there's an apartment out there at 1,268
22 in Greenpoint or in a lot of the neighborhoods that
23 you mentioned, in Chelsea.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, you know, I'm
25 under oath. So, I'm giving you information that we

1
2 have, and the information is because we've got a ton
3 of person-power looking for apartments. Having said
4 that, I want to come back to the point I wanted to
5 make before which is I've spoken to many clients in
6 the shelter system and at town halls who raise issues
7 around landlords not taking the vouchers, and that's
8 why we've invested the resources to create a new
9 unit. We've just hired a terrific director Ranise
10 Medley [sp?], and I can tell you we're already
11 starting to see a benefit. So, for example, we had a
12 couple of cases that came to us where the landlord
13 wouldn't accept the security voucher; wanted cash.
14 That's a form of source of income discrimination. As
15 a result of her intervention, a landlord who controls
16 more than 300 units now understands that he has to
17 accept our programs. So we're going to keep working
18 with any clients. We have the leaflets. For us, we
19 want to know specific landlord or specific broker and
20 specific apartments, and we are going to be enforcing
21 that. In the primary testimony that I gave, you
22 know, the Human Rights Commission filed five
23 complaints that involve landlords of 20,000
24 apartments in this city. That's a significant impact
25 potentially through the prosecution of those

1
2 complaints, and you know, we provide a lot of support
3 to Housing Works in the litigation that they've
4 brought, challenging the failure to take our HASA
5 vouchers. We continue to be available to do that.
6 So, I want to be clear in presenting this information
7 to you, that on the one hand we put a lot of
8 resources into identifying units. We've moved out a
9 lot of people into them. At the same time, we're
10 hearing from clients and providers about problems,
11 and we're stepping up our enforcement to address
12 that. The issue that you're raising about rent
13 levels I think is a different issue.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It is.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And it really relates
16 to, you know, the issue that I described in my
17 testimony which is for many your State FEPS was at a
18 level that this committee and others highlighted that
19 the amounts were less than what market was. The
20 1,050 was the amount for a family of three to four
21 for State FEPS, and as you know, we set CityFEPS at
22 higher levels, and we set LINC. LINC originally was
23 set at 1,200 dollars and the state allowed us to go
24 up to 1,515, which we did. The City made up the
25 difference. Now, there's been a settlement in

1
2 litigation against the state by the Legal Aid Society
3 that challenged the FEPS amounts, and now the FEPS
4 amounts have been brought up to the same levels as
5 the LINC and CityFEPS levels. Our current programs,
6 and this goes to really the other piece, the other
7 part of the legislation, about how long you could
8 receive them. Our current programs, two of them are
9 state-approved. LINC I and LINC II are state-approved
10 programs, and rent levels, eligibility levels, all of
11 those are subject to state approval. A question that
12 I have, and I think it's for the committee to
13 consider, is having a city programs that are set at
14 different levels than state programs we think will
15 not have a positive effect on the system, not to
16 mention the [inaudible].

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you believe that
18 the subsidy level as they exist right now are
19 adequate?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Look, we are
21 continuing through the process that we said we would
22 do, which is to streamline the programs. We started-
23 - I'm going to answer your question, but it's part of
24 the same issue. In looking at six LINC programs and
25 two FEPS or SEPS programs, we started them because we

1
2 didn't want a one-size-fits-all. Now, we're
3 streamlining them all. We're obviously looking at
4 how they operate, and rent levels is an issue we're
5 looking at.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I mean, at the
7 moment, do you-- do you believe that they're
8 adequate, sufficient to meet the needs within the
9 system.

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We're finding
11 substantial numbers of apartments. We're always
12 anxious to do more, and as part of the streamlining
13 process we're going to look at the issues raised by
14 the bills. We think that-- you know, you introduce
15 the bills and they raise serious issues, and we're
16 going to take a look at them in the streamlining
17 process.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I'm going to--
19 I'm dubious. I'm dubious. So, we're going to
20 continue to look at this.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You're dubious of
22 whether we actually found the apartments?

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm dubious that it's
24 efficient amount--

1 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] That--
2
3 that's--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And that
5 it-- and that, you know, it can't be that like just
6 my constituents are the ones that can't find
7 apartments with LINC.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, and I, again, I--

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] To me,
10 that seems-- that seems unusual to me.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And like,-- and oh,
13 the other question I have is of the-- okay, 63,068
14 people in the shelter system today that have been
15 found qualified for LINC voucher, that's the 63,068
16 number, right?

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's the number of
18 people, not households who have been moved out
19 through the various programs, 62,158.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are the ones that are
21 in shelter--

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Those
23 are people--

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: today.

25 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: My question is this,
3 the people that are in shelter today--

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] 63,068,
5 I'm sorry. I apologize.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright, 63,068. Do
7 they all have a housing specialist that they're
8 working with that are-- that they have a relationship
9 with that are-- and that they're finding apartments
10 for those people?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As part of the model
12 budgeting process, we want to make sure that every
13 location has a housing specialist. Every location
14 that's a Tier II should, but it's something that we--
15 that we're very interested in looking at during the
16 model budget process to make sure that-- I think the
17 underlying issue you're raising that people have.
18 You came to Tracy centrally because of--

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] I was
20 bugging the heck out of you guys.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, but out of
22 dissatisfaction with things that were happening
23 locally. But I want to come back to your--
24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] But
3 also, I mean, I just-- I have a constituent who has
4 been in a different type of shelter.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I was talking to that
7 person, and the last time they saw an apartment was
8 like in October, and then I started bugging you guys,
9 and then in like a-- you know, then they came to him
10 with another apartment, but it's been-- it'd been
11 like six months since they've seen an apartment.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Can I answer a
13 question you asked earlier? You said it's not-- you
14 asked rhetorically, "It's not just my constituents
15 that have-- it couldn't just be my constituents that
16 have these problems." I don't want you to take
17 anything away from my testimony that would imply that
18 that's what I think. We have clients throughout the
19 system who have challenges, and--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] These
21 people don't have any specific challenges other than
22 they can't find an apartment.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, challenges in--
24 no, that's the challenge. That's what I said when
25 you asked me what is the most common thing that I

1
2 hear, it's that I don't want to be shelter; I want to
3 find an apartment. So, I don't want you to glean
4 from the statistics and data that we're giving you,
5 that we don't think we can do better; we do, and it's
6 one of the reasons why in particular we're
7 streamlining the programs. We're going to take a
8 look at the issues raised by the legislation, and
9 we've also put in place a new source of income unit,
10 which we're already starting to see some impact from.
11 So, that's our way of hearing from you as Chair of
12 this committee saying, look, I'm calling you because
13 I'm experiencing that my constituents are having
14 problems, and our response to that is to say, okay,
15 we're really pushing very hard in getting a lot of
16 people out, but at the same time, as part of
17 streamlining we're going to take a look at the issues
18 that you as the Chair have raised, and we're going to
19 redouble our efforts on source of income
20 discrimination because we've heard that issue from
21 lots of clients.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I also want to
23 reiterate that living in shelter sucks, and so
24 that's-- I mean, I think that-- I mean, you can live
25 in a WIN shelter, right? Nobody wants-- nobody wants

1
2 to be there, nobody. We have to also be looking at
3 improving people's experience and making sure-- I
4 mean, just because you mentioned going back to that
5 people's main complaint is that there's not-- they
6 can't find an apartment. Yes, that's a big
7 complaint, but I want to make sure that I'm
8 reiterating here that the complaint that we also hear
9 is that it is a terrible, terrible experience to live
10 in shelter.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Understood. We think
12 the investment at 200 million dollars and our shelter
13 providers through the model budget project process
14 and adding social workers will address some of those
15 very real concerns the clients raise with us.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I have one final
17 question here, and it has to do with eligibility
18 rates. So, from April 2016 to April 2017, the
19 average percentage of families that applied for
20 shelter were deemed-- that were deemed eligible--
21 sorry, that it was a high of 55 percent in May of 16
22 and a low of 29 percent in April of 17. So,
23 obviously, wide fluctuation in rates. It obviously
24 seemed that many-- that's a huge reduction in the
25 percentage of people deemed eligible. Why is that?

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: There was a change
3 in-- after a 2015 change in eligibility rates-- I'm
4 sorry, change of eligibility rules, we worked with
5 the state to implement a revision to eligibility in
6 2016 which essentially restored the eligibility rate
7 to what its historic level had been. Previously, the
8 City had been able to investigate fully to see if
9 families could recently be reunited in the community,
10 and the revision that the state made in 2016 enables
11 the City to return to conduct that kind of full
12 investigation of whether families can viably make
13 other arrangements so that we can best reconnect them
14 with available and viable housing options, family or
15 friends, for example, to achieve solutions that
16 permit them to remain in permanent housing in the
17 community. The eligibility rate is about 42 percent
18 today, and that's consistent with past rates.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, April 17's rate
20 of 29.5 is-- that wasn't the rate in April?

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We look at the rate
22 overtime. You're looking at a snapshot in particular
23 months. So, the eligibility rate is approximately 42
24 percent today, and that's what it's been
25 historically. The change occurred between December

1
2 2015 and December 2016 when there were two changes in
3 the state administrative director with respect to
4 eligibility for shelter. First change in 2015 made
5 one change, and then working with the state it was
6 revised back in 2016.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Were those changes
8 made at the request of the City?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The change back was
10 made at the request of the City because we did not
11 feel that we had the ability to use our prevention
12 tools in the same way that we had hoped that we would
13 be able in terms of reuniting people with family and
14 friends.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, but you don't
16 dispute that point in time April 16, 50.3 percent--
17 sorry. April of 16, 48.3 percent and May of-- April
18 17-- I'm sorry. May of 16, 55 percent, and April of
19 17, 29.5 percent? Even if it average-- even if it
20 averages out to 42 percent, that that is a
21 fluctuation of point in time, right? And you know,
22 one year-- same month, basically or same time of
23 year, one year over the other.

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think the most
25 accurate way for me to answer your question is,

1 before December 2015, there was one approach, then
2 there was the change in state policy, and that
3 continued to be in place from December 2015 until
4 December 2016. And so if you looked at eligibility
5 rates in that period of time, they would be different
6 than the eligibility rates before December 2015, and
7 after--

8
9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Higher,
10 higher? They'd be higher.

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Correct.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, they're lower
13 now.

14 COMMISSIONER BANKS: That's correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And they're going to
16 continue to be lower.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: They'll be
18 continuing to remain at the historic levels that they
19 had been at, and that particular year the rates were
20 higher.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is that a good thing?
22 I mean, do we-- we want-- basically, what we're
23 saying is that more families are being turned away at
24 PATH than they were a year ago?

1
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think that I
3 would look at it differently. As you know, I'm very
4 familiar with eligibility issue. I litigated about
5 eligibility for many years in this city. I think the
6 change that was made back gave us the ability to
7 provide more prevention tools than we were able to
8 before they were changed back. The rules, the change
9 in rules between December 2015 and December 2016
10 limited the ability to have solutions other than
11 shelter like paying, providing money for people to
12 remain in the community, for example.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Last issue and
14 I'll let you go. You don't even have to answer this.
15 But the City does not have an agency-- you talk about
16 rent stabilized housing and rent stable-- losing a
17 rent stabilized housing stock. There are a lot of
18 units that we lose illegally, because landlords are
19 taking units out of rent stabilization. Either
20 they've overcharged over the years or they've--
21 they're doing it in some fashion illegally. The City
22 does not have an agency focused on identifying those
23 units. We don't have oversight because that's a
24 state issue at DHCR, but we're-- if we don't-- if
25 we're not proactive, if we don't identify which units

1
2 are being lost and when they're being lost and how
3 they're being lost, then ultimately, you know, we
4 bear some responsibility. So, it's our-- we should
5 be working with I don't know whether it's HPD or some
6 other investigative unit to identify those units when
7 they're being lost. If we have to, you know, have a
8 big press conference instead of DHCR and say, you
9 know, put these units back into rent stabilization,
10 then we need to do that, but we also bear some
11 responsibility in not being able to identify them.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think you're
13 right to point out that rent stabilization is
14 administered by the state Homes and Community Renewal
15 Agency, and but on the other hand, I just want to
16 highlight for the record, and we're going to have HPD
17 here I guess in the fall, but that HPD and HCR and
18 the Attorney General are in a partnership and a
19 taskforce to address exactly the issue that you're
20 raising. And so there's been enforcement activities
21 that HPD State HCR and Attorney General have been
22 involved in to address landlords who have been
23 improperly removed, units from rent stabilization.
24 The numbers that I gave, the loss of 100-- net of

1
2 150,000 that was-- predates the current
3 administration.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Commissioner, I
5 kept you three minutes longer than I was supposed to,
6 so you can go. Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We're going to call
9 the first panel up: Beth Noveck, Rob Rodrick [sp?],
10 Andre Moniea [sp?], and John Robertson. Okay, you
11 can go ahead.

