

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2023

Start: 1:14 P. M.

Recess: 4:04 P. M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room, 14th  
Floor

B E F O R E: Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés  
Chi A. Ossé  
Kristin Richardson Jordan  
Kevin C. Riley

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Farah Louis

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES  
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Zaqanah Stephens  
Youth Advocate and Member of New York City Youth  
Action Board

Doobneek  
Youth Advocate and Member of New York City Youth  
Action Board

Josh Bravo  
Youth Advocate and Member of New York City Youth  
Action Board

Onyx Walker  
Co-Chair Coordinator of the Youth Action Board

Susan Haskell,  
Deputy Commissioner at New York City Department  
of Youth and The Department Community  
Development

Tracey Thorne,  
Director of Strategic Planning and Data Analysis  
at Runaway and Homeless Youth Services of New  
York City

Samantha Dawkins  
Director of Program Management at Runaway and  
Homeless Youth Services of New York City

Lauren Galloway,  
Advocacy Coordinator at  
The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Jamie Powlovich,  
Executive Director at  
The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Gina Michu,  
Advocacy Fellow at The Coalition for Homeless  
Youth; former Youth Action Board Member of NYC

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES  
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Nadia Swanson,  
Director of Technical Assistance and Advocacy at  
The Ali Forney Center

Jimmy Meagher  
Policy Director at Safe Horizon

Jonah Dill-D'Ascoli  
Financial Empowerment Coach at Safe Horizon

Jayne Bigelsen,  
President of Advocacy at Covenant House of New  
York

Nickesha Francis,  
Policy and Advocacy Manager at  
Good Shepherd Services

Stacy Stewart  
Licensed Social Worker; Managing Director of  
Housing and Runaway and Homeless Youth Services  
at The Door

1  
2 SERGEANT BIONDO: Thank you, this is for recording  
3 purposes, microphone test. Today's date is April 24,  
4 2023 for The Committee on Youth Services, 14th Floor,  
5 Committee Room, being recorded by John Biondo.

6 Good afternoon, and welcome to today's hybrid  
7 Committee Hearing for Youth Services.

8 If anyone would like to testify, please submit  
9 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov), once again,  
10 that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

11 We ask everyone to please place all electronic  
12 devices to vibrate or silent mode at this time.

13 Chair, we are ready to begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS:

15 [GAVELING IN] [GAVEL SOUND]

16 Good afternoon, I am Council Member Althea  
17 Stevens, Chair of New York City Council's Committee  
18 on Youth Services.

19 Thank you for joining us today at this hearing on  
20 Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth.

21 In addition to today's oversight topic, we will  
22 be hearing three bills:

23 Introduction 976, sponsored by me, will would  
24 require the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and  
25 the Department of Youth and Community Development

(DYCD) to report quarterly on the number of LGBTQ homeless persons who inquire about or seek DHS and DYCD services.

Introduction 977, sponsored by me, would require drop-in centers to participate in the streamlined intake process for youths aging or timing out of shelters operated or funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development, and who intend to transfer to adult shelters.

Introduction 54, sponsored by, Council Member Farah Lous, would require the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to include financial literacy training as part of all youth employment programs and programs for runaway and homeless youth.

DYCD's Runaway and Homeless Youth shelter system has greatly expanded over the past decade. DYCD currently operates 753 shelter beds for young people ages 16 to 20, a 500-bed increase from 2014. In 2019, DYCD extended their services to older youth by bringing 60 beds online for 21 to 24-year-olds.

Despite the expansion of the RHY system over the past decade, providers contend that there is still a growing demand for age-appropriate shelters in NYC.

According to Preliminary Fiscal 2023 Mayor's

1  
2 Management Report, DYCD's RHY drop-in centers served  
3 a total of 1,445 youth in the first four months of  
4 this Fiscal Year in 2023, an increase of 48 percent  
5 from the same period in Fiscal Year 2022.

6 Despite the increase in drop-in center usage,  
7 DYCD has issued a directive ordering drop-in centers  
8 to remove resting places for young people. Providers  
9 have deep concerns that without a place to rest,  
10 young people are forced to either turn to the streets  
11 or the adult homeless system where they do not feel  
12 safe. This is an impossible choice.

13 I am eager to hear today why the DYCD plan to  
14 continue to enforce this policy or if they plan to  
15 identify an alternative solution.

16 The Committee is concerned that the surge in  
17 drop-in centers usage is driven by youths' inability  
18 to access CityFHEPS vouchers, the rise in accompanied  
19 young migrants, and an inadequate number of beds for  
20 homeless young adults.

21 In the Council's Fiscal 2024 Budget Response, the  
22 body included a request to baseline \$6.3 million for  
23 40 additional homeless young adults, and , 16 housing  
24 specialists, and 16 peer navigator positions to aid  
25

1  
2 youth in their transition into permanent housing and  
3 self-sufficiency.

4 The Council emphasis that DYCD must increase its  
5 capacity so that the youth in need are not turned  
6 away. The limited RHY system is overburdened by  
7 these compounding crises. I believe by expanding the  
8 capacity for homeless young adults is one solution to  
9 help alleviate the strain the system.

10 An addition to today's oversight topic, I look  
11 forward to hearing the Administration's feedback on  
12 my legislation. I am very proud of the bill we are  
13 hearing today.

14 Lastly, I want to stress that caring for our most  
15 vulnerable youth is a priority for me and this  
16 committee. We are here today to ensure that the  
17 comprehensive streamlining services for RHY is also a  
18 priority for this administration.

19 I would like to thank the staff for their hard  
20 work in preparing for this hearing, Christina  
21 Yellamaty, Committee Counsel, and Elizabeth Arzt,  
22 Policy Analyst, as well as my Chief of Staff Kate,  
23 and the entire A team back at the district office in  
24 16.

1  
2 I believe that now we are going to hear an  
3 opening statement from Council Member Louis.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair.

5 Good afternoon, thank you Chair Stevens for the  
6 opportunity to speak about my bill Introduction 54, A  
7 Local Law that would provide financial literacy  
8 education in in schools and youth employment programs  
9 and other relevant programs funded by The Department  
10 of Youth and Community Development, also known as the  
11 DYCD.

12 We all know that financial literacy is a crucial  
13 life tool that helps individuals make informed  
14 decisions and plan for their future. Unfortunately,  
15 today we have not provided young people in our  
16 communities with access to financial education. Many  
17 young people in Black and Brown communities do not  
18 have access to financial literacy training through  
19 their families and external means. This particularly  
20 affects Black and Brown communities who have been  
21 excluded from these opportunities for generations.

22 For far too long, financial literacy education  
23 has been a privilege that only certain groups of  
24 people have been afforded. As a result, we see a  
25 stark inequality in our society, where historically



1 disenfranchised communities struggle to access the  
2 critical recourses they need to get ahead whether  
3 that is a decent job, affordable housing, or reliable  
4 health care. That is why Introduction 54 is so  
5 important. By mandating at least two hours of  
6 financial literacy education to youth in citywide  
7 programs, we ensure that our young people are  
8 equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to  
9 make informed financial choices which are very  
10 critical to succeed in today's economy and to  
11 potentially create generational wealth.  
12

13 I look forward to today's conversation to bring  
14 equitable opportunities for all young New Yorkers.  
15 Thank you, Chair, the committee staff, my Legislative  
16 Director, Andrea Fondulas, and to my colleagues for  
17 their support. Thanks, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, Council Member.

19 I would like to also acknowledge that Council  
20 Member Ossé, Council Member Avilés, and Council  
21 Member Louis for being here today, thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will be limiting public  
23 testimony today to two minutes each. For in-person  
24 panelists, please come up to the table once your name  
25 has been called.

1  
2 For virtual panelists, once your name is called,  
3 a member of our staff will unmute you, and the  
4 Sergeant At Arms will set the timer and give you the  
5 go ahead to begin. Please wait for the sergeant to  
6 announce that you may begin before delivering your  
7 testimony.

8 We are going to start with a panel of youth,  
9 followed by the Administration.

10 I am now going to call Onyx Walker, Doobneek,  
11 Zaqanah Stephens, and Josh Bravo up to the table to  
12 testify.

13 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Hello, my name is Zaqanah  
14 Stephens; I am a youth advocate and part of the New  
15 York City Youth Action Board.

16 Thank you, Chair Althea Stevens, and The  
17 Committee on Youth Services for holding this hearing  
18 and allowing me to testify.

19 I am in favor of the amendment of Introduction 54  
20 to include financial literacy training as part of  
21 Youth Employment Services and Runaway and Homeless  
22 Youth.

23 As someone who has experienced homelessness at  
24 the age of 17, I did not have adult guidance to teach  
25 me about taxes. At 18 years old, I worked as an

1 independent contractor before knowing what that  
2 phrase meant or even filing my first tax form.

3  
4 Now at 24, I am finally stable and equipped with  
5 more financial knowledge. The mistakes I have made  
6 in my teens, while ignorant to monetary and fiscal  
7 fundamentals while navigating housing insecurity,  
8 have caused irreparable damage to my finances.

9 I am the outcome of inadequate financial  
10 knowledge in the youth shelter system. With all the  
11 effort and perseverance it takes to survive and  
12 overcome homelessness, it is incredibly discouraging  
13 once you have found a way to stand on your own two  
14 feet only to realize that you have been knocked  
15 several steps back. We owe it to our youth to give  
16 them the resources and knowledge they need to make  
17 well informed financial decisions.

18 I would also like to speak about the importance  
19 of Housing Navigators and the DYCD drop-in centers.

20 The current Housing Specialists at drop-in  
21 centers are temporarily funded through Emergency  
22 Housing Voucher (EHV) funding, and it is set to  
23 expire in June.