12 BETH SIMONE NOVECK: Is this on? Great.
13 Thank you very much. I am really delighted and
14 honored to be here today to speak in support of 855A,
15 the process of applying for assistance. My name, as
16 was already announced, is Professor Beth Simone
17 Noveck. I am both a Professor at NYU and the head of
18 its Governance Lab, and I also was formerly the
19 Deputy CTO of the United States and head of Open
20 Government under President Obama. So, I wanted to
21 come out today to say that if this bill is enacted it
22 has the potential to begin to help New Yorkers. It's
23 a first step in the direction of helping those most
24 in need of public assistance to receive the benefits
25 for which they are eligible, and thus, improve their

1 standard of living and help to begin to lift people
2 out of poverty or near poverty and at the same time
3 decrease administrative burden on the cost--
4 administrative burden and cost on the City. So, I
5 only have a few minutes today to speak to you. so
6 that's what I've done, is I've prepared and hopefully
7 entered into the record a memorandum dated December
8 17th, 2017, that I collaborated in drafting along
9 with a short article that I published in Governing
10 Magazine also around the same time. Both lay out in
11 detail the case for and the argument in favor of so-
12 called automatic benefits or these efforts to use new
13 technology to simplify the delivery of benefits by
14 reducing and simplifying benefit collection. So,
15 both of them explain how through cutting red tape we
16 could create more efficient, more data-driven, and
17 more human government. So, I want to introduce them
18 into the record to also show that the bill that's
19 before you today, as you know, was introduced more
20 than two years ago, and has been intentionally
21 delayed in order to develop a practical and
22 incremental strategy for implementation, the one that
23 you see before you today. The bill is very
24 important, because it's estimated, as you know better
25

1 than I, that 1.7 million New Yorkers are receiving
2 SNAP benefits, but that number represents only 72.5
3 percent of those who are eligible. That means that
4 at least 600,000 New Yorkers are eligible to receive
5 snap benefits who aren't already doing so, and beyond
6 that, of course, countless other benefits to which
7 people don't even know they are entitled and which
8 they are not accessing. The reason is, I think, that
9 we need to reduce the burden that people face and the
10 stigma that they face involved in obtaining benefits.
11 So, by requiring the use of data the government is
12 already collecting, we can simplify the process of
13 determining if public assistant recipients actually
14 qualify for additional forms of public assistance at
15 the time that they apply for one benefit, and
16 prefilling those forms using information, again,
17 already provided. The bill takes in this way an
18 important first step to reimagining how government
19 thinks about and administers public assistance
20 programs. So, if the bill goes forward from
21 committee and beyond, then New York would be taking a
22 step really to catch up with other states. This was
23 already mentioned earlier today, and I won't go into
24 the detail that's laid out further in writing in the
25

1 testimony, but in fact, we're doing-- we would be
2 doing that which Louisiana already does, that which
3 South Carolina already does, that which California
4 already does in enabling automatic, if you will, pre-
5 filling of forms, automatic renewal of benefits, and
6 simplification of the process. Applications for
7 SNAP, for Medicaid-- is that my timing? Is that what
8 that means? Oh, I didn't know how formal the two
9 minutes was. So, let me just end on that and turn it
10 over to my colleagues then, and submit this into the
11 record, and simply end by saying that I think this is
12 a very important first step in making it easier for
13 people to obtain their benefits in a step that I hope
14 you will take. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's two minutes and
17 30 seconds. So, that's for everyone's edification.

18 BETH SIMONE NOVECK: Edification. I
19 stand duly edified, and I will leave you the other
20 five and a half minutes' worth of reading to do on
21 your own then. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

23 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic]

24 BETH SIMONE NOVECK: Thank you. I'll
25 wait the few more minutes to hear my colleagues.

1
2 ROBERT RODERICK: Hello. Sorry. My
3 name's Robert Roderick. I'm a Product Leader at
4 Intuit. We're the parent company of Turbo Tax,
5 QuickBooks and Mint.com [sic]. Two years ago we set
6 out to build a new product called Benefit Assist
7 where we would take your tax data and automatically
8 overlay it onto government assistance forms, but we'd
9 also do an important key step which was helping users
10 to identify that they were eligi-- they may be
11 eligible for these benefits. So, it was something
12 that we designed that would be free for consumers and
13 free for government agencies. One of the things that
14 we found in our research was the number one reasons
15 people in Turbo Tax didn't apply for these benefits
16 was they didn't know they qualified. They were
17 paying taxes. They had a job. They didn't realize
18 they may be eligible for the benefits. The second
19 reason is they didn't know where to go apply or how
20 to apply. The third main reason is the application
21 is too difficult and time consuming. There were
22 questions I myself could not even understand, and
23 with Turbo Tax we did a really good job at taking
24 very complicated documents and simplify them to make
25 it easier to answer. In 2015, we had one million,

1 over one million US tax payers use our Benefit Assist
2 tool across all 50 states. We also added software
3 tools such as taking a picture of your paycheck to
4 make verification of income easier on state agencies.
5 In total, we actually facilitated over 1.5 billion in
6 user benefits across all 50 states, and that was over
7 a three-month time period, basically tax season.
8 With the roll out of the tool, we decided that it was
9 a better fit to be in government agencies' hands. So
10 we, working with Ben Kallos, we were able to open
11 source the software and gift it to the government,
12 and we're also-- Intuit stands by wanting to help any
13 government agencies that want to integrate into the
14 tool for future use. One thing I would note is one
15 of the biggest things we felt for agencies is having--
16 - when updates to rules or compliance comes out it
17 takes us months for them to update their systems. We
18 built a configuration that in 30 seconds we can
19 update the eligibility requirements with our tool
20 that's available in the open source software. So,
21 what used to take months to update now can be done in
22 seconds with [sic] we had the eligibility rules that
23 we do need to update with. So, with that, I'll end
24
25

1
2 my statement, because I have 15 seconds here, but
3 thank you.

4 ANDRE MONAIT: Alright, good afternoon,
5 Chairperson Levin, members of the--

6 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic]

7 ANDRE MONAIT: Okay. So good afternoon.
8 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the
9 proposed legislation 855. I'm Andre Monait [sp?].
10 I'm an Assistant Director at Family Health Centers
11 for NYU Langone. For those who are unfamiliar, for
12 50 years, the Family Health Center has been a staple
13 in the Sunset Park, Southwest Brooklyn communities.
14 Through the years we have grown from one health
15 center to nine primary care locations providing
16 medical, dental and behavioral care, over 30 school-
17 based health centers and dental clinics, a community
18 medicine program that serves over 7,000 homeless New
19 Yorkers within shelters and a myriad of social
20 support services catering to the needs of over
21 100,000 Health Center patients. Working at the
22 Family Health Centers for over five years and living
23 within its service areas, I have seen the tremendous
24 impact that the Health Center has had on the most
25 vulnerable population, the children, the homeless,

1 the poor, the unemployed. Last year, approximately
2 80 percent of our patient population was 200 percent
3 below the federal poverty level; 70 percent were 100
4 percent and below. Though providing the best care to
5 these patients is our mission, we know it's not
6 enough. The Family Health Center's Outreach and
7 Enrollment Team may successfully enroll patients in
8 Medicaid, but it doesn't address the needs that
9 affect them and their families, particularly amongst
10 the homeless population. Barriers like unstable
11 housing, food security, unemployment, or low-paying
12 jobs and low educational attainment all pay a
13 significant impact to our patient, access to care,
14 and engagement in their own health. Going to the
15 doctor is simply not a priority. When a patient is
16 in an unstable environment and not paying attention
17 to one's health can lead to unnecessary
18 hospitalization, severe illnesses, chronic disease,
19 all of which we know commonly affect the poor and low
20 income. Many local, state and federal government
21 assistance programs offer the opportunity to tackle
22 these barriers. Many of them have been created to
23 help people get on their feet to forge a stable
24 environment for my fellow New Yorkers. But
25

1
2 unfortunately, people of the communities we serve
3 often know very little about these programs, as
4 navigating through the system is somewhat difficult,
5 and many rely on word-of-mouth. And to find out
6 whether or not they're even eligible is another
7 mystery amongst our patients. The Family Health
8 Center supports this legislation today because it
9 ensures people will be notified of their eligibility
10 requirements, and it will provide the basic necessity
11 of transparency with government programs.

12 JOHN ROBERTSON: Good afternoon. I'm
13 John Robertson from Columbia University School of
14 Social Work. I was invited here by Council Member
15 Kallos today. I wanted to start by commending the
16 Council for taking this direction. For two
17 generations public benefits in America have been
18 based on fraud prevention instead of eligibility and
19 getting people-- assuring the benefits people need.
20 We have a democratic process that decides what
21 benefits people have a right to, and then we figure
22 out ways to keep people from accessing them. And so,
23 the steps that would cause HRA and the City to become
24 proactive in delivering benefits to clients rather
25 than to restrict benefits are very important. I've

1 worked for over 35 years in Bushwick and Ocean Hill
2 with many different kinds of folks. These-- lately,
3 I've been working with frail elderly people who get
4 very complicated forms from Medicaid and from food
5 stamps and from HEAP and from housing renewal voucher
6 pieces with people who have limited sight, who have
7 limited cognitive ability, and they're expected to
8 continue to refill out these forms without annual
9 renewal, a simply unified annual renewal. So, I
10 think that moving towards some kind of centralized
11 and organized renewal and eligibility process would
12 be vital. I think it's going to cost the City in
13 staff development. We at the moment have eligibility
14 workers whom on the whole only understand in the most
15 limited way what eligibility is and have to go to
16 supervision for almost question beyond that. And so
17 for people to understand eligibility for HEAP for
18 food stamps and for Medicaid and for housing programs
19 and for WIC and TANF, it's going to require
20 investment in the eligibility workers that work for
21 city agencies. Finally, I'd like to say that this
22 initiative needs to include NYCHA and ACS and HHC and
23 the Department of Corrections, all of whom play a
24 role in giving people access to benefits. Thanks.
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you for
3 tremendous testimony. With regards to the work of
4 Gov Lab, in terms-- why is Gov Lab specifically
5 interested in this? How can we use data to have
6 better governance, and why can some states do it, but
7 New York can't?

8 BETH SIMONE NOVECK: Well, I would say
9 there's no reason that New York can't do it. In fact,
10 to the contrary. There is every reason that New York
11 as other states have done should be in the business
12 of using the data that it already collects from the
13 forms people fill out that are already stored in
14 databases in the City to use that, obviously, to
15 prefill forms to make-- to prefill renewal
16 applications, and eventually I hope and where this
17 legislation should be going is in direction of making
18 the delivery of benefits through the kind of means
19 testing that software like Intuit has developed make
20 possible the ability to then deliver benefits
21 automatically where they are owing to people so that
22 they never have to go through the described process
23 of filling out forms, especially not lengthy and
24 complicated forms. It should be something that we
25 can take care of for people, and the reason to do

1 that is not simply to enable the delivery of benefits
2 and decrease the stigma of doing so, but to decrease
3 cost administered burden for the City. So, Gov Lab
4 is interested not only because we care about the
5 social justice issues at the root of this question,
6 but because we care about how government uses data
7 and technology to in fact streamline the delivery of
8 services to people.
9

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And in terms of
11 your-- you as a resource in Gov Lab, as the resources
12 limited to just me as a Council Member or if the
13 Commissioner of Department of Social Services calls
14 you tomorrow, would Gov Lab be available?

15 BETH SIMONE NOVECK: Council Member, I
16 hate to disappoint you, but you're not that special.
17 We are very happy to be helpful to anybody who needs.
18 Gov Lab is both a think-tank and a do-tank. We work
19 directly with public institutions at every level of
20 government helping people to develop the ideas and to
21 develop the practice of using technology in new ways.
22 So, it's an area where we at Gov Lab, which is part
23 of NYU, like our colleagues at Columbia, I'm sure are
24 very happy to be of use here and to provide whatever
25 assistance that we can in helping to identify the

1
2 practicalities of how to implement this in practice,
3 because I think that's the big mystery here that a
4 lot of people have, that it could be difficult to do
5 the answer. It's not. It is very doable even with
6 legacy systems. So, happy to take that offline and
7 talk about the details of the implementation.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Perfect. Thank
9 you. I'd like to excuse you, if you wish. So, my
10 question first to our guest from Intuit. Which
11 office are you working out of, and how far did you
12 travel for this hearing?

13 ROBERT RODERICK: I'm currently out of
14 the-- actually our headquarter is in Mountain View,
15 California, and so I came from San Francisco last
16 night, and I'm leaving shortly after this meeting.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Well, thank you
18 very much for coming all this way. Why-- so, how
19 did-- how did Intuit even come to Benefit Assist?
20 And how many folks did we end up finding who didn't
21 already have benefits?

22 ROBERT RODERICK: Great question. So,
23 our founder of Intuit, Scott Cook, actually has been
24 his key piece where over 30 years he's wanted to
25 develop a system where it truly just gives back to

1 our customers, and to that commitment part of it was
2 how can we help the customers that need it the most
3 using our Turbo Tax software. And so to, you know,
4 not only for customers using our software, but we
5 also did BenefitAssist.com, so you didn't even need
6 to be a Turbo Tax or Intuit customer to be able to
7 use our benefits, Benefit Assist engine. Your second
8 question, it's approximately a little over-- excuse
9 me-- approximately a little over a million people in
10 2015 that we found benefits for and helped facilitate
11 the-- filling out the application and sending it to
12 the appropriate agency across all 50 states. Now, we
13 were limited in our ability to be able to understand
14 what happens after the application comes back, which
15 was our ongoing work to partner with government
16 agencies to close that gap and to better build our
17 software.

18
19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so, the
20 Commissioner,-- the Commissioner and I went back and
21 forth. So you've developed your own rules engine
22 based on reading their paper rules, their regulations
23 they write in legal ease. If tomorrow Department of
24 Social Services and the City of New York made their
25 rules engine available, would there be any difference

1
2 between how their system processed applications and
3 rules from how yours would if you were using the same
4 rules?

5 ROBERT RODERICK: So, if I understand
6 your question correctly, the short answer would be--
7 there should be no difference, and part of that is we
8 took the rules that were all publicly available to
9 us, meaning we took every application from the state
10 and also the federal level and made sure to
11 incorporate as much as we could to our knowledge into
12 the system. So, to answer your question, yes, it
13 should be a one-to-one parallel with what's publicly
14 available to us.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so, how many
16 hours, or what would you be-- estimate your-- the
17 number of hours that Intuit invested into Benefit
18 Assist.

19 ROBERT RODERICK: It's tens of thousands
20 of dollars, I would say, because of the amount of
21 teams. We had an entire team that went through every
22 single application across all 50 states and contacted
23 every single local agency available for benefits to
24 make sure all the information we had in our system
25

1
2 was compiled across all 50 states. So, it was a very
3 large effort on Intuit's part.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I never ask this
5 question. I'm sorry I'm curious. Which took more
6 time, the code or discerning the regulations?

7 ROBERT RODERICK: The regulations was
8 actually the eight months of work. The actual code
9 only took us about two months total once we
10 understood what we needed to do.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: How many
12 developers did you have working on it?

13 ROBERT RODERICK: Three.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, and so if New
15 York City wanted to do that, would we have to pay
16 Intuit for it to take your software and your
17 intellectual property?

18 ROBERT RODERICK: No, we've opened
19 sourced it. So, it's 100 percent free to use, and
20 we've also, Intuit has stated that publicly that we'd
21 be more than happy to assist in the integration of
22 that system.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, tomorrow if
24 Department of Social-- so, it's available. I have
25 downloaded. I have looked at it. If tomorrow,

1 Department of Social Services for the City or New
2 York State or another jurisdiction in the city, state
3 or another country said we want to use this, I'm the
4 only one who gets it, right?
5

6 ROBERT RODERICK: No, it is free and open
7 to anyone. We wanted to encourage anybody that wants
8 to use it to use it. That is something we definitely
9 didn't want to have behind closed doors at Intuit.
10 We wanted to gift it to anyone that wants to use the
11 engine now for these benefits.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: DO you recall the
13 URL if somebody wants to download it because they're
14 watching it at home or if they want to test it out?

15 ROBERT RODERICK: I, unfortunately, I
16 don't have it with me off the top of my head, but I
17 can send you the repository link.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I believe it's on
19 a good [sic] hub [sic] depository [sic] hosted by the
20 Federal Government at the Medicaid-- my office-- the
21 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid is part of a larger
22 conglomerate group of software, and so I think last
23 but just certainly not least I just want to thank you
24 for making the code available to everyone and
25 encourage other folks to deal with it. I want to

1
2 move on to the-- and just thank you for your
3 collaboration. I think one of the concerns I had
4 when we started was could we build an infrastructure
5 that could process this many benefits, and the answer
6 is not only yes, but now the code is free for anyone
7 to change it. I looked at it. The code is more
8 elegant than perhaps-- I thought it was more
9 beautiful than the Grand Canyon. I did not cry when
10 I saw the Grand Canyon. I cried when I saw their
11 code. I want to thank NYU Langone for testifying.
12 Help me understand this. So, in your testimony
13 you're saying that medical care just isn't enough and
14 that people actually have other problems that affect
15 their health?

16 ANDRE MONAIT: It's not affecting their
17 health, but their-- I mean, it-- honestly it does.
18 If you don't have a stable place to live, then your
19 priority is actually not coming to the doctor, it's
20 securing your housing. It's having-- if you don't
21 have a place for your daughter to go to daycare, then
22 your priority is being home with your daughter as
23 opposed to going to the doctor. It just presents
24 itself as barriers, not that they don't know that
25 might have a health issue that need to take care of,

1
2 but it's, you know, do they have the opportunity to
3 do so.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: In terms of-- I'm
5 a big advocate on food and health. Is there any link
6 that NYU has found or that you're studying or
7 interested in studying between the impacts of having
8 access to food and SNAP and whether or not folks are
9 able to make healthy choices in terms of eating,
10 because you've got 1,000 calories here, but it's got
11 high fat, high sodium and it's in a can, but there's
12 300 calories over there, but it's healthy calories
13 that might be more?

14 ANDRE MONAIT: I mean, we do, you know,
15 health education to all of our patients and we
16 counsel them on nutrition as well. Sometimes making
17 that choice as easy as that. Some of our patients
18 lack the knowledge. You know, we serve an area of
19 many immigrants. We have, you know, Chinese,
20 Spanish, you know, Arabic population. They all--
21 they're more culturally in tune as opposed to, you
22 know, what is the correct way to eat healthy. So,
23 you know, try telling a Chinese person not to eat
24 white rice and have them, you know, eat brown rice
25 instead. Sometimes-- it's very difficult to make

1
2 that change in their behavior. It's because cultural
3 norms are more valuable to our patients as opposed
4 to, you know, what's right to eat and what's not. We
5 are studying our population in different aspects. We
6 are working with the School of Population Health to
7 do some studies on how we can help them, but you
8 know, we do have these things that held us back.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: If this
10 legislation were passed, would that allow you to
11 offer people additional benefits beyond Medicaid
12 through your services?

13 ANDRE MONAIT: So, it would allow our
14 patients to-- yes, it would. It would link
15 especially our homeless population. We have outreach
16 and enrollers that go there to help enroll them in
17 Medicaid, but they, you know, they're very-- they
18 don't know, you know, what else they're eligible for.
19 They don't know the opportunities that they have.
20 This would allow them to be knowledge of what is out
21 there for them, what they can take advantage of, what
22 they qualify for, whether or not they're eligible,
23 and not just for the homeless, for a lot of our low
24 income population as well. They are not aware, you
25 know. They only know what they hear at, you know,

1
2 their community centers. They only know what they
3 hear from their friends, their neighbors, and they
4 are not reaping the benefit that they can.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And so I want to
6 thank Doctor Robertson for being here and testifying
7 and actually putting a point on it about fraud
8 prevention. So, do you have any concerns that if we
9 actually had everyone's information and we used their
10 tax information or their benefits information that
11 perhaps somebody who is very low income, but was
12 perhaps was at 201 percent of the poverty line
13 instead of 200 percent might be getting it, and
14 doesn't that just-- keeping that one person from
15 having their benefits when they shouldn't because
16 their one percent over the poverty line, doesn't that
17 justify stopping 600,000 New Yorkers from not having
18 SNAP?

19 JOHN ROBERTSON: Council Member, I think
20 that when you have 28 different systems with all
21 kinds of different paperwork and many, many different
22 approaches, what you do is give the hustler the
23 opportunity and people who are looking to game the
24 system game it. I think that by rationalizing it and
25 pulling it together, you actually have a much more

1
2 honest conversation with the people that are
3 applying. And I teach this all the time, if we keep
4 food stamp fraud down to one and a half percent where
5 it is right now, we're doing better than any other
6 fraud organization in the country. So, every time
7 there's money around, there are people to hustle the
8 system. The question is, is it improved by creating
9 all of these very obscure and different processes
10 that make no sense? But while I have the mic,
11 there's something that I would like to pitch about,
12 and that is that when you're doing electronic
13 accessing with clients that are not electronically
14 capable, we really need fingerprint pass points.
15 Because if I'm a social worker working with someone
16 and I have to open the account whether it's with
17 Medicare or Social Security or with New York City,
18 I'm sitting with someone and we need to create a
19 password that is unique to them and that they have
20 control over. And so I would like push the people
21 I'm talking to right here, I'm talking to, getting
22 some password, fingerprint passwording [sic] for
23 this.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, first, thank
25 you for answering the question. Second, just for

1
2 anyone who is watching who may not know me, my
3 question was actually, I was taking the Devil's
4 Advocate position. I don't actually agree with that-
5 -

6 JOHN ROBERTSON: [interposing] I got that,
7 yeah [sic].

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: what I had said.
9 I will just-- I know that there are some concerns in
10 the privacy community about using fingerprints as
11 passwords, and then what can be done with that
12 information. There's also new technology where folks
13 take pictures and then pull the fingerprints off
14 people. That's fine. But I will just simply it and
15 ask our resident tech expert from Intuit, just in his
16 expert capacity as a technologist whether or not it
17 would be possible to build account around a
18 fingerprint that could actually be swiped on a phone
19 like so?

20 ROBERT RODERICK: Yeah. The actual
21 technology to actually swipe it, you could, but then
22 implementing that in ways where a user could then
23 identify themselves outside the phone I think would
24 be a little more difficult, but from a technology
25 standpoint, yeah, you could.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay. And so I
3 guess-- so, your argument is just the fraud for SNAP
4 is so low that it should not be a concern, and I
5 guess the other question is--

6 JOHN ROBERTSON: [interposing] No, my
7 argument is that we create benefits. We
8 democratically create benefits that people should
9 access, and to be obsessed about only fraud rather
10 than delivering benefits is to redirect the purpose
11 of the democracy, which there's been a fairly large
12 push in some parts on the right to simply re-direct
13 the place of our benefits, and I think we've seen
14 that in some of the appointments in New York City
15 social services over the last 20 years, and so I'm
16 really glad to see an effort that is returning
17 benefits to being actually providing what the country
18 had decided people should have.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I just want to
20 thank all the panelists for being here in person. I
21 know there was an option to submit testimony, but I
22 just appreciate your being here in person to make the
23 case yourselves. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. And I
25 think longest trip ever maybe for somebody

1 that there's an affordability crisis here in New York
2 City. It's estimated at 35 units of affordable
3 housing are available for every 100 families who is
4 in need of such a unit. But in addition to the
5 economics at hand, there are also issues related to
6 trauma and other issues. Just this past year in
7 2016, we saw for the first time domestic violence
8 being the number one driver of folks coming into the
9 system surpassing eviction. And so what I really
10 want to spend a little bit more time is on solutions.
11 We know and research shows us, the evidence shows us
12 that what works is housing subsidies, right? When we
13 placed-- in 2016, we placed 800 families, nearly 800
14 families in permanent housing. About 55 percent of
15 those or 450 families were placed with a housing
16 subsidy. Anywhere between 14 to 15 percent of
17 families that were placed in that year came back to
18 shelter in one year, and of those who did come back
19 to shelter, 93 percent were placed without a subsidy,
20 excuse me. And so what we see is that subsidies are
21 effective at keeping families stably housed, but we
22 know there are challenges, as Council Member Levin so
23 carefully and precisely articulated, with families
24 finding housing even with vouchers in hand. And so
25

1 we are in strong support of Intro. 1642, as it will
2 tackle some of those challenges by making sure that
3 it increases the amount at a rate parallel to the FMR
4 [sic], as well as removing any arbitrary limits to
5 families being eligible for the subsidies. And then
6 lastly, I would say we strongly support Intro. 1597
7 as well for vulnerable youth aging out of foster
8 care. Thank you.

9
10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Raysa, and
11 thank you for all the great work that WIN does.

12 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

13 BRENDA RILEY: Good afternoon. I thank
14 you for giving me this opportunity. My name is
15 Brenda Riley, and I'm presently representing my
16 hardworking colleagues from Safety Net Activists, and
17 our parent company is Urban Justice. I'm also here
18 to represent the 52,000 voiceless families that are
19 homeless and receiving grants or either others just
20 receiving grants from HRA. I'm here to speak on the
21 introduction proposals for 1461 to request that
22 Department of Social Services to provide customer
23 service-- customer refreshment courses for customer
24 service related jobs at HRA. And the reason that I
25 seek this is because-- and I hear so much back from

1 clients, is that they're not being treated properly.
2 They sometimes are having real difficulty in the
3 system itself in trying to get what they really,
4 really need, and you are this person that just have
5 to find some kind of way to make someone else who's
6 educated understand what you're asking for, and that
7 just shouldn't be. It should be more simplified. I
8 will give credit to Commissioner Banks, because he
9 has been working with us and he is hearing us. So,
10 in that way, I will give him credit for that. It is
11 task-taking, but I do feel that all people who are
12 working with the public from HRA should indeed
13 receive a training, at least at minimum two-- twice a
14 year, and the reason for that is that they are not--
15 they become more introduced to the work. If you're
16 more introduced to the work, it creates less stress.
17 Immediate less stress also creates a climate for the
18 client to feel less stressed. So, that's just a no-
19 win for me. So, I am really, really asking that this
20 be taken into serious consideration by our agency to
21 see that clients and HRA people are really getting
22 this training so that they can really true have the
23 knowledge and be able to work with people. Thank
24 you.
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

JOHNATHAN SUNSHINE: Hi, I'm Johnathan Sunshine. Thank you for this opportunity, and good to see you again. Anyway, I wanted to say that, you know, I think that the-- first of all I'm here-- I'm part of the Safety Net and I'm of the Urban Justice Center. And I wanted to say that a lot of the people, I think that they need more resource training, training in the resources that is available to them and everything. I mean, the staff from the HRA and the others who work with the Human Resources and the DHS and all that, I think they should be trained more in how to value people more than, you know. Because people are more than statistics and facts and figures. They are actual beings. They have feelings and values that we should take into consideration that, you know, you don't have to be a rich millionaire to, you know, to understand what's going on. And especially with housing. Housing is-- housing and jobs are the most-- one, two and three priorities of what we need to happen, and then after that, getting jobs and everything and being able to start businesses. But people need places to live, and that's basically what we're after here. And the

1 home to the majority of 21 year olds who have aged
2 out of foster care. These young adults find
3 themselves in DHS or DHS nonprofit shelters for young
4 adults or DHS shelters for an older population. The
5 reports from the young adult's shelters are they are
6 unsafe, much fighting, bullying, and sex trafficking.
7 On the other hand, the 21 to 23 year olds amongst the
8 30 to 70 year olds offer different problems. Please--
9 excuse me-- please have a plan for aged out of foster
10 care to exit to a dormitory to college their own
11 studio or one-bedroom with community support services
12 or another plan which they have chosen. Too often,
13 these young people are released to the world and they
14 have very little practical pay-the-bills life
15 experiences. I support Intro. Bill 1642. Many of
16 the City of New York Department of Homeless Services
17 have been for generations or in their adult lives,
18 low income. Creating permanent vouchers for income
19 eligible will assist rent burdened New Yorkers. In
20 addition, DHS should create a family profile per DHS
21 resident, which includes all family members. Many
22 times, single adults, adult families and families
23 with children who have other family members who will
24 join them once they are housed. Because DHS does not
25

1
2 currently capture the entire household once housed
3 many times over crowding and inadequacy issues begin.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
5 Ms. O'Shields. I want to thank this entire panel for
6 your testimony, for bringing these-- all these issues
7 to light, making sure that we continue to be focused
8 on at this committee. A number of view have
9 testified before in front of this committee, and so I
10 just very much thank you for your continued
11 engagement here at the City Council. We would not
12 know what's happening on the ground if it wasn't for
13 members of the community like you and providers that
14 are bringing these issues to our attention. So, we
15 greatly appreciate. We look forward to continuing to
16 work with you in the months ahead.

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

18 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Next panel, Stephanie
20 Gendell, Citizen's Committee for Children, Giselle
21 Routhier from Coalition for the Homeless, and Kathryn
22 Kliff of Legal Aid Society and Catherine Trapani from
23 Homeless Services United.