24 For most youth facing homelessness, this would be  
25 their first attempt at entering the housing market.

1  
2 And New York City's housing market is infamous for  
3 being incredibly difficult to navigate. Just as we  
4 should create support and recourses for financial  
5 literacy, we should create support and resources for  
6 youth to have a higher chance of success at securing  
7 housing. [TIMER CHIMES]

8 Available data shows that there has been a 350  
9 percent increase in youth exiting homelessness into  
10 their own apartments. And since the implementation  
11 of Housing Specialists in this capacity, the data has  
12 shown that this is a necessity in our drop-in  
13 centers, and it is imperative that they are  
14 sustained. Thank you.

15 DOOBNEEK: Hi, everyone, My name is Doobneek, and  
16 I use they/them gender pronouns.

17 I am testifying on behalf of the Youth Action  
18 Board out of my lived expertise of a non-citizen who  
19 first immigrated to The United States due to  
20 persecution for being an LGBTQIA+ individual and my  
21 inability to return due to disagreement with Russia's  
22 government [INAUDIBLE] support for Ukraine.

23 My displacement and the artificial barriers  
24 forced on to underprivileged persons immigrating to  
25 The United States by the government, made me homeless

1  
2 -- a common situation that displaced people face,  
3 which adds to the houselessness crisis. The delays  
4 in the US [INAUDIBLE] laws preventing undocumented  
5 non-citizens and persons at the beginning of their  
6 asylum journey from receiving benefits, housing, and  
7 employment create unbearable conditions for people  
8 living in limbo, unable to advance and exit  
9 houselessness. They are living under the constant  
10 threat of removal from The United States. The  
11 government cannot; however, deport all of them, but  
12 rather it gives them a choice to either live in a  
13 country deprived of recourses and rights or leave and  
14 never come back. The government wishes to keep  
15 poverty abroad, but if you are lucky enough to come  
16 here as a non-citizen, border follows you throughout  
17 your life here, preventing you from accessing basic  
18 necessities.

19 Even though immigration is a federal issue, I  
20 wish to raise awareness for all New York City  
21 agencies and nonprofits about people who look like  
22 us, who live around us, and face invisible barriers  
23 because they are not born here. [TIMER CHIMES] I  
24 would like to include education for staff on  
25 immigration barriers in all of the services they

1  
2 provide including financial literacy services that  
3 were launched by Department of Youth & Community  
4 Development (DYCD).

5 JOSH BRAVO: I'm Josh, I am testifying on behalf  
6 of the New York City Youth Action Board. I just got  
7 my apartment after nine months of waiting, being in  
8 The Ali Forney Center, the drop-in center. Without  
9 that bed at the drop-in, I would not have gotten to  
10 where I am. I would probably have ended up dead in  
11 the streets.

12 We need more beds for people 21 and older so that  
13 youth would not have to sleep at the drop-in centers.  
14 We need to do better to be better instead of  
15 enforcing these cruel policies which make innocent  
16 youth suffer at the hands of the most broken system.

17 ONYX WALKER: Hello.

18 Good afternoon, my name is Onyx Walker; I'm 25  
19 years old, and I am Co-Chair Coordinator of the New  
20 York City Youth Action Board. I want to thank Council  
21 Member Farah Louis and Chair Althea Stephens for  
22 sponsoring this work, as well as the Committee for  
23 Youth Services.

24 I am for the amendment of Introduction 54. For a  
25 long time, the folks alongside me have been powerful

1  
2 advocates in combatting the cycle of homelessness in  
3 this city and state. From our allies of the  
4 Coalition of Homeless Youth, to my colleagues at New  
5 York City Youth Action Board, the tenacity and shared  
6 fight remain the same.

7 I represent young people who are and have been  
8 homeless, as I have been homeless before.

9 I represent service providers who want to aid and  
10 empower young people to lift themselves out of their  
11 circumstance, as I work with those providers.

12 I represent a voice of young people who, despite  
13 their struggle, continue to hold systems and decision  
14 makers accountable by taking up space in those  
15 conversations, for I am one of the people.

16 I exist at this intersection of those who need  
17 aid and those who provide. Intersectionality is  
18 important for us to acknowledge as we continue to  
19 talk about financial literacy and challenge our  
20 thinking about what it means to be homeless and how  
21 to lift yourself out of that struggle.

22 Make no mistake, homelessness is an  
23 intersectional issue. It combines the issues of  
24 gentrification, health -- both mental and physical,  
25 financial literacy, general education, and many more

1 systematic struggles. If we fail to provide adequate  
2 learning and recourses to unstably housed  
3 individuals, we in turn enable a cycle of chronic  
4 homelessness.  
5

6 I ask everyone listening, where do you think  
7 young people who have had a history of unstable  
8 housing learn to budget or do taxes? How do they  
9 acquire the knowledge needed to build credit, which  
10 is a necessity for acquiring new housing? Is there a  
11 reason to believe that they or we couldn't use a  
12 minor lesson in financial literacy? In the city  
13 where the cost of living is the highest on earth, why  
14 wouldn't financial literacy recourses be a priority?

15 If you believe yourself to be an advocate, this  
16 is a clear direction to aiding folks who are unstably  
17 housed. In supporting this bill, we can work towards  
18 lowering the number of young people who are currently  
19 or chronically homeless.

20 The New York City Youth Advocacy Board continues  
21 to inform decision makers at every angle, on  
22 approaches [TIMER CHIMES] that can actually help and  
23 consider the affected youth population.

24 We look forward to what will come of this. So,  
25 thank you for your time.



1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I would like to say...  
3 Well, thank you, guys, for all being here, I really  
4 appreciate it -- one, for sharing your stories, and  
5 being so open and honest, because sharing can also  
6 sometimes be traumatizing. So, I just want to  
7 acknowledge that and say thank you.

8 You know, I think that it is instrumental that  
9 we are teaching financial literacy not only in ,you  
10 know, with homeless and runaway youth, but with  
11 everyone. Right? Because even thinking about our  
12 education system, there is a total lack of that. We  
13 are not... Young people are not taught how to save,  
14 they are not taught how to do taxes. I took Algebra  
15 I, I haven't used Algebra I since I left high school.  
16 So, I would love to figure out when I'm going to use  
17 that. So, and we just thinking about how we actually  
18 teach young people skills that they are actually  
19 going to use and need in order to be successful  
20 adults.

21 So, I 100 percent agree with you guys. Not  
22 only should it be taught in those programs, these  
23 skills should be taught in all youth programming --  
24 in schools, in afterschool programs, and all of that,  
25

1  
2 that should be part of the education system and just  
3 real life skills. So, I really appreciate that.

4 I had a question for Doobneek, and I just wanted  
5 to just kind of ask the question around, like, I know  
6 you said that we should be doing more around teaching  
7 staff, around how to interact with ,you know, the  
8 young people who are coming here and seeking asylum  
9 and things like that.

10 Could you talk about how that would look like and  
11 ideally how that would work?

12 DOOBNEEK: I think there should be... So, in my  
13 lived expertise, I mean I have never been [INAUDIBLE]  
14 I am fortunate enough, but I have been in this limbo  
15 like a lot of people seeking asylum. They start from  
16 not being able to work. They are not able to receive  
17 benefits up until they get a firm decision on their  
18 case. If they don't get it, they will never be able  
19 to get any aid. But at least they will be able to  
20 work after one... half a year after they apply for  
21 asylum. So, I have been in this situation that  
22 undocumented people experience throughout their life,  
23 and they have no hope of changing that. At least  
24 DACA recipients can receive work permits. But, in a  
25 situation where you cannot apply for any financial

1 aid like Medicaid, school aid, SNAP assistance, and  
2 you also cannot work, and you cannot get housing, I  
3 have been in a situation where I didn't know the  
4 laws, and my caseworkers, with brilliant educations,  
5 they were not aware that I was not eligible for  
6 services that they were trying to enroll me in. So,  
7 they gave me false hope, and went with me through  
8 this long process only to find out that I am  
9 ineligible. So, there should be robust education for  
10 all providers, that is one -- to tell the youth that  
11 you cannot, unfortunately, receive those benefits,  
12 but there are some alternatives specifically for  
13 financial education. People who have no social  
14 security number, they can still build credit with  
15 their tax I.D., so there should be education about  
16 that.

17  
18 In all advocacy, I hear there is never any  
19 interest, never inclusion, it is color blind,  
20 [INAUDIBLE] have advocacy saying like we are  
21 providing housing for all, but actually don't. And  
22 people just, like... I understand the majority of  
23 people are citizens, they don't deal with it, and,  
24 uh, so people don't know about it, they don't want to

1  
2 learn about it, and it is just... And they just  
3 don't provide adequate services and advocacy.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no, I really  
5 appreciate that. And that is a lot of information.

6 And ,you know, especially with the increase of  
7 asylum seekers who are coming into New York City, I  
8 think it is one of those things that we do have to  
9 talk about, uhm, and really start making sure we are  
10 providing the correct services. And, so, thank you  
11 for that. That's really appreciated, because that is  
12 one of the things that I think that has been lacking  
13 in the system. And it is often, said, like, "Oh, we  
14 don't have a lot of asylum seekers seeking, uhm, or  
15 popping up in our centers," but that is clearly not  
16 true.

17 DOOBNEEK: But also not only asylum seekers, we  
18 also have to care about those who are already here.  
19 Right?

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, Mm-hmm.

21 DOOBNEEK: And they are not eligible for asylum.  
22 Right? After one year you are in this county, your  
23 claim will most likely be denied.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes.  
25

1  
2 DOOBNEEK: Unless you have extra circumstances.  
3 So, there should very much be an increase in that,  
4 like, just basic knowledge of immigration laws for  
5 all staff.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes. I appreciate that,  
7 thank you. Or have a designated person at all of the  
8 centers who specializes in that.

9 Josh, just really quickly, I know you mentioned  
10 the drop-in centers and that it saved your life.  
11 Could you talk a little bit about what that really  
12 looked like? Because, as we all know, there has been  
13 a mandate that folks cannot rest there at the drop-in  
14 centers anymore. Uhm, and I think that that is a  
15 crucial and mean policy that we are implementing.

16 So, could you talk a little bit about your  
17 experience that you had at the drop-in centers and  
18 how that actually helps you prepare to get your own  
19 place?

20 JOSH BRAVO: The difference between a DHS shelter  
21 and Ali Forney, was that they had more opportunities.  
22 It was either that or be in a very unsafe  
23 environment. I think without that crucial benefactor  
24 and my kind of journey throughout suffering through  
25 homelessness, I would not have been here. And the

1  
2 reason why I am here testifying and being a major  
3 part of Youth Advocate is because I endured so much  
4 trauma from my time being homeless that I had to just  
5 speak on the behalf of others, so that they don't  
6 have to suffer in the same ways that I have.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so, did you want to  
8 tell me your experience... And any of you can also  
9 answer, uhm, from the experience of even spending any  
10 time in the drop-in centers, could you talk a little  
11 bit about, like, what the difference is between the  
12 drop-in centers and like, going to the shelter and  
13 that process?

14 JOSH BRAVO: A DHS shelter is built more on, like,  
15 systemic structures. It is very institutionalized.  
16 The drop-in center is not. It feels safe. It feels  
17 like a lot more of what a shelter should be rather  
18 than what the system built has for us.

19 DOOBNEEK: Right now, I work for the... I want to  
20 share about nonprofits, but my job is just to collect  
21 data on social services, and, yes, it feels like  
22 those drop-in centers are empty now. It is like they  
23 are useless. It's [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Why do you think it's  
25 useless?

1  
2 DOOBNEEK: Because of people who really... Well,  
3 there are a lot of people in actual homelessness  
4 situations. They are hanging out there still, but  
5 people who actually need housing ,you know, there is  
6 no need for them it feels like... to come there.  
7 But, yeah, you asked about DHS, I was referring  
8 somebody there, I had never been into a DHS shelter,  
9 but I have been to one of the providers, and the  
10 first question they asked my friend is, "Are you on  
11 parole?", or something. Like, they asked about their  
12 criminal record first thing. And, so, because they  
13 deny people like that I believe.

14 JOSH BRAVO: So, with experience with Ali Forney  
15 and DHS, the housing at DHS takes a lot longer than  
16 what Ali Forney has done. Because, I had an  
17 individualized appointments and more of more focused  
18 intensity on my housing. So, without... I did not  
19 get my housing done at any of the shelters I was at.  
20 I got my housing specifically done at Ali Forney, and  
21 it was the possibly the quickest it took. And it is  
22 a more productive, innovative way to get you off the  
23 streets into supportive housing, into Tills, into  
24 apartments -- all types of that. I just think that  
25 the drop-in center for even sleeping and in emergency

1 events, is definitely something that is needed.

2 Because, without me going in there during my worse  
3 moments, I would have been dead.

4  
5 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: I would say that drop-in  
6 centers are tailored for the age ranges that they  
7 serve. We have groups; we have certain resources.  
8 But, let's also not be fooled, the most important  
9 part about drop-in centers is that they provide a  
10 place for you to sleep and rest your head. If you  
11 are a youth trying... Especially if you are man  
12 trying to get into a DHS shelter, one, it is hard,  
13 there are waiting lists, and if you do get into it,  
14 it is a more tough environment. It is not curated  
15 for growth or thriving. It is really just more of a  
16 survival kind of space. Drop-in centers that have  
17 sleeping arrangements allow you to still be able to  
18 go to work, still be able to get meals, still be able  
19 to have your schedule... allow you to have a  
20 schedule that will be sustainable while you are  
21 working and trying to figure out your housing  
22 situation.

23 I have been in both DHS and drop-in centers, and  
24 the DHS shelter was by far the most traumatic  
25 experience I had.



1  
2 ONYX WALKER: So, I was street homeless. So, I  
3 didn't stay in any of those shelters. But, the work  
4 that I do is alongside service providers who do host  
5 young people at drop-in centers. And I think, I  
6 mean, forgive me for being blunt, I think in the work  
7 that we do where we are supposed to be providing  
8 service and assisting those who are unstably housed,  
9 removing your utility is backwards. Right? I think  
10 if we are going to continue to do the work of harm  
11 reduction, we need to not remove utility and maybe  
12 adjust the way that we use the utility.

13 I know for myself when I was homeless that I  
14 avoided shelters, because of what I had heard about  
15 them. And knowing what I know about drop-in centers,  
16 that would have been undoubtedly beneficial for me in  
17 my specific situation -- literally street homeless,  
18 but still had to work. I don't imagine that I would  
19 have found the time to be able to sit through intake  
20 in a shelter process, especially because I had heard  
21 that they were unsafe. And like Zaqanah just  
22 mentioned, I am a cis male, things are different in  
23 those shelter systems. And, so, I think, uhm, just  
24 as we continue to talk about, like, what that utility  
25 looks like, sleeping is a basic human necessity, and

1  
2 it is extremely jarring when you need a full night's  
3 sleep and you are woken up after two or three hours.  
4 You will not be able to function for the rest of the  
5 day. I have gone through it before, and if that  
6 happens in a drop-in center, it is not much different  
7 than sleeping on the streets. So...

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I believe, uh, my colleagues  
9 have questions. Chi Ossé?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you, Chair Stevens.  
11 And thank you to the four of you for testifying this  
12 afternoon. I am wildly impressed, and I appreciate  
13 you taking the time out of your days to share, again,  
14 some traumatic experiences that you may or may not  
15 have had.

16 Zaqanah, I have a question for you, and I know  
17 you said you were 24, I am just a year older than  
18 you, and I am in awe at some of your leadership here  
19 today.

20 You know, I want to hear from your experience,  
21 what helped you get to the place where you are today,  
22 whether it was from a city agency, whether it was  
23 from a drop-in center, and how could we work on  
24 expanding those things that helped you to get out of  
25 homelessness and find housing?

1  
2           ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Yes, definitely. So, I have  
3 been in almost all... I have been in a lot of  
4 different forms of youth shelters. So, I do... I  
5 can attest to, like, a lot of the different forms. I  
6 would say that when I was younger, I was mainly in  
7 Tills. Tills do serve a purpose, and I do believe  
8 that they should have Tills for older youth as  
9 well... (CROSS-TALK)

10           COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Can you explain what  
11 Tills...

12           ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Transitional living...

13           COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay.

14           ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Transitional Independent  
15 Living. Those are places where you could stay for up  
16 to two years, and they were helpful for me during a  
17 time when at my age I probably wasn't going to be  
18 able to get housing. When I did leave, I went to DHS  
19 shelter and I had a CityFHEPS voucher; I did not  
20 receive any help from the shelter that I was living  
21 in, and I wasn't able to get housing, because it was  
22 so difficult to find housing through the CityFHEPS  
23 voucher, which is why I am supportive of the Housing  
24 Specialists.

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After I left, I was in a rapid re-housing housing, which I found myself, and was able to tell my case manager to, like, refer me. That was... It was interesting... It was probably the most successful program that I have been in when it came to securing housing. It did have its hiccups, but I do believe that rapid re-housing housing is the future for securing housing for youth. At the end, I was able to secure housing, and this entire time span took seven years of me... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Wow...

ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Yeah... going through the shelter system for me to secure housing now. As I secured housing, I am realizing the financial decisions that I made back when I was homeless were not good decisions.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you for sharing that.

And, Josh, I know you spoke about Ali Forney being a supportive provider, even more supportive than DHS, and I would love to hear from the four of you whether you had Ali Forney help or some other providers, what are some of those other providers that were better than ,you know, a city agency that

1  
2 is supposed to be assisting you with the situations  
3 that you were in?

4 JOSH BRAVO: I can only speak on the behalf of Ali  
5 Forney, because the majority of the shelters that I  
6 did go to were DHS and were not helpful. They were  
7 very much institutionalized structures. There were a  
8 lot more issues with harm reduction. There were a lot  
9 of people who were not mentally well and were placed  
10 in environments where it was very uncontrolled and a  
11 lot of conflict was happening.

12 So, I really can't speak on the behalf of any  
13 other shelter, but I can say that Ali Forney is going  
14 in the right direction to where we need to be with  
15 the homelessness crisis.

16 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: I also stayed at Ali Forney  
17 and my Rapid Re-Housing was Jericho Project.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And to my knowledge, and  
19 maybe correct if I am wrong, I know that Ali Forney  
20 is focused mainly on LGBTQ+ unsheltered folks, do you  
21 know if they also cater to those who do not identify  
22 as LGBTQ+?

23 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: To my knowledge, I don't think  
24 so... (CROSS-TALK)

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [NOT MIC'D] I believe they  
3 do, but I think that that's [INAUDIBLE]...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [NOT MIC'D] [INAUDIBLE] they  
6 turn away any [INAUDIBLE]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

8 And, at some of the city shelters, uhm, were  
9 there any specific, and I think I know the answer to  
10 this question, anyways, but are there any specific,  
11 uh, services for those that, uh, identified at  
12 LGBTQ+?