24 CATHERINE TRAPANI: We're whispering
25 about who's going to start. So, I'm just going to

1 take it. Thank you, Council Member Levin. My name
2 is Catherine Trapani. I'm with Homeless Services
3 United. I did submit more complete remarks for the
4 record, but just in the interest of respecting
5 everybody's time, I just want to go through a couple
6 of themes. Going back to the, sort of, oversight
7 section of the hearing from the families' perspective
8 of being in the shelter system, I just want to for
9 once come here to say thank to the Administration as
10 opposed to complaining, because I think that, as
11 Commissioner Banks testified earlier today, the rate
12 reform effort is going to make a tremendous
13 difference to folks on the ground in the shelters.
14 We heard from people who didn't have housing
15 specialists, didn't have social workers as you were
16 talking back and forth to Commissioner Banks, and
17 this effort to right-size the rates is going to give
18 shelter providers the resources that they need to
19 actually hire those people, which is really going to
20 improve the experience of folks. So I'm really
21 looking forward this fiscal year to seeing some major
22 improvements on the ground with conditions in the
23 shelters as well as with the staffing levels. So, I
24 do want to say for the record, thank you for that. I
25

1 think that where we continue to have challenges that
2 really impact the families and individuals we serve
3 in shelter are despite us I think tending to agree
4 with the Administration on the spirit of a lot of the
5 reforms that they've tried to introduce, it's the
6 execution that is really lacking, and that really
7 stems from gaps in leadership as well as gaps in
8 collaboration and coordination with providers and
9 clients on the ground. So when I say gaps in
10 leadership, there are a number of vacant positions at
11 the Department of Homeless Services, including that
12 of an administrator, and while Commissioner Banks and
13 his staff have been very generous with me, I have a
14 lot of privilege, I get to call him when I have an
15 issue, I really think that that chain of command
16 could help fix a lot of the operational issues. So,
17 one example with the social workers in shelter, the
18 Thrive initiative, it's really important that folks
19 experiencing trauma have access to trained
20 therapists, mental health professionals, but the
21 funding to hire those social workers still hasn't
22 been released over a year into the initiative. So,
23 beating providers up for failing to hire these people
24 is not terribly productive. I know I'm running very
25

1 short on time. We also want to say that sometimes
2 when we do these reactive reforms like introducing
3 regulations on daycare, drop-off daycare services in
4 the shelter, really good intentions. I want every kid
5 in shelter to be safe, but then when limiting care
6 hours comes into it and you're actually depriving
7 homeless families of a vital service, it doesn't make
8 very much sense. And so, consulting with the
9 provider community, I think, is really helpful so
10 that we can make sure that the policy makers
11 understand what's actually going to happen when you
12 implement those changes so that we can have a
13 smoother roll-out and improve the experience for the
14 folks that we're serving. HSU's position on the
15 bills is in the testimony, but I want to respect
16 everyone's time, and I proceed to the next
17 presenters. Thanks.

18
19 GISELLE ROUTHIER: Thanks, Catherine.
20 Thanks, Council Member, for having us. We, Legal Aid
21 and Coalition, submitted joint testimony, so I'm
22 going to begin and then have Kathryn follow up. I
23 want to push back a bit on what the Commissioner said
24 about returning to lower eligibility rates as being
25 not a bad thing. We think it actually really is.

1
2 So, we've documented in the data a disturbing trend
3 of reduce eligibility. So, the past three Aprils
4 from 2014, 2015, 2016, there's an eligibility rate
5 about 50 percent. So, 50 percent of people applying
6 for shelter at PATH were found eligible. Now, it's
7 38 percent as of this April. That's a significant
8 decline, but in addition to that, simultaneously,
9 families are actually having to apply more often,
10 multiple times. So, now, as-- in April 2014, 34
11 percent of families had to apply more than once. Now
12 42 percent of families have to apply more than once.
13 So you're seeing fewer families actually being found
14 eligible, and those families that are being found
15 eligible are having to apply multiple times. So, a
16 much more onerous process and going back to the day
17 that the previous Administration where families were
18 continuously pushed, you know, pushed back through
19 the whole process and having to go jump through many
20 hurdles to get through. So we see this as a very
21 disturbing trend, and we have actually some client
22 examples, and Kathryn has some more details on those,
23 so we're going to talk about that a little bit more.
24 The other thing we wanted to talk about is as the
25 shelter system has expanded, the city's ability to

1
2 make appropriate placements has faltered and has
3 suffered, but in sum, families have much less likely
4 to be placed near their kids' schools, as we talked
5 about, and also accommodations for those with
6 disabilities are not often supplied in a timely
7 fashion. We are grateful that recent settlement in
8 the Butler litigation will begin to address some of
9 those issues, but we're concerned that as the
10 capacity of the system continues to grow that those
11 appropriate placements will not be made or have not
12 been made. So, we want to kind of let the
13 Administration know and put forward publicly what we
14 think should be done. So, we really think that the
15 City and State need to work together to create a much
16 less onerous shelter intake process system as you--
17 as the Commissioner testified, it was a dual process
18 between the City and State, and the State issues
19 regulations about governing the eligibility process,
20 but the City has a lot of say in that. So,
21 applicants should be assisted routinely in obtaining
22 necessary documents and recommended housing options
23 need to be verified as actually available, and we've
24 seen a lot of problems with that. And finally, I'll
25 just end on the fact that the City could reduce the

1
2 shelter census quite a bit by actually utilizing more
3 of its housing resources, namely NYCHA, and HPD
4 resources so we would have fewer people in shelter to
5 begin with.

6 KATHRYN KLIFF: Good afternoon, Council
7 Members. My name is Kathryn Kliff. I'm a Staff
8 Attorney at the Legal Aid Society, and I'm here to
9 provide what Council Member Levin asked for in the
10 beginning which is client experiences. I was
11 actually at PATH this morning conducting outreach.
12 I'm there a couple of times a week, and we-- you
13 know, we see a large number of families and a large
14 number of really frustrated families. The
15 eligibility process is very, very difficult. It's
16 been difficult. It got slightly better with the
17 administrative directive change that Commissioner
18 Banks mentioned in 2015, and then it got a lot worse
19 when that was changed back at the City's request
20 which was discussed in our joint testimony. So what
21 we're seeing is families that are reapplying. I had
22 a client today who told me she had applied seven
23 times in a row and she could not figure out what she
24 was supposed to bring because the notices provided
25 are so confusing. So, it's really important. One of

1
2 our recommendations was to really make sure the
3 notices that are given to clients are clear about
4 what they need to bring, because otherwise every ten
5 days you're starting the, you know, nine to fifteen
6 hour process all over again, and it's extremely
7 stressful. So, we mentioned a couple examples in our
8 testimony, but I wanted to give you just two cases
9 I've had just in the past week that kind of highlight
10 what we're seeing on the ground. The first one was a
11 client who she and her two children had been living
12 with her partner's grandmother and her partner for
13 some time, and they had shared a bedroom, all oen
14 bedroom for the four of them. She is no longer with
15 that partner, but she's with her two children, so she
16 went to PATH to seek shelter. ACS was involved. ACS
17 did not think that home was safe for the family.
18 There had been altercations, but she went to PATH and
19 applied, and they told her, oh no, you can go back
20 and live with the grandmother of the ex-partner, and
21 by the way, the ex-partner still lives there. So, it
22 took our intervention in order for her to actually
23 get shelter, and if we hadn't intervened, she would
24 not have a place to go to sleep with her kids for the
25 night. And secondly, Giselle mentioned the issues

1
2 with disability. Obviously, we're thrilled that
3 Butler has been settled, but we're still seeing some
4 pretty scary things on the ground. For instance,
5 last Thursday I met a man who had been placed in the
6 fifth floor walk-up for a year and a half, and he
7 uses a cane, and it's extremely painful for him just
8 to access his shelter unit, and we have yet to get
9 confirmation that he has been moved, even though the
10 Administration recognizes he needs to be, but the
11 capacity crisis has made it so difficult for them to
12 accommodate disability. So, we're really looking
13 forward to all the changes the Commissioner talked
14 about, and additional capacity because a lot of these
15 problems could be solved, but as we mentioned, the
16 eligibility issue is getting worse, not better.
17 Thank you.

18 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Good afternoon. My
19 name is Stephanie Gendell. I'm the Associate
20 Executive Director for Policy and Advocacy at
21 Citizens' Committee for Children. We appreciate you
22 all holding this hearing today and your line of
23 questioning. We too have been especially concerned
24 about the wellbeing of the children and their parents
25 who are in the shelter system. It led us to convene a

1 taskforce, and I've included in our testimony the
2 recommendations of the taskforce for the record, and
3 I'm just going to talk about a few of them. But in
4 general, we agree with what you were talking about
5 earlier today with regard to ensuring that these are
6 trauma-informed environments that better meet the
7 needs of children and their families. Part of that
8 is that is not socially isolating families; it's
9 giving them a place to develop relationships and
10 maintain relationships. We are concerned about the
11 data showing that placements have gone down in terms
12 of ensuring the youngest child remains in the borough
13 where their school is. That said, the other half of
14 the children are not school-age. About 50 percent of
15 them are under six. We don't even track what happens
16 with those families. We're really concerned about
17 those children and their parents. Very young
18 children need connections to their communities and
19 social supports as well. And so we look forward to
20 hopefully getting to a place where we can, when it's
21 safe and appropriate, keep families really in their
22 communities. We also appreciate the work that's
23 being done to add social workers and appreciate
24 Kathryn raising some of the concerns there. I think
25

1 we need more than a social worker in a shelter to
2 really address all of the family needs, but more
3 importantly, there are a significant number of
4 families in hotels, and they're not due to be out of
5 the hotels until 2023, and we need to do something
6 for those families in the interim, and so whether
7 it's adding a social worker or some other supports,
8 we are very concerned about the families in the
9 hotels. Our testimony also adds in a couple of
10 recommendations not in the taskforce report. One is
11 to look at the "no visitor" policy and figure out how
12 we can at least have safe places for families and
13 children to play and to visit. Another one is we're
14 concerned about the proposed rules around childcare.
15 We want children to be able to be in fulltime
16 childcare centers. We want children to be in safe
17 childcare centers, but for some families, drop-in is
18 the most appropriate, especially if they were really
19 in shelter temporarily. Ten hours a week, it's
20 completely arbitrary. It doesn't even meet two days
21 a week. I don't know where you would get ten hours.
22 And then lastly, I'll just mention that we think
23 expanding home visiting programs in shelter is an
24 important thing to do. And then finally, that we are
25

1 supporting the two LINC bills and appreciate their
2 being introduced and look forward to figuring out how
3 we can pass them into law.

4
5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, as always, I want
6 to thank all of you with the great work that you
7 continue to do. And obviously, there's still a
8 tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. I
9 appreciate you pointing out the accomplishments of
10 the Administration, and we do appreciate their
11 general orientation on all of these issues. We do
12 appreciate that. There has-- we have to do more, and
13 it's important that we, you know, are able to look
14 at-- look in the mirror in a clear-eyed fashion and
15 say, okay, these things are not working as well as we
16 would hope. Let's, you know, let's do it better.
17 So, I really appreciate all of the good work that
18 you're doing, and keep up, you know, keep that up,
19 and by all means, if there are issues that you are
20 seeing on the ground, please don't hesitate to
21 communicate those with this committee.

22 STEPHANIE GENDELL: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Next committee, Joel
24 Berg, Hunger Free America, Yvonne Pena, Community
25

1
2 Service Society, Emily Marano, Single Stop, and Matt
3 Bishop, Open City Labs.

4 JOEL BERG: I'm-- ready? Thank you, Mr.
5 Chair. I'm Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America. I
6 look forward to the New York Post headline tomorrow,
7 "Liberal Council Chair Condemns Bushwick Hipster
8 Funky People." I want to more seriously thank you
9 and Councilman Kallos for all your leadership on
10 getting more funding for hunger programs in the
11 budget. I don't have a lot to say about
12 homelessness. I mostly want to praise Council Member
13 Kallos' bill, but I do want to say, the Federal
14 Government, the State Government, the City
15 Government, and the real estate industry all have to
16 be held accountable for our homelessness crisis but
17 so does every New Yorker who's ever opposed a
18 homeless shelter, affordable housing unit, or
19 supportive housing coming into the neighborhood,
20 particularly my progressive friends who claim to be
21 so anti-trump and pro-refugee. They should put up or
22 shut up. Anyway, onto Council Member Kallos' bill.
23 It's-- he's absolutely right. We've been working on
24 this together for years. I actually have a chapter
25 in my new book on this very topic, the idea of making

1
2 it easier for low income people to access government
3 services. Economists often talk about opportunity
4 points-- opportunity costs when it comes to wealthy
5 people, but don't respect the time of low-income
6 people, and the truth of the matter is, this society
7 is losing billions and billions and billions of
8 dollars a year because low-income people are waiting
9 online at social services offices instead of working
10 or taking care of their kids, or studying, etcetera.
11 Just to get uber wonkish [sic] for just a second, is
12 I think it's important to distinguish what the City
13 can do on its own, versus what we need the state and
14 the federal government to do. Right now, under
15 federal law, you have to have a separate interview
16 just for SNAP food stamps. The City doesn't even
17 manage WIC clinics. That's managed by private
18 entities on behalf of the state. To file for your
19 income taxes, you have to go through the federal IRS.
20 You can't go through a city agency. So, that's one
21 reason we're working with members of congress, and
22 we'd love your support of this to get authorization
23 perhaps in the next farm bill for a pilot project
24 that actually makes it easier for the City to do
25 this. And certainly, the Commissioner is right, this

1
2 has to go through a state system, so and by federal
3 law it's really the states who are in power to run
4 many of these programs due to the wishes of southern
5 segregationists who basically won't-- in the House
6 and Senate years ago who wanted to be able to ban
7 certain people getting these benefits. But at the
8 City level, you're absolutely right, there are a
9 thousand things the City can be or should be doing on
10 its own, but I respectfully suggest the biggest
11 problem isn't the committee, the agencies under this
12 jurisdiction of this committee, it's the other city
13 agencies who are working with HRA to do this and
14 really having a seamless system. Other states do it.
15 There's no reason we shouldn't do it. I just want to
16 push back a little against the suggestion of
17 fingerprinting. We just won a multi-decade battle to
18 stop the process of criminalizing this. I understand
19 people weren't suggesting that we criminalize it,
20 using it for a different way, but the message would
21 be criminalization. We just got Arizona to end
22 finger imaging for SNAP, for goodness sakes. Let's
23 not bring it back here. Thank you.