13 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Not to my knowledge.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay.

15 DOOBNEEK: [INAUDIBLE] about what services are  
16 catered specifically?

17 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: [NOT MIC'D] [INAUDIBLE]

18 DOOBNEEK: Oh, from DHS? No.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: No?

20 And did you find that a bit difficult, if you did  
21 identify as LGBTQ+ when in those shelter systems,  
22 based off of your identity?

23 DOOBNEEK: Yes, there is no specific shelter for  
24 them. I mean, there is a Marsha's [TIMER CHIMES]  
25 House. But, but [INAUDIBLE] DHS [INAUDIBLE]

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: All right, thank you so much  
3 for sharing.

4 JOSH BRAVO: With my experiences with DHS  
5 shelters, there are a lot of issues with homophobia  
6 and internalized homophobia in those environments.  
7 There is a just a very... Like, a lot of  
8 personalities collided. And there are a range of  
9 people who are not as opened-minded and as mindful  
10 with the things that they say. It is from staff who  
11 work in DHS shelters. For example, Marsha's House, I  
12 have not met a person who identified as LGBTQ+ or a  
13 transgender individual in that house. And there was  
14 a lot of internalized homophobia at that building.  
15 And I don't have many great things to say about it...

16 (CROSS-TALK)

17 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: You said from the staff,  
18 too?

19 JOSH BRAVO: Yes, from Marsha's House and project  
20 Renewal. I have not... I have had my own traumatic  
21 experiences in Project Renewal that I really just  
22 want to keep to myself for them. But, it is  
23 definitely... There definitely needs to be an  
24 improvement with staff misusing their power, and  
25 things of that sort. And, a lot of training, and a

1 lot of training on harm reduction being accepting of  
2 people who are nonbinary and transgender -- myself  
3 being nonbinary, there definitely needs to be someone  
4 being held accountable for how the system is being  
5 played out in these types of shelters. It is unfair  
6 and it is cruel.

7  
8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Can I ask one more question,  
9 Chair?

10 And if ,you know, a situation arose at one of  
11 these shelters, uh, based off of discrimination of  
12 your gender identity or sexual orientation, was there  
13 someone on site that you were able to speak to about  
14 this? If you did speak to them about this, were  
15 there any solutions that were provided?

16 JOSH BRAVO: No, I was alone. Just alone. And  
17 only alone. I had to figure it out for myself.

18 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: And in my experience, even the  
19 higher-ups usually don't do their due diligence or  
20 are on ,you know, or really trying to help you. They  
21 are usually trying to just retain staff, because the  
22 retention rate is so difficult.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much for  
24 sharing those testimonies. I know it is not easy at  
25 all, especially as an LGBTQ+ identified person, as a



1  
2 young person, I hear you, and I know that we will  
3 work hard to try to fix this situation, so that no  
4 one else like you, or that you know, has to deal with  
5 this in the future. Thank you

6 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Thank you, thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Avilés?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Hi there, first, I want to  
9 thank you all for sharing your experiences, and  
10 fighting, and making sure that we do better as a city  
11 by all young people... all people. We should be  
12 doing better and making sure we provide dignity for  
13 all.

14 Onyx, I was wondering if you could talk a little  
15 bit more about -- you noted the intersectional issue.  
16 In what ways could we also be doing better? We have  
17 heard some of your other... folks up here mentioned  
18 a couple of different things like more beds, and  
19 obviously, competent staff who know the services, at  
20 a real place where people can actually put forward  
21 grievances. It sounds like there is no process for  
22 that, and that you are left to your own devices, and  
23 it potentially leaves you open to retaliation from  
24 the staff and possibly others.

1  
2 So, could you give us some other additional  
3 concrete recommendations?

4 ONYX WALKER: So, the work that I have done for  
5 the past, I want to say seven or eight years, has  
6 been youth organizing. And I think that is where the  
7 lens of intersectionality comes from. Because, what  
8 I was working towards before was ending the school to  
9 prison pipeline. But, homelessness is a part of  
10 that. And, so I think, uh, trauma informed work is a  
11 big piece of that. And, so, it includes considering  
12 who you are speaking to, uh, and where they are  
13 coming from, and what their perspective might be.  
14 Consider that they may not know enough, or that they  
15 already have known what it is that you are trying to  
16 tell them, but you should meet them where they are  
17 at. And, so, that means asking more questions first,  
18 I think. There are some other things as well, for  
19 example, like gentrification being part of this issue  
20 as well. And I don't think we necessarily need to  
21 give a crash course to every individual on what  
22 gentrification means, but what that implicates for  
23 individuals who are looking for housing -- the  
24 average rent in New York City as of last year was  
25 about \$1,600 per month. And, on a minimum wage

1 salary, if you are lucky enough to get a salary, it  
2 would be a struggle to maintain that to say the  
3 least. And, so, I think a lot of young people have  
4 entered into rapid re-housing programs, so Zaqanah  
5 and I can attest to this, we had entered in to rapid  
6 re-housing programs looking for housing, but not  
7 knowing how to sustain the housing. Right? So, that  
8 is why I talk about the financial literacy piece,  
9 because a lot of young people will say, okay, here is  
10 a way for me to get an apartment, and they will get  
11 the apartment, and they will be, like, okay, well,  
12 thank god, I am not homeless anymore, but now they  
13 have this rent that that they have to pay and  
14 sustain, and they don't know how to do that. And,  
15 then, in the event that they lose the housing, they  
16 don't know how to regain housing on their own. And,  
17 now they have passed the age threshold. So, now they  
18 are no longer young enough to qualify for the same  
19 rapid re-housing program, they are 25, 26, and they  
20 can't get access to the same resources. And, so, I  
21 think that's a part of that.

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23 You mentioned education and the public school  
24 systems, and that is a part of that same  
25 intersectionality. I have been thinking about it for

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years, no one taught us how to do our taxes. We had to go and seek that knowledge elsewhere. And if you don't know where to look, you won't find it. I am still learning how to do my taxes. You know? So, I think, uh, and just imagine someone who is the middle of their crisis, and is trying to figure out how to just get housing first. Where are they going to find the time to learn how to do their taxes, budget, build credit, et cetera, et cetera. Right? For example, Doobneek alluded to some things that some folks who are undocumented might not know. You can still build credit without a social security number. Right? And, so, again, you don't know what you don't know. And I think assuming that it is a one-tiered thing is a mistake that I think a lot of people make. Because, again, homelessness is a combination of many different things. So, I hope that answers your question.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

We have an enormous amount of work to do. Thank you, all for your testimony.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Louis?

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair.

1  
2 I want to echo my colleagues, I want to thank you  
3 all for being here and for sharing your experiences  
4 with us. You all are change makers, and this is how  
5 we change the situations that young people like you  
6 have been through in the city of New York.

7 I have one quick question. DYCD states that they  
8 provide financial literacy training at drop-in  
9 centers. I want to ask you all, have you been able  
10 to receive services when it comes to financial  
11 literacy , a financial coach, or anyone to show you  
12 or help you navigate any financial related matters  
13 that you have had?

14 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: No.

15 JOSH BRAVO: No.

16 ONYX WALKER: Yeah, I mean, like I said, I was  
17 street homeless, but I can also say that even in some  
18 of the programs that I work with, it doesn't seem to  
19 me that financial literacy is being pushed forward.  
20 It could happen, like once in a blue moon. Right?  
21 But, to my knowledge, it doesn't happen often enough  
22 if it is happening at all.

23 ZAQANAH STEPHENS: You know what? They might have  
24 a budget group or something like that.

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COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: But, you haven't experienced it.

ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Yeah, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And you all from different parts of the city, right?

ZAQANAH STEPHENS: Mm-hmm.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: So, there is obviously a disparity there.

Thank you for being honest about that.

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: If there are no more questions, thank you, guys, for coming in and testifying today. We really appreciate it. And thank you for your courage and openness.

PANEL: Thank you

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Before the next panel, we are going to take a five-minute break.

We will now hear testimony from the Administration.

Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation.

Panelists, please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

[ADMINISTRATION AFFIRMS]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin when ready.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Youth Services Committee. I am Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner for Youth Services At The Department Of Youth And Community Development. I am joined by my colleagues from Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, Tracey Thorne, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Data Analysis at Runaway, and Samantha Dawkins, Director of Program Management. Our pronouns are she/her.

On behalf of Commissioner Howard, thank you for this opportunity to update the Council about how we address the needs of runaway and homeless youth.

I want to take a moment to recognize the leadership of our former Youth Services Chair, Lew Fidler, on behalf of Runaway and Homeless Youth. DYCD is grateful to have worked with the city Council over the years, as well as providers and advocates, to build a comprehensive continuum of an ecosystem of Runaway and Homeless Youth Services.

1  
2 To name a few of our major accomplishments, in  
3 recent years we have more than tripled the number of  
4 residential beds, increased the age for residential  
5 services to 24, lengthened the maximize stay, and  
6 opened new drop-in centers. There are currently eight  
7 DYCD funded centers, with at least one 24/7 center  
8 operating in all five boroughs. Young people can now  
9 access high quality mental health services in drop-in  
10 centers and in residences.

11 Our system is unparalleled and demonstrates the  
12 City as a national leader in fighting youth  
13 homelessness and ensuring better outcomes for young  
14 people. In recognition of that, in 2021 HUD awarded  
15 New York City a \$15 million grant as part of the  
16 Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

17 DYCD is the lead agency for implementing the New  
18 York City coordinated community plan, called  
19 Opportunity Starts with a Home. Many city agencies  
20 came together to develop and implement this plan, in  
21 partnership with youth lived expertise with  
22 homelessness, service providers, and other community  
23 stakeholders. This funding supports a wide range of  
24 new housing and service interventions to prevent and  
25 end youth homelessness.



1  
2 To support the goals of this plan, the City has  
3 funded Financial Literacy Coaches and Peer Navigators  
4 in drop- in centers. These areas were prioritized by  
5 members of the Youth Action Board and The Planning  
6 Committee during the planning process.

7 The annual New York City Youth Count ran from  
8 Wednesday, January 25 through Friday, January 27 as  
9 part of the citywide effort to determine New Yorkers'  
10 housing situation on the night of Tuesday, January  
11 24. During that time, RHY partner, staff, and  
12 volunteers asked young people between the ages of 14  
13 and 24 to complete an anonymous survey on the real  
14 housing experiences of youth and young adults. The  
15 New York City Youth Count was conducted at various  
16 times and places, including participating youth  
17 serving programs, RHY drop-in centers, mobile,  
18 outreach, virtual survey rooms, and other locations.  
19 Additionally, all elected officials and community  
20 board members were invited to participate and special  
21 training was available. We are hosting a feedback  
22 session this Thursday, and we thank the Committee and  
23 The Youth Action Board for their continued  
24 partnership to make continuous improvements to ensure  
25 every runaway or homeless youth is counted.

1  
2 With support from the federal government and a  
3 pilot program for CityFHEPS, since the fall of 2021,  
4 307 young people from runaway and homeless youth  
5 programs were able to move into their own apartment  
6 with housing vouchers, with an additional 110 waiting  
7 to sign leases. DYCD utilized the federal emergency  
8 housing vouchers and CityFHEPS, supported by teams of  
9 Housing Navigators and Peer Navigators working out of  
10 drop-in centers, directly with youth, to help them  
11 through the process of identifying and securing a  
12 permanent home.

13 I would like now to touch upon the three pieces  
14 of legislation being consider today:

15 Introduction 54 will require DYCD to include  
16 financial literacy training as part of all youth  
17 employment programs and services for RHY. Currently,  
18 all DYCD funded youth workforce development  
19 programs, including the Summer Youth, Employment  
20 Program, have financial literacy as part of their  
21 program curriculum. I would be pleased to facilitate  
22 a more detailed review of those services with my  
23 colleague, Deputy Commissioner, Valerie Mulligan, and  
24 her team.

1  
2 In terms of financial literacy for young people  
3 and RHY, as my testimony touched upon, we offer a  
4 Financial Coach in each of our eight drop-in  
5 centers. Using a tailored financial counseling model  
6 to meet the unique needs of youth ages 14 through 24,  
7 trained Financial Coaches to meet with young people  
8 on one on one, host clinics, and join drop in center  
9 activities to incorporate and build financial  
10 literacy and life skills to meet the needs and goals  
11 of young youth participants. The goal of the program  
12 is to financially empower vulnerable youth, and the  
13 program model is being developed in conjunction with  
14 The Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. We  
15 look forward to continuing discussions on this bill.

16 Introduction 976 would require The Department of  
17 Homeless Youth Services and DYCD to report quarterly  
18 on the number of LGBTQ+ persons with who inquire  
19 about our seek DHS and DYCD services, as well as the  
20 number of beds, receipt for such persons, and the  
21 rates and reasons, when given, that such beds are  
22 refused.

23 Pursuant to Local Law 86, twice per year, DYCD  
24 reports the data we collect on gender identity,  
25

1  
2 sexual orientation, and other characteristics for  
3 youth in RHY residential programs.

4 DYCD could expand this data reporting to include  
5 youth who receive services in DYCD funded drop-in  
6 centers in the information we provide our Local Law  
7 86 RHY Democratic Reform Reports. Please reach out to  
8 our partners at DHS about the impact of Introduction  
9 976 on their work.

10 Finally, Introduction 977 would require drop in  
11 centers to participate in the streamlined intake  
12 process for RHY youth to transition into adult  
13 shelters.

14 This bill would expand Local Law 81, which last  
15 year saw 61 young people referred through this  
16 process. Similarly, we suggest discussing  
17 Introduction 977 with DHS as another agency impacted  
18 by the bill.

19 Thank you once again for this opportunity to  
20 discuss how we are addressing the needs of runaway  
21 and homeless youth and these three bills.

22 We look forward to continuing to collaborate with  
23 you, advocates, providers, and youth in the time  
24 ahead to continue to improve services for youth.

1  
2 We are pleased to answer any questions you may  
3 have.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 So, I am just going to jump right into questions.

6 Throughout the city, homeless youth continuum of  
7 care, there are 60 beds dedicated to youth ages 21 to  
8 24 -- also referred to as homeless young adults.

9 Providers have long maintained that this limited  
10 supply is insufficient to address the growing needs.

11 In its FY24 Budget Response, The City Council has  
12 called to bring 40 additional beds online for youth  
13 21 to 24. Does DYCD believe that those additional  
14 beds are needed to provide shelter to homeless young  
15 adults?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think the ,you  
17 know, for decades runaway and homeless youth  
18 residential programs were just for ages under 21.  
19 And when the state law changed to allow for 21 to 24,  
20 DYCD was very excited. And we made good use of the  
21 funding, advocating by City Council and Unity  
22 Project, and some other advocates and stakeholders to  
23 bring 60 beds online. And we would be excited about  
24 bringing on additional beds if funding became  
25 available.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In Fiscal Year 2023, what  
3 is the utilization rate of crisis services programs  
4 for homeless young adults?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: From July to March,  
6 this fiscal year so far, the utilization for HYA  
7 crisis is 94 percent.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In Fiscal Year 2023, how  
9 many homeless young adults have been turned away at a  
10 crisis service program because there were no  
11 available beds?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Many young people  
13 present at a crisis programs, but often a drop-in  
14 center is the entry point for young people to get  
15 connected to services -- including to housing. And  
16 all young people who present at a DYCD funded program  
17 will get a referral to housing -- ideally in a DYCD  
18 funded residence.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, do you have numbers in  
20 those crisis services of how many were turned away?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I... (CROSS-TALK)

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is that not tracked?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I don't have  
24 information on how many youth in that age group were  
25

1  
2 offered a DYCD funded program versus another housing  
3 option.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you get that back to  
5 us, or is that not collected at all?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: We could work in  
7 coordination with our providers to understand more  
8 information. I can look into that.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, thank you.

10 In Fiscal Year 2023, what is the utilization rate  
11 for transitional independent living facilities,  
12 (TILLS) for homeless young adults?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: The TILL programs  
14 this fiscal year are so far are at 99 percent  
15 utilization.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm sorry, could you say  
17 that again [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yes, the TILL  
19 programs this fiscal year so far are at 99 percent  
20 utilization.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, 99 percent.

22 In Fiscal Year 2023, how many homeless young  
23 adults have been turned away from at TILL, because  
24 there was not an available bed?

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Similar to my  
3 previous answer, young people would present typically  
4 at an RHY drop-in center, maybe at a crisis services  
5 program, and get a referral. All young people who  
6 present for shelter will have a referral to shelter.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: After the DYCD cut ties with  
8 a provider, there were 45 beds online for homeless  
9 young adults. With the 15 remaining beds scheduled  
10 to come back online this month, how has DYCD been  
11 able to bring the 15 remaining beds back online?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Well, I mean, I will  
13 say start, continuity of services are our number one  
14 priority. When we understood that the City was no  
15 longer going to be able to contract with that  
16 provider, a new partnership with New York State, we  
17 worked with Rising Ground, one of our providers; a  
18 site was secured for HYA. We have been working with  
19 through the rigorous safety requirements for  
20 licensing of an RHY TILL program. That process is  
21 virtually complete. And I think I will turn  
22 colleague, Sam, to see to see an update on the  
23 timeline for those 15 beds?

24

25



1  
2 DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: Hi, yes, we are  
3 looking towards the end of this week or early next  
4 week to have those 15 beds certified and back online.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, I just want to say, I am  
6 a little concerned, because the number of beds are  
7 already so low, then having 15 taken offline to me is  
8 just really unacceptable.

9 And, so what is the contingency plan if this  
10 happens again, so that we are not losing bed  
11 capacity. And what is the plan moving forward?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, I think it  
13 was an ,you know, this was an unforeseen circumstance  
14 where this provider was no longer able to be  
15 contracted. And they operated five, I believe, five  
16 residential programs with DYCD funding. Four of  
17 those programs ,you know, were under a year. It  
18 takes a long time to meet New York State  
19 certification requirements. Four of those programs  
20 are online and operating, and the last one is close.

21 Obviously continuity, again, it has been a sense  
22 of urgency for us with weekly meetings about how that  
23 is going to stay on top of it.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely, I hear you.  
25 But, what I'm saying is, how do we prevent this from

1  
2 happening again? Because we already have only 60  
3 beds, and you have already testified that a lot of  
4 these services were [INAUDIBLE] at 94 percent  
5 capacity... 99 percent capacity. So, losing 15  
6 beds, to me, is crucial. So, how do we make sure  
7 that moving forward -- is there a contingency plan if  
8 something like this happens again, so that we are not  
9 losing capacity?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, one of the  
11 things that we try to do is stay in close touch with  
12 our partners about available residential real estate  
13 that might be appropriate for congregate care that is  
14 going to meet the very specific and home-like  
15 requirements for New York State certification.

16 So, we do try to be aware of potential spaces in  
17 New York City that could be connected with. But,  
18 until there is a funded contract provider seeking a  
19 lease, that is more something we try to keep  
20 awareness of, so that we are ready if something like  
21 this should happen again.