24 EMILY MARANO: Hi, Chair Levin and
25 Council Member Kallos. Thank you so much. I'm

1
2 Emily Marano. I'm Single Stop's Manager of Policy
3 and Research, and I'm here representing our
4 organization. We connect New Yorkers with the full
5 spectrum of benefits and resources available to them
6 and the promise behind Single Stop has always been
7 based on multiple benefit access, because access to
8 individually a single benefit may not be able to
9 stabilize the household, but in concert multiple
10 resources can address the underlying causes of
11 poverty. So, I'm here to enthusiastically support
12 this bill and all efforts by the City to further the
13 goal of making the Safety Net more accessible. We
14 need-- in order for New Yorkers to attain household
15 stability they need-- and benefit from the proven
16 long-term outcomes of the safety net programs, they
17 have to first learn about the existence of programs
18 and then navigate the complex application processes.
19 So, we need to make that easier. We've been at the
20 forefront of working to make coordinated access to
21 the social safety net simpler for people who need it
22 for a long time. We convened the National Coalition
23 that did work highlighting reforms to modernized
24 application procedures for benefits. We've in-house
25 created web-based apps that allows clients to find

1 programs that they're eligible for, and we're
2 currently one of the lead partners on the Robin Hood
3 Start by Asking campaign here in New York City to
4 access multiple benefits. Based on our experiences,
5 we believe that this proposed legislation is a big
6 step towards the goal of increasing access to
7 programs designed to help provide-- help low-income
8 New Yorkers. We know it will be a big task for HRA
9 to successfully implement the law so that families
10 receive easy-to-understand and actionable
11 information, but once done it's going to be highly
12 valuable to the families who receive the resources
13 they need to stabilize their lives. In other
14 jurisdictions, the lessons of program integration
15 have been-- that sustainable change requires
16 collaboration and redesigned business processes that
17 support the goal. Policy alignment must be a
18 priority and HRA and its partners must be intentional
19 about the implementation of policy refining their
20 approach as they go. Single Stop is here to offer
21 HRA and the City Council our support, our partnership
22 and our knowledge from our more than 10 years of
23 experience with connected clients to multiple
24

1 benefits as you go forward with this challenge.

2 Thank you so much.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,
5 and thank you very much for the great work that
6 Single Stop does. It's greatly appreciated.

7 YVONNE PENA: Hi, good afternoon,
8 Chairperson Levin. My name is Yvonne Pena, Project
9 Director for the Community Service Society Benefits
10 Plus Learning Center. I would like thank Council
11 Member Kallos for the invitation and thank you all
12 for the opportunity to provide testimony on the
13 process of applying for assistance along with Intro
14 855A in relation to notification of public assistance
15 eligibility. CSS is a 176-year-old organizations
16 whose mission is to promote policies and create
17 programs that advance the economic security of low
18 and moderate income New Yorkers. We have the
19 expertise in helping low-income New Yorkers access
20 public benefits, including Medicaid, SNAP, cash
21 assistance, SCRIE and DRIE and many other through two
22 programs, the Benefits Plus Learning Center and the
23 Advocacy Counseling and Entitlement Services Program,
24 or ACES. The Benefits Plus Learning Center was
25 created to address the problem that we all know

1 exists. Too often, New York City residents encounter
2 a myriad of difficulties in access and public
3 benefits. The system can be difficult to navigate,
4 and social service professionals who work with New
5 York City's vulnerable population cannot always keep
6 up with rules and regulations that constantly change.
7 Accredited by the New York State Education
8 Department, the Learning Center Provides intensive
9 training on the New York City public benefits system
10 for staff of social service organizations to serve
11 their clients more effectively. The Center also
12 publishes an online manual, Benefits Plus, with
13 comprehensive information on more than 80 different
14 government benefit and housing programs. We also
15 have extensive experience in directly helping low-
16 income New Yorkers obtain the public benefits for
17 which they qualify. Established in 1984, the ACES
18 program, excuse me, trains volunteers ages 55 and
19 older to serve as public benefit counselors in
20 community agencies throughout New York City. Last
21 year, ACES volunteers assisted 5,700 clients with
22 7,800 public benefit issues. CSS supports the City's
23 first step toward reimagining how government
24 administers public assistance program through the
25

1
2 proposed Intro. 855A, because most low-income
3 households qualify for a range of different public
4 benefit programs, creating technology to facilitate
5 the application process and eligibility verification
6 for needs-based benefits would be both cost-effective
7 and efficient. This technology would avoid
8 duplication of efforts and save time for both the
9 consumer and the government entities that administer
10 the programs, and promoting access to the full
11 package of benefits for which families qualify. Intro
12 855A will help families meet their need for food,
13 medical care, affordable housing, and childcare. For
14 this reason, CSS supports Intro. 855A, provision for
15 providing automatic notices and applicants of one
16 public assistance program when they're likely to
17 qualify for additional programs administered by HRA.

18 MATT BISHOP: Good afternoon. My name is
19 Matt Bishop. I'm CEO of Open City Labs. I want to
20 thank Council Member Ben Kallos for his leadership on
21 the automatic benefits legislation and many other
22 technology-related initiatives, and I'm here to ask
23 the City Council and HRA to support this critical
24 legislation because everyone deserves quick and
25 efficient access to government services and benefits.

1 As you know, as you all know well, quality programs
2 are only as effective as they are accessible.

3
4 Nationally, 80 billion dollars in government benefits
5 goes unclaimed by people who are eligible every year,
6 and the downstream effects of this are that-- are
7 increased hunger, poor health and a missed

8 opportunity to help people reach their potential. I

9 want to recognize the leadership of Mayor de Blasio,

10 the Commissioner, Matt Kline, [sic] and Ariel Kennan

11 [sp?]. Making City services more accessible has been

12 a major focus of this administration, and programs

13 like AccessNYC have received national attention.

14 This legislation builds on existing initiatives and

15 raises the bar even higher. Streamlining access is a

16 critical next step in addressing inequality in New

17 York City. My experience working at Volunteers of

18 America, a nonprofit that contracts with HRA and over

19 20 other agencies to provide social services has

20 showed me that these government benefits can be a

21 lifeline, yet the process of applying for these

22 benefits is both tedious and clients often have to

23 repeat the process as they move from agency to

24 agency. In addition, the burden on clients-- to the

25 burden on clients, the burden on staff is enormous.

1 I founded Open City Labs to make it easy to apply for
2 government programs. As a technology entrepreneur, I
3 know that applying for government programs and
4 services can be almost as easy as ordering lunch on
5 seamless [sic]. Technology can make the
6 implementation of this legislation not just possible,
7 but it can also reduce the paperwork for case
8 managers. Every moment of unnecessary paperwork that
9 we can save HRA employees and case managers is a
10 moment of opportunity. These are the moment of human
11 connection between case manager and client that are
12 opportunities for self-discovery and self-healing
13 that empower clients to take the next steps to self-
14 sufficiency. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
17 to this panel. I'm going to-- unfortunately, I have
18 to leave, but I'm going to turn it over and leave in
19 the capable hands of Council Member Kallos to close
20 out the hearing. There are two more panels after
21 this panel. I will-- I assure you, because
22 everything is online, I will be watching your
23 testimony for the next two panel tomorrow when I come
24 into the office, but I greatly, greatly, greatly
25 appreciate all the work that you've all done, and I

1
2 York State, people can put in information and find
3 out one, if they are potentially eligible for snap
4 benefits and about how much they would be eligible to
5 receive. Our current volunteers, they do an intake
6 with each client. So the ACES program, those--
7 that's the program that actually helps clients access
8 benefits. They do an intake. They find out specific
9 information for each client such as household ties,
10 income, and they try to do their best to navigate
11 across all programs so they could streamline for the
12 client of way to know which benefits they could be
13 eligible for. A program like this would help us
14 immensely, because it would allow us access to
15 applications, to different programs without having to
16 go here and then here and then here. So, this
17 technology, if it does come to fruition would be
18 great, would be a great addition.

19 EMILY MARANO: Yeah, our technology has a
20 screening component. It screens for five program--
21 five if you count health insurance as one right now
22 in nine states, including New York. So, the system
23 itself does the full rules engine that the government
24 also does once they submit the application. The
25 dream would be that clients could just enter their

1 information once somewhere and then that information
2 is captured and provided to whoever needs it to
3 provide them with the program that they need. I
4 think that this legislation is a good first step
5 towards clients understanding what they are eligible
6 for and looking at the forms and seeing what they
7 want to do. They'll probably still need guidance
8 with the case worker on a lot cases, but anything
9 that can help make the process smoother, I think, is
10 important.
11

12 YVONNE PENA: And if I could just
13 interject here. One thing that CSS does is we are
14 also navigators. So, we help New Yorkers enroll in
15 healthcare. So, we envision this system being like
16 the marketplace, and although we do know that it
17 would be-- it's a tall order, but we do want to pose
18 it to the Council to partner with state and federal
19 governments to make something like this so that it
20 streamlines benefits across all different areas, so
21 not just local but state and federal.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I like your idea
23 so much, we suggested it to the federal government
24 that for the 17 states that didn't have marketplaces
25 where the federal government had created it using

1
2 Healthcare.gov that they build that in. Actually, I
3 will give that letter to Secretary-- sorry, not
4 Secretary, to Zions [sic] to our Committee Counsel
5 for the record. And so we have a technologist here
6 who has started a company. Does the technology that
7 they're-- that everyone's asking for. We've had
8 Intuit who's built a product. Do you have a similar
9 product that could handle this situation, too? And
10 how hard is this technology to build if we would just
11 make the rules public?

12 MATT BISHOP: Open City Labs is focused
13 on the process of populating the forms with the
14 information needed. So, the client information could
15 be entered by a social once. They select the
16 programs that they're interested in applying for on
17 behalf of their client, and then those PDF's would be
18 populated and auto faxed to the agencies in question.
19 We're also looking at kind of like a tell-health
20 [sic] component where social workers and navigators
21 could connect with people via text message and guide
22 them through the applications, and our software would
23 pull the data into the forms through kind of like a
24 conversational form.

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, Joel, you
3 have extensive testimony that is multiple pages with
4 some--

5 JOEL BERG: [interposing] I want to keep
6 my former employer the far [sic] servicing [sic]
7 business.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Fair enough, but
9 within terms of just you touch on a lot of issues.
10 So, you-- can you talk a little bit about the
11 reduction of bureaucracy, and is that perhaps one of
12 the reasons that we see where people would generally
13 classify as red states as the leaders in this,
14 Louisiana, South Carolina. It's hard to say that
15 this state isn't as progressive as they are when it
16 comes to--

17 JOEL BERG: [interposing] So, you'd say--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] So,
19 why are they ahead of us, and is that actually
20 something they're seeing?

21 JOEL BERG: Well, you know, technology as
22 you know is neutral, value neutral, and some states
23 have used technology for evil purposes. Some have
24 used it for evil and mixed good purposes, and some
25 have used it for good purposes. There are some

1 states that their main purpose in reducing
2 bureaucracy has to have been, you know, reduce the
3 state workforce and basically crush public employees'
4 unions. In some cases, their goals of reducing
5 bureaucracy coincide with the goals of progressives
6 of increasing access to public benefits, and then
7 some places they've had on paper what looks like
8 access, but really, oh, we're going to let you call
9 in, but the call centers never answer. But New York
10 City and New York State is, you know, way behind, and
11 you know, HRA has made some significant progress, but
12 again, there are challenges, and I think the
13 technology is the least of the problems in some
14 sense. For instance, there's never been a uniformed
15 protocol on what constitutes an electronic
16 significant. Virtually all these applications
17 require that you sign, you're attesting to the truth
18 on pane [sic] of perjury, and I don't think there's
19 an agreed upon set of protocols at the state, federal
20 and city level of what constitutes an electronic
21 signature. In a sensible world, you would have one
22 electronic signature that you check at the bottom,
23 but everything I've said for all these programs is
24 accurate, and that one signature is good to go, but I
25

1 don't think that's the case now under federal, state
2 or city law, and that'd be great progress. And, you
3 know, we're talking a lot about what the people have
4 to provide and the financial information, but also
5 other information. To me, it is insane, but it is
6 incumbent on the citizens or the residents to submit
7 government documents to the government, and you know,
8 the place you're going to live changes. Your income
9 changes. The place you were born, unless you believe
10 in reincarnation never changes. And so the fact that
11 every time you have to resubmit an application every
12 year, every six months, you have to reprove where you
13 were born, you as a citizen provide a government
14 document to the government seems insane. It should
15 seem that there should be a protocol with good safety
16 protocols and privacy protocols, but to protect that
17 information that the government should say, "Okay,
18 you were born here. We've asked once. We never have
19 to ask again." What was your question? Politicians
20 aren't the only ones who can pivot.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That's fine. And
23 so, we were-- in your testimony you mentioned the
24 fact that it reduces bureaucracy which is why some
25 conservative states have implemented it. You also

1
2 put up the additional argument that some might argue
3 it creates more reliance on big government and such
4 that people would never-- will just continue to rely.
5 What say you to that, even though--

6 JOEL BERG: [interposing] That's a load
7 of--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: you can go online
9 and watch it.

10 JOEL BERG: That's a load of hypocritical
11 bull. You know, one of the most prominent proponents
12 of that line of reasoning is Speaker of the House
13 who's been on the government payroll nearly his
14 entire life, who after his father died he received
15 SSI survivor's benefits, arguably welfare benefits,
16 and let's be clear, the American right isn't against
17 big government. They're against big government for
18 people who don't vote for them or don't give them
19 campaign contributions. When it comes to corporate
20 welfare--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] Tell
22 us what you really think.

23 JOEL BERG: Yeah, when it comes to
24 corporate welfare for massive agriculture concerns
25 run by huge corporations, they're all for ever-bigger

1 checks when it comes to defense contractors building
2 products we don't need for wars we shouldn't be
3 fighting. They're all for it. When it comes to tax
4 breaks for their buddies for their second home,
5 they're all for it. So, this argument that they're
6 against big government is ridiculous. There's not an
7 iota of evidence that programs like SNAP increase
8 dependency. Ninety percent, 90 percent of the
9 parents with children in the SNAP program were
10 working the year before and the year after getting
11 SNAP. Eighty-three percent of the people in the SNAP
12 program are children, people with disabilities or
13 senior citizens. The arguments from the right are
14 just a lot of crock. The SNAP program supports work.
15 Now, low-income people like me, they think the best
16 answer to poverty should be a living wage job, but as
17 long as our economy fails to do that, and as many of
18 the opponents of SNAP fail to support higher wages
19 it's entirely hypocritical for them to oppose
20 allowing-- to basically call for allowing people to
21 starve, which also goes against their professed
22 Christianity I must add.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: You mentioned a
25 hope account, what is a hope account?