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, I really would love for  
23 us to really have a contingency plan, because as we  
24 can see, especially with the City and contracting,  
25 nonprofits are in trouble, because we don't pay them.

1  
2 And, so, we just need to make sure that we have  
3 planned... And, so, yes, continuity of services is  
4 absolutely everyone's top priority, but then we also  
5 need to have contingency plans, because, we know that  
6 situation that we are in.

7 So, I really hope that we start developing some  
8 type of plan so that these things can't happen.  
9 Because, once again, I already believe that 60 beds  
10 is unacceptable and super low. And we should be  
11 having more beds available to this group of young  
12 people. But, to then have 15 beds offline, for any  
13 amount of time, to me is just unacceptable.

14 So, I will move on to the next question.

15 How many young people who aged out of DYCD  
16 shelters on their 21st birthday were then forced to  
17 enter an adult shelter?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I wouldn't have that  
19 information today. I don't have that information  
20 today.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, you guys can get that  
22 back to us?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yes, can you say  
24 that question again? Aged, uh, turned 21...

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: On their 21st birthday were  
3 forced to enter an adult shelter?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: To DHS? Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, one  
7 indicator of that data would be the streamlined  
8 process that we spoke about briefly in testimony that  
9 is part of one the bills that you are speaking of.  
10 We do track on a bi-annual basis the number of young  
11 people who seek a facilitated connection to an adult  
12 shelter -- acknowledging that the DYCD providers  
13 already have a good amount of information about young  
14 people and can help invite ,you know, providing that  
15 context for DHS , can kind of streamline their  
16 referral into DHS. So, we do have information on  
17 that.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, great.

19 Uh, and, for me, my hope would be that we would  
20 have more young people aging out, moving into  
21 permanent housing and not just shifting them from  
22 shelter to shelter. And, so, that should really be  
23 the goal, and we should definitely make sure that  
24 that is a top priority.  
25

1  
2 And I have question, a followup question for one  
3 of the ones that I asked earlier.

4 Will any of the sheltering, RHY, beds be going  
5 offline since they are closing?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Similar to the  
7 experience we have with the other provider, this is  
8 really unexpected. We are truly disheartened about  
9 sheltering... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: We owe then so much money.  
11 It's not unexpected.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: And we have three  
13 residential programs with them and two drop-in  
14 centers. We are on schedule for the two drop-in  
15 centers and two of the residences for a May 1st  
16 transition and a July 1st transition for the other  
17 residential program.

18 So, our goal is to have a smooth transition, no  
19 disruptions to services, and I think we are on track.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, thank you.

21 DYCD is not permitting a young person to stay in  
22 a shelter from 16 to 20 years old once they turn 21 -  
23 - even if there is still time left on their stay.  
24 Why doesn't DYCD permit older youth to remain in  
25 those programs past 21?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think when...

When New York State law was changed ,you know, there had been years of advocating for additional beds for 16 to 20 year olds. And, as I mentioned in the testimony, we tripled the number of beds. And young people aged 16 to 21 are vulnerable, because we already... they are even more vulnerable than 21 to 24 year olds. So, our goal is to maintain that robust resource that we have developed. And, for the most part, if you're under 21, we can find a bed for you. I think our providers in the drop-in centers would acknowledge, like, we've got that... You know, we have 50 residential programs in total, and we have beds available. So, we try to maintain that resource as it was designed and as is licensed by New York State. Uh, we could make some changes to that, but our goal is really to preserve those resources for young people ages 16 to 20.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no, I hear that, but I think also, too, we just have to be cognizant of not traumatizing people, like, oh, it's your birthday, now get out. It's, like, wait, what? Like, their birthday present is, now go. And thinking about, what does that look like, right? And, so, if you're 21,

1  
2 you turned 21, like, there should be some wiggle room  
3 in there. So, yes, you are still maintaining, but me  
4 being 21 and a day, shouldn't determine me being  
5 kicked out. I mean, these young people are already  
6 traumatized enough and feel rejected enough. And,  
7 so, our job is to make sure that we are trying to  
8 really support them through this process. And I  
9 think, a birthday present of, like, get out, is crazy  
10 to me. Because that is basically what we are doing.

11 So, I will move on, and I have some questions  
12 around the drop-in center.

13 A total of 1,445 youth and young adults were  
14 served through an RHY drop-in center for the first  
15 four months of Fiscal Year 2023, an increase of 48  
16 percent from the same period in Fiscal Year 2022.  
17 This exceeds the annual for Fiscal Year 2023. Does  
18 the agency believe that the limited number of beds in  
19 the homeless young adult system is driving the  
20 increased young people to stay in overnight drop-in  
21 centers?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASSELL: I think to some  
23 degree, we are seeing like what you described as a  
24 surge, because during Fiscal Year 2021, there was  
25 definitely a reduction in people accessing services

1 and moving about the City during COVID. So, I think  
2 to some degree, we are seeing kind of a return to a  
3 more typical flow into drop-in centers that we had  
4 before. I don't... Yeah, I don't know if that is  
5 just more people coming out to access to service,  
6 which we find really encouraging.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, you, uh, DYCD doesn't  
9 see this as because there is a lack of services, uh,  
10 a lack of beds for this group, that that is not  
11 helping to increase the utilization of the drop-in  
12 centers?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, I think  
14 we... Our goal is to... Drop-in centers provide a  
15 fundamental service. In many ways, like, what is  
16 going on at the drop-in centers, we've launched  
17 financial literacy services; we've got Housing and  
18 Peer Navigators. To your point, long term stable  
19 housing is the ultimate goal. We have also have  
20 mental health hub services there. You can get  
21 education and employment support. So, we want to  
22 drive young people to the drop-in centers. We have  
23 developed an internal marketing campaign. We are  
24 working with some external partners to get marketing.  
25 We see it positive if young people are going to the



1 drop-in centers to access service. I don't see that  
2 as negative. We would like to see that number to  
3 continue to increase. We want to make sure that any  
4 young person who needs it knows about the service and  
5 comes to the drop-in centers.  
6

7 And we have been adding services there. So, I  
8 wouldn't... It is not surprising to me that more  
9 young people are coming. I'd like to see that  
10 continue.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, but, I think those  
12 services should be there anyway. And, so, you know,  
13 you know how I get, I get very uncomfortable when we  
14 start to pat ourselves on our backs for doing our  
15 jobs. So, that is our job. Right? We should be  
16 increasing services. Those things should have been  
17 available already. But, I don't want us to, like,  
18 not acknowledge that. It is a low number of 60 beds.  
19 And we have a lot of young people coming in to get  
20 those services, but it is also because they don't  
21 have other places to go. So, I think that there is  
22 also a balance there as well.

23 I will go onto my next question. On January  
24 13th, DYCD a directive to drop-in centers that said,  
25 "Effective immediately, providers are required to

1  
2 discontinue the practice of allowing youth and young  
3 adults to sleep overnight." The agency has said that  
4 this ensures that centers that are not compliant with  
5 the state law are not operating as unlicensed  
6 shelters. However, unlike DYCD funded shelters,  
7 which are regulated by the state Office of Children  
8 and Family Services, drop-in centers do not fall  
9 under the state oversight.

10 Could you please explain what prompted DYCD to  
11 give this directive?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think the... Two  
13 major reasons, the first reason is the 24-hour drop-  
14 in centers were always meant as a place where young  
15 people could go, 24 hours a day, to come get some of  
16 the services that we described. One of the most  
17 important services is getting a referral to shelter  
18 and housing. They can also get a shower, food, and  
19 clothing. In addition, there are a lot of young  
20 people who don't need shelter tonight. There are  
21 also young people who may be couch surfing, who are  
22 on route to get maybe a supportive housing placement.  
23 There are a lot of young people who don't need  
24 shelter tonight, who we still want to come to the  
25 drop-in centers and get these fundamental services.

1  
2 That's the drop-in center model that was cited. That  
3 is the contract. That is what is put in the RFP.  
4 That is what DYCD is funding.

5 So, the number one, is that we wanted to  
6 reiterate for providers, like, this is not a place  
7 for planned overnight sleeping, where the lights go  
8 off and services stop. This is really a place for  
9 young people to access services.

10 But, the second thing is the safety concern. I  
11 think the practices had evolved at drop-in centers to  
12 really raise a flag of concern. They are not a place  
13 for 20 young people to be sleeping on a cot on a  
14 floor overnight. We have a service for that. DYCD  
15 values sleep, rest, home-like environments where  
16 young people can be safe -- connected with peers,  
17 caring adults. That is the crises services model.  
18 That is the transitional independent living program  
19 model. Young people need a safe place to sleep. We  
20 absolutely agree. We have grown and grown that  
21 service, and we want to encourage young people who  
22 need a safe place to sleep to access it. But, for  
23 safety reasons... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What are those safety  
25 reasons?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Those spaces are not  
3 designed, again, for 20 people to be sleeping on the  
4 floor of the drop-in centers... (CROSS-TALK)

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, a subway is a safe space  
6 for them to sleep? Emergency rooms? Train stations?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: No, I think we  
8 probably share a vision for a dignified, safe, and  
9 welcoming space for young people to be.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I hear you, but we have not  
11 created that space. So, then what are the options?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Every young person  
13 who comes to a drop-in center will get a referral to  
14 shelter services.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What happens when it is not  
16 available?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Every young person  
18 will get a referral, ideally in a DYCD [INAUDIBLE]...  
19 (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That is not what is  
21 happening!

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yeah...