1
2 JOEL BERG: The idea is taking on what
3 you've proposed and even going the next step of
4 allowing every single program to be combined into one
5 program accessed by a smartphone. You'd be able to
6 access your EITC benefits, your SNAP benefits, all
7 your social service benefits. Not only apply for
8 them by a smartphone, but manage your benefits by a
9 smartphone. If there are any government savings
10 programs, like individual development account, you'd
11 be able to manage them there. Now, there are some
12 say, well, this-- putting them all in one place would
13 make it easier for the right to cut them all. That's
14 ridiculous. The right doesn't need our help to
15 propose massive cuts in social service programs. I
16 say to my progressive friends, that's like two people
17 on a firing squad saying, "Do you want to ask for a
18 cigarette?" And the other goes, "No, I don't want to
19 make them mad." You know, the President has proposed
20 bigger cuts in the social service safety net than
21 even proposed by Ronald Reagan, 192 billion dollars
22 in cuts to social service safety net. So, the idea
23 that we shouldn't propose progressive reforms,
24 because we're worried about them being hijacked by
25 the other side is preposterous, and I do note, I call

1
2 very specifically, if this does reduce the jobs in
3 the social service bureaucracy filling out forms, I
4 support every one of those single jobs being
5 maintained, being maintained as a unionized job, but
6 instead of filling out meaningless forms, they can
7 help people access housing. They can staff our
8 Universal Pre-K Center. They can staff a job
9 training center. We don't need to have low-income
10 people, the only people in America unaffected by the
11 technology revolution of the last few decades.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you very
13 much. I urge folks to read the testimony online, and
14 excuse this panel. Thank you for your patience, and
15 our next panel is Mercedes Jennings, Partnership for
16 the Homeless, Sarah Wilson, Safety Net, Ms. Moore,
17 Safety Net, Kelly Grace Price, Jails Action
18 Coalition. You may begin when ready.

19 MERCEDES JENNINGS: Okay. Thank you
20 again for the opportunity to testify this evening.
21 My name is Mercedes Jennings. I'm an Education
22 Advocate at the Partnership for the Homeless. I work
23 with homeless families and children specifically in
24 East New York. As you know, East New York is the
25 largest area of families, neighborhood wise, that

1 goes to PATH daily and gets acceptance for shelter
2 through PATH. So, I'm speaking from the child's
3 perspective and in support of 1597 and 1642 for
4 subsidies due to the fact that it would prevent a lot
5 of children in going into shelter. As an advocate
6 I've seen firsthand the difficulties of children
7 going into shelter and going through the PATH
8 process. Many times, youth that go through that
9 process are mostly affected because they are placed
10 far from their schools of origin, and as a result
11 they have to sometimes wait more than seven days as
12 per the office of pupil transportation try to say to
13 get busing. Also, many families had reported that
14 even though the new process states that they don't
15 have to return their children back to PATH, that
16 policy still has not been implemented for the
17 families and hasn't been reported to families to do.
18 In addition to that, we also support the extensive
19 trainings of DHS employees to work with the families,
20 because as they said, not only is living in shelter a
21 trauma, but also going through the PATH process has
22 been a trauma for them as well. To support many of
23 the-- the troubles that the children have been going
24 through in school as it relates to their absences,
25

1
2 lateness because they're placed so far from their
3 school of origin. NYC's IBO report of 2016 has also
4 supported that children who are suffering from
5 homelessness face serious challenges to obtaining a
6 good education including rates of absenteeism and
7 underperformance compared to children who are
8 permanently housed. As a result of that, I also want
9 to bring to the attention of the committee the Family
10 Option Study that was done by one of our board
11 members of our agency, Professor Mary-Beth Shen
12 [sp?], that subsidy basically states that rent
13 subsidies is a better provision to preventing
14 homelessness for youth and for families in New York
15 City. Also, currently, right now, the cost of
16 keeping a family in shelter is 41,000 per year to
17 house a family in a city shelter, not to mention the
18 cost of building or expanding over 100 shelters
19 currently as our city policy. We do ask that you not
20 only recognize that the PATH process is not just a
21 traumatizing event for the parents, but also the
22 educational inequalities and the struggles that the
23 children go through as a result.

24 SARAH WILSON: Hi, my name is Sarah
25 Wilson. I'm here to support Intro. 1642. I'm with

1 the Safety Net Activists, but on a personal note, I'm
2 also a resident of a DHS shelter. I've been in the
3 system myself for 22 months, and I appreciate you
4 guys speaking on mental health and substance abuse,
5 because I'm currently in recovery from active [sic]
6 addiction, and I do have mental health issues. So
7 all of these issues are very near and dear to my
8 heart. With that said, from my experience, there is
9 a major gap in communication process and in
10 possessing and sharing information on how to get out
11 of the system and into self-sufficiency and
12 independent living. I was able to obtain a SEPS
13 voucher based on the criteria of my chronic
14 homelessness and being over 200 percent below poverty
15 because of my disabilities. With that, I'm on a
16 fixed income and I would need a fixed rent to sustain
17 any type of life. Chronic homelessness does lead to
18 very real external factors that will create
19 additional avoidable triggers that do in fact lead to
20 relapse on many levels. In regard to me having a
21 voucher, I've obtained it over six months ago, which
22 just puts new obstacles in front of me. Finding
23 anyone willing to or knowledgeable on how to connect
24 recipients with landlords seems to be a very big
25

1 struggle. There are a lot of many discouraging
2 factors and preconceived notions that landlords have
3 about people that possess these vouchers. So, if the
4 vouchers were unable to be questioned on their
5 validity, then discrimination would be that much more
6 blatant and apparent, and the landlords would have to
7 accept them or be held accountable if they didn't.
8 So, in regards to Intro 1642, it would be able to
9 ensure rental voucher system that would be designed
10 to work. Putting a cap on the amount of time allowed
11 for a person to receive a voucher instead of being
12 based on specific information is basically ensuring
13 recidivism back into the system for those who are
14 unable to get out in that amount of time. There also
15 needs to be fair market value in regards to the price
16 of the vouchers. If not, then basically they are
17 null and void. In my case specific, I need a voucher
18 to be able to obtain independent living with my fixed
19 income, chronic homelessness and disabilities.
20 There's enough challenges ahead, and to have the
21 vouchers be able to be questioned by any means or
22 overlooking problems with them guarantees myself and
23 many other people to continue suffering with chronic
24 homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse, and
25

1
2 eventually loss of life and potential life. Thank
3 you very much for all you guys do.

4 LYNSETTA MOORE: Hello, my name is
5 Lynsetta [sp?] Moore. I'm part of Safety Net.
6 Actually, I didn't come here to testify. I came here
7 to support my Safety Net family. However, when I was
8 in the other room and Mr. Levin was asking Mr. Banks
9 about why there's no overnight visits or families
10 coming to the shelter, I'm like, wait a minute. When
11 did this happen? I was in the shelter from 2000 to
12 2004 with my son. Where I was was at Jenny Clark
13 [sp?], and my son and I was allowed to have visitors,
14 and we was allowed to go out. Now, part of this,
15 when he was in Rice [sic] High School-- he was in
16 Rice High School. He was doing okay. I spoke to the
17 principal. The principal was saying he was
18 embarrassed because he was homeless, he couldn't have
19 nobody come to see him and so forth and so on. So we
20 spoke to the director there, and the director let us
21 have-- now, I don't know if he was, you know, doing
22 something that he wasn't supposed to, but it helped
23 my son, and as a result of that my son's grades came
24 up. He was on the robotics team. He was on-- he was
25 in the Spanish Club. He was dealing with the art,

1 and he ended up on the Honor Roll. So what I say to
2 Mr. Banks, DHS, let the families have someone to
3 visit them. Let them go see their family, because it
4 raises their self-esteem, because my son was
5 embarrassed. They wanted to come see him, "But why
6 can't we come see him?" "Mom, I'm in the shelter, I
7 can't let them." You understand what I'm saying?
8 So, that is imperative. It is essential that
9 families stay connected with their families so they
10 don't feel like they are, you know, it's their fault
11 or it's something wrong with them, and you really
12 don't have to really know their business, because I
13 happen to be in Jenny Clark, and I had an apartment.
14 I was fortunate like that. But I was really
15 surprised that he said that, because I'm like, well
16 when did this happen? Because we've always had, you
17 know, we was all able to do that. So, is that what's
18 going on, they're not allowed to have people come or
19 people come over? Is that-- really? When did this
20 happen? Oh, okay. [laughter]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, just a follow-up.
23 So I think we are pushing Commissioner Banks a lot on
24 the timeline and that every day matters. So, if you
25 can just share how in terms of the steps and the

1
2 phases he talked through, how long it takes to get
3 in, how long you can get stuck at any given point?

4 It sounds like it was 16 months before you even got a
5 LINC voucher, and so that's troubling to me, because
6 I feel like you should be getting that LINC voucher
7 as immediately as possible. So, I'd love to learn
8 more about your personal experience and how long you
9 got stuck.

10 SARAH WILSON: Okay. Thank you, and
11 thank you guys for what you do. I wanted to say that,
12 but I was kind of watching the clock. As far as the
13 vouchers, I've been in-- this is my fifth shelter
14 counting the intake shelter. So, I don't necessarily
15 know where the problem lies in with my case, but I
16 know that the connection between staffing and
17 obtaining the vouchers has been a problem at every
18 shelter I've been in. I had to actually go and get
19 my own voucher. It was not provided to me from the
20 shelter system. SEPS voucher, you got on your own
21 based on criteria. So, somebody had directed me
22 where to go for that. So, now the issue seems to lie
23 in finding some--

24

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] So,
3 they weren't willing to even help you get the
4 voucher to get out of the shelter?

5 SARAH WILSON: No, I got my own voucher.

6 MERCEDES JENNINGS: I have to--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] Let
8 the record reflect multiple people from the audience
9 nodded and said no as well.

10 MERCEDES JENNINGS: And from a service
11 perspective, her story is true. I've had multiple--
12 in the past two and a half years probably served over
13 a thousand clients in East New York, and many times
14 whether it's CityFEPS, LINC,-- mind you, we're not a
15 shelter-- as well as SEPS, we were the ones that were
16 instrumental in referring families and/or advocating
17 with the shelter to give them the LINC voucher.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: If the-- if you
19 didn't go out and get your own, if you hadn't gotten
20 your advocacy, what was their pathway to permanent
21 housing?

22 MERCEDES JENNINGS: There was none. Many
23 of them said they wish they knew about agency like
24 mine when they went through PATH.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, that is
3 deeply, deeply troubling. Just let the record
4 reflect additional folks from the audience also
5 agreed that they felt that through PATH there wasn't-
6 - they weren't being presented with a way out. That
7 is a problem.

8 MERCEDES JENNINGS: I know that there's
9 shortness of time, but I just want to make one more
10 other point about PATH with children. Many-- I've
11 only one family out of the two and a half years that
12 I've worked in this agency has told me that they knew
13 that there was a DOE liaison in PATH, and I've been
14 trying to push the idea that a PATH-- that a DOE
15 liaison should be part of that process, through the
16 intake process, because families don't know that
17 they're supposed to contact schools while they're
18 going through that process, and the fact that it's
19 disturbing when you mention the 27 percent were
20 seemed eligible means that they were probably going
21 through that 10-day process more than once. That
22 means children were missing significant days of
23 school.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, on that note,
25 I went to a public high school. Some of my friends

1
2 from high school were telling me that like they
3 didn't know where they were going home at night,
4 because they didn't know where their fam-- which
5 shelter their family might be in. They didn't know
6 whether or not their stuff would be there, or they
7 didn't know where their stuff was, and you're not
8 going to get your homework done when you're spending
9 the night trying to figure out. Is that still a
10 thing?

11 MERCEDES JENNINGS: And what--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I'm
13 older than I look. So, this was like--

14 MERCEDES JENNINGS: [interposing] Yes.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: This was like 20
16 years ago.

17 MERCEDES JENNINGS: Yes, and moreover
18 because there's obviously a very low vacancy rate,
19 families are put into hotels. So you can imagine a
20 family of five in a small hotel room. What space
21 does a child have to do homework?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Right.

23 MERCEDES JENNINGS: I'm a parent of three
24 kids. I can imagine being in a room smaller than
25 this having to manage three kids to do homework and

1
2 orchestrate that, and study time. Again, I know your
3 time is precious, but I just wanted to stress that
4 point that a lot of youth that are homeless right
5 now between the ages of zero to 18 years old, and I
6 think things like that are not addressed. And also,
7 one small-- it might seem very small and minute, but
8 the access to Wi-Fi for kids in shelter as well as in
9 hotel placement now is a huge problem, because a lot
10 of homework assignments are now placed through Wi-Fi
11 or through the internet, and they can't get that work
12 done.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I-- if there's
14 specific locations that don't have Wi-Fi, I believe
15 that DHS has been making some inroads on trying to
16 get Wi-Fi into many of the shelters, but just I care
17 about accessibility.

18 MERCEDES JENNINGS: Right.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That's one of my
20 key things. I want to thank you for sharing your--

21 SARAH WILSON: I just-- I have one more
22 thing to say, sir.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Sure.

24 SARAH WILSON: Another thing as far as--

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] You
3 can call me Ben.

4 SARAH WILSON: Okay. Another thing as far
5 as the breakdown in communication, when I was
6 assessed when I came into the shelter system on
7 disability, because I'm on SSD I was told that I'm
8 not eligible for any HRA benefit at all whatsoever,
9 and I was given paperwork that say denied. So, on
10 that note, I'm not eligible to receive any HRA
11 services to my knowledge to help me assist in
12 anything because I'm on Social Security Disability,
13 meaning I worked my whole life, I had some things go
14 on, didn't bounce quite right back from, and collect
15 what I paid into taxes, and because of that and the
16 difference between that and SSI, I'm told that I'm
17 ineligible for any HRA benefits at all.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I see folks in
19 the audience nodding no, so before I have to-- one of
20 the great things about the hearing sometimes is you
21 run into folks who might be helpful, and hopefully
22 part of Intro. 855A we could-- we can already screen
23 you on some of the tools, and looks like some folks
24 in the audience want to be helpful to you.