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, I... I... I would like  
24 to live in the reality, because in reality we know  
25 that is not always happening, especially with the 60

1  
2 beds. And if they had places to put them, they would  
3 give them a referral. None of the providers want to  
4 have to have them sleep there, but that is the  
5 situation that we are in. And I have had this  
6 conversation multiple times, where I have said,  
7 clearly there is a glitch in the system that instead  
8 of fixing what the real issue is, which is young  
9 people don't have a place to go, they are sleeping in  
10 these centers. And so you're saying because of  
11 safety concerns, they can't stay there. So, what are  
12 the other options? Because if they can't get a  
13 referral at two in the morning, what is the option?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Well, in that  
15 special... In that circumstance that you just  
16 described, that is what we want... The vision is for  
17 the drop-in centers to be open 24/7. At two o'clock  
18 in the morning, you come in [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-  
19 TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, what am I doing... If I  
21 can't rest, what am I doing?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Resting in a drop-in  
23 center is fine. We have been talking about planned  
24 overnight [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so what does that look  
3 like?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: If a young person  
5 comes to the drop-in center at two o'clock in the  
6 morning, they should be greeted, have their immediate  
7 needs addressed: Do you need something to eat? Are  
8 you comfortable in your clothing? Do you need a  
9 restroom? Here is a comfortable place to sit down  
10 [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: "Yes, I am exhausted, I  
12 would like to sleep." "I'm tired." Why is that not  
13 an option?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: if a young people in  
15 that scenario is waiting for a referral -- let's say  
16 a person who is 19 years old, DYCD had a funded bed  
17 available to them, they should sit down and rest.  
18 Absolutely. DYCD has never said to provide...

19 (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, you want them to sit in  
21 a chair and rest? I need... I'm asking these  
22 question, because this is a really pressing issue.  
23 And, so, like, in reality, on paper it might look one  
24 way, but in reality, we know that is not the case.

1  
2 And, so, what you are saying is at two o'clock in  
3 the morning, a young person shows up at a center,  
4 they are greeted, they're given food, they are given  
5 clothes, and then they are given a chair to sit in  
6 until nine o'clock in the morning when they can be  
7 referred out?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: A young person who  
9 doesn't have a safe place to sleep deserves a  
10 referral to a safe place to sleep... (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely. It is two  
12 o'clock in the morning. What are they doing between  
13 2:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, I think we  
15 might be on the same page to some degree that they  
16 value of the 24-hour drop-in centers is that at two  
17 o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock, or one  
18 o'clock, a young person can find a safe place where  
19 there will be caring adults coming and finding out  
20 what their needs are, and if they need to be referred  
21 out in the morning, "Come in. Make yourself  
22 comfortable. We are going to talk to you about some  
23 of what your urgent needs are, and your options for a  
24 safe to stay. And will figure that out in the  
25 morning. Please come in and rest."

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Everyone knows that I am a  
3 person who, if I do not believe something makes  
4 sense, I will not do it. And I do not believe what  
5 we are putting in a policy makes sense. It just does  
6 not make sense. And I am uncomfortable, and I am  
7 angry, and it really pisses me off that a young  
8 person, who is probably tired and feels unwanted, and  
9 feels unloved, is then being told, well, you can wait  
10 until nine o'clock in the morning for a referral, so  
11 you can be referred out, and *hopefully* get a bed.  
12 Because the other piece is the hope. We have 60  
13 beds, and we know that we have 15 offline for the  
14 last couple of weeks, and so we are at 45 beds. And,  
15 so, there is a glitch in the matrix here. And I...  
16 And it is really... And I am so passionate about it,  
17 because it is breaking my heart. Because this is  
18 unacceptable. It is an unacceptable policy.

19 So, what communication has DYCD had with Office  
20 of Children and Family Services about overnight stays  
21 in drop-in centers?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: OCFS is DYCD's  
23 oversight for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services,  
24 and we stay in touch with OCFS on any major policy  
25 decision. We had communication with them before we



1  
2 issued our directive. We have spoken with them about  
3 it afterwards. We stay in pretty close contact with  
4 OCFS. They are our oversights.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, but, I am also hearing  
6 that they are willing to really look at those  
7 polices, and bring something that actually makes  
8 sense. So, what does that communication really look  
9 like around this specific drop-in policy?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think OCFS  
11 expressed that they would be open to conversations  
12 about different models. And we are also open to  
13 conversations about different models. [INAUDIBLE]...  
14 (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, if we are open to it,  
16 when are we going to start the conversation? Because  
17 I think this is an urgent matter, and it deserves  
18 immediate attention. And it has been going on for a  
19 couple of months now.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yeah, I actually  
21 think of OCFS is preparing to host some conversations  
22 about their runaway and homeless youth regulations in  
23 the upcoming weeks.

24

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Could you please get back to  
3 me with a date? Because, like, I said, I believe  
4 this is a very urgent matter.

5 At the March Budget Hearing, DYCD testified that  
6 they would not be issuing a new 24-hour drop-in  
7 policy, but providers reported that DYCD told them  
8 that they would be getting a new policy this month.  
9 Will you be issuing a new policy to address the call  
10 from providers to reverse this policy?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: DYCD stands by the  
12 guidance that we issued. It was consistent with our  
13 contracts. It is consistent with the RFP. It was  
14 the planned service of 24-hour drop-in centers, and  
15 we are standing by that.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, we are standing by  
17 having young people not having a place to rest? I  
18 just want to say that's a... That's ,you know,  
19 that's crazy to me. I am not standing by that, I am  
20 going to tell you that right now. I do not believe  
21 in this policy. I think it is detrimental to our  
22 children. And I think we are retraumatizing them.  
23 So, I do not stand behind this policy. And I will  
24 support providers who also do not stand behind this  
25 policy.

1  
2 Providers have said that DYCD had been reluctant  
3 to meet with them to discuss drop-in centers. Can  
4 the agency commit to work with providers to address  
5 their ongoing concerns? When is the next time you  
6 are planning to meet with them to discuss this  
7 policy?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: DYCD will meet with  
9 providers any time. We will pick up the phone and  
10 meet with providers, like, any time they want to have  
11 a meeting. Anyone of us -- you can contact any one  
12 of us individual, group, we are available to  
13 providers. We have had no less than a dozen,  
14 probably, meetings about the drop-in center policies  
15 and the guidance. And that doesn't even include  
16 [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That is not what providers  
18 are saying.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I don't know how  
20 that is being counted. But, I am telling you that we  
21 have had... We have a monthly RHY provider meeting  
22 every month. We have had individual conversations  
23 with providers. We have gone out on site visits. We  
24 have conversations. We have met with advocates. We  
25 value the feedback that we got from the Youth Action

1 Board. We met with Doobneek. I think Onyx was there  
2 again, and they had helpful perspectives. We have  
3 been meeting about this very regularly since it  
4 happened, and we are prepared to meet at any time.  
5

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to say, I think  
7 that there is a disconnect, because maybe they don't  
8 feel supported or something. But, what I am hearing  
9 from providers is that they had one meeting, and they  
10 have not had another meeting regarding this policy  
11 specifically.

12 And, I will say this, you guys are always  
13 available, right? We all know that. They can call  
14 you at any time and pick up the phone. However, with  
15 the policy or directive that was given to them, I do  
16 believe that one, we should be giving them more  
17 support around what that looks like, meeting with  
18 them regularly, specifically about this.

19 So, yes, you probably are having your regular  
20 meeting and those things; however, it is instrumental  
21 that you are giving them more direction around this.  
22 And they don't feel supported, because they have said  
23 specifically that they have not met around this  
24 policy except for once. And that is unacceptable  
25

1  
2 because this happened back in January, and we are now  
3 in April.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Chair Stevens, we  
5 want our providers to feel supported and that they  
6 have access to all of the information that they need.  
7 We are happy to set up another meeting with the drop-  
8 in centers. It is our not our intent to be  
9 unavailable or uncommunicative with them. They are  
10 our partners, and we meet with them regularly.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I hear you. But, what I am  
12 saying is there is a disconnect.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I hear you.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Like, a disconnect...

15 (CROSS-TALK)

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: We will take that  
17 [INAUDIBLE] yes... (CROSS-TALK)

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: There is a disconnect.

21 I am going to ask a couple of more questions, and  
22 then I will turn it over to my colleagues.

23 So, Local Law 170 of 2021, says that youth have  
24 spent time in Runaway and Homeless Youth Services  
25 shelters funded by DYCD for eligible for CityFHEPS

1 rental assistant vouchers. Yet the Law Department  
2 has issued an advisement contradicting this  
3 interpretation. Was it DYCD's understanding that  
4 when Local Law 170 went in to effect, that it would  
5 give youth access to City vouchers without going into  
6 DHS shelters? If so, could you clarify the Law  
7 Department's misunderstanding of the law?  
8

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: We won't be speaking  
10 on the behalf of The Law Department, but I will defer  
11 to my colleague Tracy who facilitates the CityFHEPS  
12 and the voucher work.

13 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Hi, good afternoon,  
14 everyone. I just want to start out by saying how  
15 grateful we were to have access to CityFHEPS for the  
16 Runaway and Homeless Youth Services portfolio. And  
17 we... Including the Emergency Housing vouchers and  
18 the CityFHEPS.

19 We have really worked hard to make sure as many  
20 young people are housed as possible. Susan mentioned  
21 in her testimony that we have 300 youth who moved in  
22 and a 100 more who are linked. So, we are proud of  
23 the work that we are doing. We are proud of the  
24 Housing Navigators who are doing the work. It is our  
25 understanding that outside the current pilot, that

1  
2 the rule for CityFHEPS allows for a young person's  
3 time in DYCD funded RHY programs to count toward the  
4 length of stay eligibility for CityFHEPS if they are  
5 in a DHS shelter.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: At the March Budget Hearing,  
7 DYCD said that they were advocating for RHY to gain  
8 access to CityFHEPS vouchers outside of the current  
9 pilot program. Is there any update on those efforts?