25 SARAH WILSON: Thank you.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, we can
3 definitely do that, and I guess, just first, thank
4 you for sharing some of the challenges that you're
5 fighting. I guess, one question is, so you went
6 through the intake, you went through the assessment.
7 At the assessment you self-identified as SSDI. You
8 identified your mental health and addiction. How
9 long did they keep you for assessment after you self-
10 identified? Like, did you come in and you say this
11 is it, or did you stay there like--

12 SARAH WILSON: It was an assessment
13 process. It was almost two years ago now. I know I
14 had to bring them paperwork. I provided them
15 documentation that I was in a program, I was in
16 treatment, an award letter, and they told me I was
17 denied.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And then how long
19 did you get stuck in that assessment shelter before
20 they got you into a next--

21 SARAH WILSON: [interposing] About 28
22 days.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Even after you
24 told them this is who I am, here's proof, they made
25 you go through the whole system again just to verify

1
2 that you were telling-- they just needed to read you
3 those tests anyway?

4 SARAH WILSON: I don't know. It was the
5 same documents I provided them they used to place me.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I have a problem
7 with that. I feel that if a person comes in and self-
8 identifies and says, "This is who I am, these are the
9 challenges I have," that we should just let them skip
10 that step and get to the next place. It's a waste of
11 time and money to reassess somebody if they're
12 already saying that these are the things that--

13 SARAH WILSON: [interposing] Well, then
14 hopefully this can help somebody else.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you.

16 SARAH WILSON: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you very
18 much to this panel, and please keep up your advocacy
19 and fighting.

20 LYNSETTA MOORE: Can I say one thing? I
21 just want to say I hope Commissioner Banks and
22 whoever the powers be, let them start having company
23 at the shelter, especially if they're in an
24 apartment, and let them go out to their families,
25

1 because I'm telling you it took my son from C to A,
2 because he end up on the honor roll.

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I absolutely
5 agree, and I think it's something that the Chair of
6 this committee and I agree, and it looks like the
7 Commissioner seems to have been reached. I want to
8 invite Alexandra Brandes from Lenox Hill Neighborhood
9 House, which is a settlement house in my district. I
10 want to thank them for joining us through a very long
11 day, and thank you for you also offering some
12 assistance. Lenox Hill Neighborhood House actually
13 has a women's shelter that they run on Park Avenue at
14 the Armory, which we try to do what we can in my
15 district. We also have Olivia from New York City
16 Veterans Alliance, Elana Duffy from Pathfinder Labs
17 and New York City Veterans Alliance, and again, thank
18 you for your patience on what is a long hearing. And
19 then we'll have one more panel. For the folks who
20 just finished testifying, hopefully you can hear me,
21 but if you can hand over your testimony, we would
22 love to enter it into the record. I'll ask the
23 Sergeant at Arms after they're done distributing to
24 see if we can pick up the testimony from those who
25 just testified. If anyone here is still waiting to

1
2 testify, please make sure to fill out one of the
3 witness slips. Please begin.

4 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: Thank you, Council
5 Member Kallos for the opportunity to testify about
6 proposed legislation 855A. My name is Alexandra
7 Brandes. I'm the Supervising Attorney of the
8 Healthcare Access Project at Lenox Hill Neighborhood
9 House. As Council Member Kallos pointed out, Lenox
10 Hill Neighborhood House is a settlement house on the
11 eastside of Manhattan that has provided integrated
12 social services to low-income New Yorkers for 123
13 years. When clients contact our Legal Advocacy
14 Department for assistance, they are screened for
15 public benefits. Frequently, clients are receiving
16 none or only one of several public benefits to which
17 they're entitled. For instance, a senior contacted
18 our office for assistance because he could not afford
19 to buy his asthma medications. This resulted in
20 hospitalization and severe health complications.
21 Although the client received the maximum SNAP
22 benefit, he did not know he qualified for the
23 Medicare Savings Program, Extra Help, EPIC, or SCRIE.
24 Had he been informed of his eligibility for these
25 programs when he first received his SNAP benefits, he

1
2 might never have been hospitalized or had irreparable
3 health damage. This client represents what many New
4 York City seniors and other people face as a quarter
5 of seniors over-- a quarter of New York City
6 residents over 65 live below poverty and are often
7 forced to choose between buying necessary medical
8 care and food. Lenox Hill Neighborhood House fully
9 supports a proposal to expand notice of eligibility.
10 We would like to highlight several areas where
11 legislative intervention is still needed. First, the
12 statutory notification requirement should expand
13 beyond current benefit recipients to include
14 individuals who are potentially and who are
15 prospectively [sic] eligible. Second, the Department
16 should be obligated to reduce lapses in public
17 benefits assistance via automatic recertification,
18 expanded grace periods, and retroactive reinstatement
19 for good cause. Third, the Department should be
20 required to include in its report the estimated
21 number of eligible people for each public benefit in
22 addition to the target number of people enrolled.
23 These proposals will improve the lives of those
24 adversely affected by the existing statutory scheme.
25 We appreciate the Council's investigation and are

1
2 hopeful that the concerns described in the written
3 testimony submitted today will be addressed. Thank
4 you again for the opportunity to testify.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you. I
6 can-- thank you.

7 OLIVIA MEIER: Good evening, and thank
8 you to Chairman Levin and committee members for the
9 opportunity to testify today. My name is Olivia
10 Meier, and I'm here to offer testimony on Intro 855A
11 on behalf of the New York City Veteran's Alliance, a
12 member-supported grassroots policy advocacy and
13 empowerment organization serving veterans, service
14 members and their families across the New York City
15 metropolitan area. We applaud and support Council
16 Member Kallos' bill to improve and streamline access
17 to public assistance for our fellow New Yorkers in
18 need. New York City is a leader in digital
19 innovation in the private sector and we must marshal
20 the latest advances in technology, not just for
21 corporate profit, but for the social good of
22 improving the lives of the most vulnerable among us.
23 It should be as easy to find information and apply
24 for services with City agencies as it is to apply for
25 a job or place an order online to have sushi

1 delivered. It shouldn't be an exhausting, confusing,
2 frustrating process for a citizen in need to
3 determine their eligibility for food or housing
4 assistance or to initiate their application. Our
5 fellow New Yorkers who are in need or in crisis
6 should have streamlined, compassionate access to the
7 help they need, not a series of frustrating barriers
8 that are too often-- that too often conceal or limit
9 access to crucial resources for which they're
10 eligible. My organization has advocated for improved
11 access to resources for veterans of the United States
12 Armed Forces and currently serving members of reserve
13 National Guard and state militia forces. Over the
14 years there have been frustrating barriers for these
15 individuals. An estimated-- estimated at 220,000
16 across the five boroughs, plus an estimated 250,000
17 family members, being able to access the city, state
18 and federal benefits and services for which they or
19 their families are eligible. Taking together
20 approximately one to seventeen New Yorkers are
21 eligible for city, state and federal benefits and
22 services provided for veterans and their families.
23 Yet, far too many veterans, even those most in need,
24 do not identify as veterans because they served
25

1 during peace time or they were never called to
2 "active" status. When those who have served in the
3 military and their families do not self-identify as
4 veterans and seek out the benefits and services to
5 which they are eligible, this represents potentially
6 millions of federal and state dollars that are not
7 reaching families and communities here in New York
8 City that need that money. As such, to ensure that
9 streamlined access to services for the one and
10 seventeen New Yorkers who've either served in the
11 military or who are a spouse or a dependent family
12 member of someone who served, we strongly urge this
13 committee to amend the current bill to include the
14 specification that applicants requesting assistance
15 from HRA be screened for prior service in the US
16 Armed Forces or State Guard or militia, or for
17 whether their spouse or head of household has ever
18 served in the US Armed Forces or State Guard or
19 militia. On behalf of the New York City Veteran's
20 Alliance, I thank you for the opportunity.

21
22 ELANA DUFFY: Okay. Council Members,
23 please first allow me to first to thank you for
24 proposing and supporting this initiative and for
25 hearing the testimony of the efficacy of this

1
2 proposed program. My name is Elana Duffy and I'm the
3 founder and CEO of the support and civil services
4 technology platform, Pathfinder Labs. We provide a
5 very similar service to the one proposed, linking our
6 current test group of veterans and their families to
7 vetted community resources to support their
8 reintegration process. We are also close to enabling
9 universal registration features and direct referral
10 services as well as push notifications for eligible
11 individuals. A significant number of the
12 capabilities you are requesting in your initiative
13 are already or soon to be features on our platforms,
14 so I'm here to speak to some of our market research
15 that ensures your goal is attainable. The primary
16 issue facing registration referral of undeserved
17 populations is each organization has different
18 technological capabilities and each individual has
19 different needs and meets different criteria to be
20 eligible for services, as well established today. It
21 is a fairly complex task, particularly when some of
22 the organizations are still using paper filing
23 systems. How at least my company is solving this
24 issue for the underserved is the following steps for
25 services: Providing a standardized information on

1
2 each service listed, focusing particularly on
3 limitations, restrictions and other eligibility
4 concerns. For example, since we are starting with a
5 veteran population, we are able to sort requirements
6 like-- we have requirements and conditions like
7 discharge status or service era. This ensures
8 connecting the individual with the service for which
9 they are immediately qualified, income, family
10 status, other criteria could easily be integrated for
11 general population needs and city services. We also
12 categorize these services based on what they provide.
13 And homelessness, for example, there are resources
14 for at-risk populations as well as currently homeless
15 populations, and these can be important distinctions
16 for rapid response. We maintain the database of
17 organizations, connecting the organization to ensure
18 correctness and completeness only once. By storing
19 this information in our database, we're not only able
20 to have a consistently updated list of services
21 provided, but can provide analysis on request based
22 on location, population, numbers served, and so
23 forth. This is one of the advantages of having a
24 centrally maintained third-party system. As in your
25 case, it can be also be compared to non-city options

1
2 for each service provided. This ultimately helps
3 with planning of social services and an accurate
4 assessment of needs met and needs outstanding in a
5 population in which it is often difficult to obtain
6 data, and the rest is all in my written testimony
7 which you have a copy of, and thank you for hearing
8 my testimony on this initiative.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you very
10 much. So, you feel that the city could easily build
11 the technology infrastructure we need to administer
12 these programs?

13 ELANA DUFFY: Build, maybe not. It's
14 taken us a little bit to hammer out some of this, but
15 I believe that the implementation of it is
16 acceptable, and the technology exists and it's out
17 there to be able to implement.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And forgive me
19 for me asking you versus probably four or five of the
20 previous panelists who are working at solving the
21 same problem. You support this even though we might
22 actually end up being a competitor who ends up
23 building this and making a rules engine out there for
24 you to use? That's--

1
2 ELANA DUFFY: [interposing] Yeah, it's no
3 prob-- we're working with actually New York State
4 already and the City of Boston, but we're
5 international, or-- not inter-- or interstate at this
6 point.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And are you-- I
8 see you sitting next to other folks who I know are at
9 Civic Hall Labs-- sorry. Civic Hall, are you also at
10 Civic Hall?

11 ELANA DUFFY: I am also at Civic Hall.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Perfect. So, you
13 are with the right folks. Civic Hall has some of the
14 best projects. So, one of the questions that we have
15 is-- so this is going to be the place where we dive
16 right into way too much data, at least with these two
17 panelists. You mentioned that we should try to
18 figure-- you said, "HRA should screen for prior
19 service in the US Armed Forces or State Guard or
20 militia and for whether their spouse or head of
21 households has ever served in US Armed forces, State
22 Guard or militia." One of the questions we have as
23 we're drafting is where is that dataset? Who owns
24 it? How private is it, and can private sector or the
25

1
2 government or the city government gain access to that
3 easily, or does the City already have that list?

4 OLIVIA MEIER: I don't-- do you know?
5 If-- I don't know. DVS would probably be the best
6 people to ask about that particular question about
7 who--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] So,
9 yes, the plain and clear question is--

10 OLIVIA MEIER: [interposing] Yeah.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: does the City of
12 New York or the State or Federal Government have a
13 list of Armed Forces or State Guard or militia that
14 is in some way publicly accessible or government
15 accessible.

16 ELANA DUFFY: It is-- there is a list
17 that is government accessible that the only problem
18 is that the military frequently does not track
19 veterans after they leave the service. They don't
20 necessarily know if they move, if they relocate. The
21 best accessible form would actually be the Department
22 of Veteran Affairs, and they would be able to
23 cooperate with the City on identifying those who are
24 at least using those services. Unfortunately, that
25

1
2 does-- that only will encompass about 50 percent of
3 the population.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I remember from
5 10 or so years ago while I was a practicing attorney,
6 that when we sued somebody, you have to prove that
7 the person isn't on active duty, and I remember there
8 was a service we paid that we would give them the
9 name and they would give us back the-- do you--
10 what's the service?

11 ELANA DUFFY: That actually, you don't--
12 the service itself you don't necessarily have to use
13 anymore. There are records checks that can be done
14 through the Federal Government with-- through
15 actually Fort Knox is still currently keeping the
16 records, oddly enough. So, Fort Knox, they were
17 going to move it over to Fort Leavenworth. I doubt
18 they ever did. It's the military, they don't move
19 things. But they can actually look-- they can do the
20 research to determine if somebody is still on active
21 duty or ever did serve on active duty.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, I guess my
23 promise to you is if you two can work with me to
24 identify where the City could gain access to that
25 data, I would work with our Committee Counsel to

1
2 determine whether or not that would be something fair
3 to ask HRA. And so, to our Attorney from Lenox Hill,
4 first, thank you for the great work that you do.
5 Thank you for offering somebody who testified before
6 you some assistance even if they might be outside
7 your catchment area. I appreciate the great work you
8 do. Thank you for coming with specific suggestions
9 on ways to improve the legislation. In terms of--
10 initially, this was based on tax data, and so the
11 idea was anyone who had a 1099, we could just use
12 that data. So, your first suggestion is how to
13 identify people who are prospectively eligible, and
14 so this same question applies of just is there a
15 specific dataset you might suggest, or is there
16 information that DSS or another City agency might
17 already have that we could refer to for identifying
18 them?

19 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: My suggestion was
20 based off of knowing that New York State polls that
21 information for Medicaid for the state of New York,
22 and so-- and for other assistance for health
23 insurance purposes. So, at least for Medicaid and
24 HRA and other medical assistance program benefits, it
25 seems that they could use the same source, since

1 those are governed by the same federal and state
2 regulations. And then in terms of my suggestion for
3 people who are potentially or prospectively eligible,
4 part of that was that benefit eligibility can change
5 based on how old you are, and so you know, if
6 somebody applies at 59 and they're turned away, but
7 at 60 they may be eligible if nothing else changes,
8 that might be helpful to know. Because some benefits
9 do vary depending on how old you are, and so I think
10 that's something that could be really useful to know
11 that, oh, you're not eligible now, but maybe in six
12 months with this income you would be. Because when
13 you're 60 things are a little different. And so that
14 was that. Also, that suggestion is that--

15
16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing]
17 Okay, so--

18 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: [interposing] You
19 know, a lot of times when people are just denied,
20 they don't really know exactly what the reason is,
21 and it doesn't mean that they're never going to be
22 eligible again, but a lot of times people feel like
23 that's a barrier.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I appreciate the
25 hearing process. So, you're correct. Denial is a

1 data point, and a denial is not permanent in time.
2 It-- I think a lot of us think as a denial as like
3 that's-- when you think technology-wise, that's a
4 balance. That's no longer a customer, but to then
5 see that data point as this person is not valid now
6 as an applicant, but they might be in a year or two
7 years. So, I think what we-- I like the idea, and
8 we'll see about amending in terms of saying that we
9 should keep the information to use that for future
10 benefits because also the SCRIE and DRIE law changed,
11 and we changed it from 25 to 50. So, if somebody
12 applied and was denied, we could send them the
13 certific-- an update being like, "Hey, two years ago
14 you had this income. You didn't qualify, but we
15 changed it." I-- thank you. Okay, that is helpful.
16 Automatic recertification, if there's any
17 jurisdictions that currently do so. I did not come
18 across it in my research in 2015. If you have it--

19 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: [interposing] I can
20 look into it and let you know.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Yes. The 90-day
22 grace period for recertification, again, if there is
23 an existing waiver that another state has and we
24 believe we can get it from this Administration. I--
25

1
2 the good cause-- so, is there currently a practice
3 where HRA allows for reinstatement of lapsed benefits
4 or retroactive?

5 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: I believe.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, I like the
7 idea. Let's work a little bit more together. We can
8 figure out whether or not it was within the--

9 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: [interposing] I don't
10 know. Yes, for SNAP and public assistance, I believe
11 they currently do allow good cause as a reason for
12 retroactive reinstatement, but it's not currently
13 part of Medicaid and the Medicare Savings Program.
14 I've had several clients who are hospitalized for a
15 period of time, then in rehab, and then--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] So,
17 let's figure out--

18 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: they had a lapse and
19 it was a pain to reinstate.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Let's figure out
21 why, why that is and where that is as that gets--

22 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: [interposing] Sure.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And were there
24 any other suggestions that you had made, because they
25 were all-- you are an amazing panel. I appreciate it.

1
2 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: I believe they're all
3 in the written--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] I'm
5 trying to make sure I've addressed them so I could
6 think them out with you.

7 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: Yeah.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'm a brain-
9 stormer [sic]. And anyone watching, you can go to
10 ben--

11 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: [interposing] Sorry, I
12 blew through them.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS:
14 gov/benkallos/legislation [cross-talk]

15 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: Because I knew I only
16 had two minutes and I was trying to respect
17 everyone's time.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: That's fine.

19 ALEXANDRA BRANDES: Yeah, I think, you
20 know, I think the biggest things we see are related
21 to, you know, the people that are maybe denied for
22 one benefit and not told that they could qualify for
23 something else, because every benefit is a little bit
24 different, so it's incredibly confusing, and then you
25 know, when people get on a benefit, you know, finding

1
2 out that like not getting kicked off for an arbitrary
3 reason would be helpful.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And I think just
5 for this panel, to the extent you've connected with
6 individuals who have had situations where but for-- I
7 think it would be helpful to have specific anecdotal
8 cases of people where they thought, like the person
9 who just walked out who had testified who said like,
10 they told him that he didn't get anything because I
11 already have SSDI. I think the more stories of
12 people who are willing to go on record to say like,
13 "If only I had gotten the additional benefits I
14 wouldn't have ended up here." So, I want to thank you
15 very much, and I'll excuse you and thank you for
16 sticking around for a five hour hearing which is--
17 has one more panelist.

18 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

19 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, we have
21 Tuwakia Kumatsu [sp?], who I have the opportunity to
22 meet as Chair of the Committee on Governmental
23 Operations. I want to thank him for working with my
24 office. I want to acknowledge that we do our best to
25 make sure everyone is a happy customer. Sometimes,

1 we are-- we fall short of that. All we can do is try
2 our best, and I know you're not happy with the work
3 we did, but I know my office has tried everything we
4 can. We've met multiple times to try to do more. I
5 will say that I wish I had a magic wand. I do have
6 one, but it's like a Harry Potter replica, and it
7 doesn't actually do magic. And so we're stuck within
8 the leaps and bounds of what we can do within the
9 legislative process. So, I do want to apologize that
10 I couldn't do more. My staff has gone back and tried
11 to figure out what else we can do. And I also just
12 want to thank you for coming out in support of a
13 legislation, and thank you, and you have two and a
14 half minutes.

16 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: Okay. Thanks for your
17 time. First time we met was on February 3rd. I
18 brought to your attention some problems I was having,
19 particularly wage theft, and also frivolous lawsuits
20 by a slumlord. You told me then you had experiences
21 in those areas as a software developer. I think
22 you're owed 6,000 dollars in back-pay, and you also
23 had litigation against a slumlord that was active.
24 One of the reasons I came today is because-- I try to
25 tune Mr. Banks out as much as possible, because he's

1
2 lied repeatedly to my face. Are you aware that his
3 wife is the supervising judge citywide for New York
4 City Housing Courts? So, on one hand, the mandate of
5 HRA is to try to reduce or stop evictions. On the
6 other, if his wife is the supervising judge, she's
7 not properly supervising her subordinates, and
8 they're coming into my apartment on July 10th of
9 2015, violating my civil rights by prohibiting me
10 from recording how they conducted that fraudulent
11 inspection so I could use it on appeal at the
12 appellate term, and then when the case went back to
13 court I was denied my due process right to present
14 any evidence whatsoever in my defense, audio
15 recordings, video recordings, confirming my landlord
16 wasn't making repairs. Guess what? I got unlawfully
17 evicted on that basis. Then I met, again, I met you
18 on February 3rd. I brought that to your attention. I
19 appreciate your help in trying to get me legal
20 assistance, but that never panned out. So, let's cut
21 to the chase. After three years and about five
22 judges in one case, a 20 million dollar defamation
23 one, I finally won on my own without counsel. But
24 again, the first time I met Mr. Banks was at the Yale
25 [sic] Club on March 1st. I told him that my iPhone

1 was stolen while I was in one of his buildings
2 because there was inadequate security there, that the
3 New York Comptroller conducted an audit confirming,
4 you know, there's no-- there aren't any security
5 cameras here. Also, something that you should be
6 mindful is I just recently found out, HRA is doing
7 business with the same company that stole my pay five
8 years ago and I brought to your attention on February
9 3rd. So, if tax payers are having their cash used to
10 provide HRA with services through that company, what
11 can you do as a legislator to try to persuade HRA to
12 steer the funding from-- that's going to that company
13 to my wallet, or essentially, if I was never
14 subjected to wage theft, I would never for once have
15 needed HRA services. I would have never been in
16 litigation against my landlords. Plus, I've got this
17 big binder of material that basically proves that Mr.
18 Banks is lying to you left and right today as well as
19 at other hearings. Basically, this is a Supreme
20 Court case. I was granted to the ability to proceed
21 anonymously and to have it sealed. However, the
22 court actually violated their own order. They put my
23 name on in the internet in relation to this case.
24 So, the fact that I'm discussing it with you is only
25

1 because of the fact their own order is now null and
2 void since they already viol-- they breached their
3 order. But one of the things in that lawsuit was I
4 beat HRA on appeal at the state level with OTDA that
5 was talked about today. OTDA hasn't enforced their
6 own decision from September 15th of last year about a
7 storage issue, and Jeffery Mossick [sp?], an attorney
8 for HRA, lied repeatedly on June 7th to the judge in
9 this case. So, when Mr. Banks sat in this chair
10 today, the remarks that he made were subject to the
11 penalties of perjury. So, if the attorney that he
12 sent to the courtroom on June 7th was lying left and
13 right to the judge, question is, do you want to get a
14 copy of that transcript so you can review it for
15 yourself and see exactly what was stated? And also,
16 take a look at this. It's pretty massive, but to
17 basically prove I'm not full of it.

18
19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, first, thank
20 you for participating in the process. I think that
21 we as elected officials and also as residents have a
22 duty to pay attention to where things are going
23 wrong, and there are places where I wish I could roll
24 up my sleeves and get down to figuring out what
25 happened. One of those places was Rivington [sp?].

1
2 Where there's concerns about specific misconduct of
3 city officials, like some of the things you brought
4 up-- so, you have triggered whistle-blower
5 protections by reporting it to the Council, and so
6 what I can offer is I myself can pass it on to
7 Department of Investigations, or if you we can. With
8 regards to concerns about judicial conduct or
9 attorney conduct, you can report the judicial conduct
10 to the courts. For the attorney conduct, you can
11 file a complaint with the State Bar Association. It's
12 self-regulating by attorneys. I'm an attorney,
13 that's why I know that. And yeah.

14 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: But with regards to
15 this recent award of 200,000 dollars to a legal
16 services group to provide veterans with legal
17 assistance--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] Yes.

19 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: So, if I'm sitting in
20 this chair as a US Navy veteran and I reach out to
21 these groups, and I always get the same answer,
22 "Sorry, but we can only help single mothers or low-
23 income families." If this funding is earmarked for
24 veterans, and I'm sitting in this chair, and I just
25 told you have a court decision confirming I prevailed

1
2 against a slumlord-- I'm also a victim of a
3 concussion that was entirely foreseeable. My former
4 roommate tried to assault-- assaulted me on May 12th
5 of last year.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Sorry.

7 TUWAKIA KAMATSU: I told one of HRA's
8 partners about that. They sent me a text message
9 back saying we're not going to evict this guy from
10 your own apartment. Both of you are lease holders.
11 You have rights. Problem is, that's not true. HRA's
12 partner pulled a bait and switch with regards to the
13 lease agreement. We signed the lease agreement on
14 February 16th at HRA's office in front of witnesses.
15 After doing so, Urban Pathways, their partner, forged
16 my signature in the second lease that was totally
17 different from the first. As a result, I didn't get
18 the apartment I signed the lease agreement for. So,
19 as a former attorney, I'm pretty sure you know what a
20 bait and switch is.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, I hear. So,
22 I think the issue being in terms of the powers for
23 the elected officials and what we can do. So, when
24 it comes to civil matters or criminal matters, that's
25 generally a place where if it's a criminal matter

1
2 that's NYPD reporting, what have you. When it's a
3 criminal activity by a city official, we have the
4 Department of Investigations who have the tools and
5 the resources. And in terms of if somebody is
6 receiving a city contract and not following it-- give
7 me one second. So, I don't-- I wish I had all the
8 answers. I believe that--

9 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: [interposing] I can
10 answer them for you. I already reached out to DOI.
11 They told me, "We can't help you. You have to deal
12 directly with HRA." With regards to the issue of
13 procurement that city contracts, it doesn't affect
14 private contracts, only like vendors who have
15 contracts with the City for those specific contracts.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Yeah.

17 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: So, if I worked at
18 Credit Suites [sic] five years ago, through Entity
19 Data, which is a company that HRA just issued a 3.5
20 million dollar contract to, then DOI can't help.
21 With regards to the slumlord issue, I reached out to
22 the Attorney General. I got a letter back saying,
23 "We're not going to help you."

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Yeah.

1
2 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: So, if the Attorney
3 General is standing in front of the news camera
4 saying we don't tolerate harassment by landlords,
5 problem is I have a letter from his office stating
6 otherwise.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I feel where
8 you're coming from, and I think we're just trying to--
9 -

10 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: [interposing] And you
11 talked about the NYPD. The Mayor talked-- Mr. Banks
12 talked about recent town hall events, public
13 meetings. I tried going to those meetings. I was
14 denied my-- with regards to New York State's open
15 meetings law and the Supreme Court case, I was
16 subjected to view point discrimination, basically
17 prevailed against HRA on appeal. Because of that I'm
18 being routinely discriminated against. I'm not able
19 to walk into the Veteran's Memorial Hall on May 23rd
20 in the Bronx Supreme Court. Instead, NYPD officers
21 are going into that courthouse where they have
22 absolutely no jurisdiction and directing the court
23 officers to keep me out of that public meeting.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing]
25 Okay, that--

1
2 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: [interposing] I've got
3 the video from the OCA.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Okay, let's--

5 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: [interposing] And I was
6 shoved three times on a public sidewalk by NYPD
7 officers.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: So, you've shared
9 it on the record. I think the item of last resort is
10 when the government isn't doing its best, I myself
11 also often go to the press. So, for--

12 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: [interposing] I'm going
13 to reach out the ACLU next.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I'm sorry I can't
15 do more. I want to do more. I hear where you're
16 coming from. I appreciate that you came out. Thank
17 you for your support on the legislation. Thank you
18 for continuing to fight the good fight.

19 T UWAKIA KAMATSU: It would help if you
20 went back into active practice so I can get an
21 attorney.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you. So, I
23 will now conclude this hearing on the Committee on
24 General Welfare.

25 [gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date July 19, 2017