10 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: We are in constant  
11 communication with Office of Management and Budget  
12 about this these requests.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, there... There are  
14 not any updates? It has just been communication?

15 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Communication.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because, I just want to say  
17 that in the testimony, I know it said that -- that  
18 Susan Haskell gave us today -- that since 2021, that  
19 only 307 young people were given these vouchers. And  
20 that, to me, is a bit low. And, so, we definitely  
21 want to see how we can work together to really make  
22 sure that young people have access to these.

23 Because, it goes back to something I said earlier,  
24 where we really should not be having young people  
25 leave the DYCD shelters to go into another shelter

1  
2 system. We need to be thinking about how we are  
3 getting them into permanent housing. So, I really  
4 want to make sure that that is, like, the priority,  
5 over, like, let's get into another shelter.

6 So, I am going to pause here for a minute, so I  
7 can leave space for my colleagues to ask questions.

8 Council Member Ossé?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Chair  
10 Stevens.

11 The first question I wanted to ask is can you  
12 walk me through the logic behind some of that policy  
13 in terms of why young people are not able to sleep  
14 or... or... if they are unable to sleep overnight  
15 at some of these drop-in centers?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I appreciate that  
17 question, because I really want to the opportunity to  
18 say, like, fundamentally, those spaces are not  
19 designed for overnight sleeping -- for congregate  
20 sleeping. And these are funded as 24-hour drop-in  
21 centers to be used for services. It is a very  
22 different expectation that we have for the, as I  
23 mentioned, 50 residential programs that we have --  
24 around fire exits and means of egress, and just the  
25 way programs are set up is very different around,



1  
2 like, community services versus congregate planned  
3 overnight sleeping. And, so, that is what... That  
4 is what drove the decision, and that is what drives  
5 standing by it. We want young people to be safe, and  
6 I cannot assure that those spaces are suitable for  
7 something that looks like an overnight shelter.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

9 But, I do hear Chair Stevens on the point that if  
10 the intention is to provide safety for these young  
11 people, I'm not sure if the streets are more safe for  
12 them.

13 So, I guess my followup question would be, when  
14 you do refer some of these young people to other  
15 shelters or places for them to sleep, what does that  
16 process look like? Is there transportation that is  
17 provided to these young people? Is there elaborate  
18 detail on where they are going? Are you looking...  
19 Are you providing them with details on the closest  
20 place for them to sleep, or is it just an array of  
21 different options for them?

22 Can you walk me through that part of the process  
23 in terms of what that recommendations looks like for  
24 a young person who is trying to find a place to rest  
25 their head, uh, if not in a drop-in center?

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I can, yeah, I  
3 appreciate that question. For sure, our providers  
4 would do a better job of explaining their practices,  
5 and each provider probably varies a bit differently.

6 But, generally speaking, we want to make sure  
7 that young people are coming into the drop-in centers  
8 every hour, every day. You might have gotten home a  
9 little bit late, the door is locked at home. There  
10 is a safe place for you to come. You come into the  
11 drop-in centers -- and some people are coming more  
12 regularly. They are coming in for, uhm ,you know,  
13 all kinds of basic needs and other kinds of services.

14 So, you will sit down with an adult to see, like,  
15 hey, "How are you doing?" "What is your situation?"  
16 "Do you need anything right now?" They start to  
17 build a relationship, "Do you have a place to stay?"  
18 "No, I don't have a place to stay."

19 The provider can look into the DYCD system and  
20 see everywhere that there is available beds. There  
21 is contact information in the system, and they can  
22 see it kind of like locate... They know ,you know,  
23 which is close, which one is far. Specialized  
24 services might be like a mother/child... A mother  
25 coming in with children. That would be specialist

1 kind of event. They can contact the provider, "Hey,  
2 is this bed available? We want to make a referral to  
3 have somebody coming in tomorrow," if it is the  
4 middle of the night then the young person can stay  
5 and ,you know, be comfortable until the morning  
6 comes. They can provide the young person with a  
7 MetroCard, or, uhm, sometimes they offer their own  
8 transportation to go to at DYCD funded residence.  
9 And if a DYCD funded residence is not available,  
10 young people will get a referral no matter what. And  
11 sometimes that will be to the adult shelter system.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: So, I am... Thank you for  
13 that response. And I hear that there are some  
14 complications in terms of... or at least a bit of  
15 reasoning in terms of why folks are unable to sleep  
16 overnight at some of these drop-in centers.

17 Because this is such an urgent situation that an  
18 individual is in where they have to... They need a  
19 place to rest their head, is there any leeway in  
20 opening some emergency cots or places for people to  
21 sleep at drop-in centers?

22 Now, I am hearing like a bunch of, "I can't," but  
23 is there any solution that we could work on together  
24 in moving past maybe some of the complications that,  
25

1  
2 uh, I guess, yields the reasoning and why folks  
3 cannot sleep at these drop-in centers?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think, uhm, to  
5 answer that question, I want to be clear, like, some  
6 of the scenarios of that... the examples you gave is  
7 a young person in the middle of the night. We  
8 absolutely want that young person to come in and be  
9 made comfortable. Again, like, we are not asking  
10 providers to wake anybody up. Uhm, we just are  
11 saying that that is not a space for, like, congregate  
12 planned overnight sleeping.

13 And, so, this ,you know, impromptu person comes  
14 in in the middle of the night and needs a safe to  
15 place to be throughout the night, absolutely. That  
16 is a good... The drop-in center is a safe place for  
17 them to be until they figure out what their plan is  
18 the next day.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And the last question, I  
20 guess relates to what we heard in some of the  
21 testimonies that we heard in regards to treatment of  
22 LGBTQ+ homeless youth.

23 What does the training look like for ,you know,  
24 [TIMER CHIMES] some of those DYCD employees or  
25 caseworkers that are at these drop-in centers, at

1  
2 ,you know, some of these shelters, uh, when it comes  
3 to cultural awareness of someone's identity or sexual  
4 orientation?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I really appreciate  
6 that question. I also appreciated the testimony of  
7 young people today. I feel like, uh, some of the  
8 reasons our drop-in centers have been able to grow  
9 and expand their services is that they were widely  
10 acknowledged as safe places for LGBTQI+ youth. They  
11 got additional funding acknowledging that -- from  
12 Unity Project -- to help expand some of those  
13 services, and leading into providing better social-  
14 emotional support and the other range of services.

15 I also think that our residences are acknowledged  
16 as safe places for LGBTQI+ youth. I know that, I  
17 think, I'm trying to find [INAUDIBLE] the names, but  
18 at least two of the young people who spoke earlier,  
19 were speaking of DYCD funded residences, uh, through  
20 Ali Forney, that I really stand by all of our  
21 providers of being... having, like, strong staff  
22 training, representation, and really experienced at  
23 building a safe culture for young people.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: And does DYCD... Sorry,  
25 Chair... Does DYCD offer... Like, to those who are

1  
2 coming into drop-in centers or any other DYCD spaces,  
3 is there any surveying or oversight that is happening  
4 in regards to potential discrimination that a young  
5 person or a young unsheltered person may be facing?  
6 Is there information at some of these sites where  
7 folks are able to speak up about ,you know, how they  
8 are being treated, uh, at some of these centers? Is  
9 there a space people to critique, for lack of a  
10 better word, how employees are treating those that  
11 are dealing with homelessness?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Absolutely. I think  
13 that is an important component of the program. Every  
14 site has, uhm, posters, like, hey, how are you doing?  
15 Do you want to give us questions, comments, or  
16 concerns? Do you want to reach out? They can call  
17 DYCD's hotline, Community Connect. They can also  
18 call 3-1-1 and get referred. We deliver a report, is  
19 it twice annually? Twice annually about calls and  
20 referrals. It is... Mostly the calls that come in  
21 are for wanting to know more about our services. But  
22 we occasionally get complaints, and we are happy to  
23 deal with directly. I feel like having ,you know,  
24 having a mechanism is what helps maintain a safe and  
25 comfortable environment.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you. Thank you,  
3 Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Council Member Avilés?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you, Chair.

6 Thank you for being here. I would like to go  
7 back to the drop-in center situation. I would like  
8 to know, did DYCD receive any calls from providers  
9 around their discomfort with... It seems that what  
10 their were spaces that were designed to do versus  
11 what they needs are that they were serving young  
12 people in in real time. Because you noted that there  
13 was a... There is a design problem here. They are  
14 not designed to be overnight shelters. Uhm, and that  
15 was part of the reason why you instituted this  
16 directive.

17 So, I wanted to know, did providers come to you  
18 and say this is a growing problem in our spaces?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: A growing problem of  
20 young people needing a safe place to stay overnight?

21 Uhm, I don't know. I wouldn't... I don't recall  
22 those conversations. I know, certainly, since we  
23 issued the guidance, we have had some conversations  
24 with providers about the challenges of, like,  
25 changing expectations. Young people, if you have an

1 expectation, this is going to be my planned overnight  
2 place to sleep for the next three days, that was  
3 something that providers expressed challenges about.  
4 Like, how we are moving back towards the plan for 24-  
5 hour drop-in centers.  
6

7 And, I want to say, like, one of the things that  
8 was raised about 24-hour drop-in centers, came  
9 directly from young people, which was the door is not  
10 open at one o'clock in the morning, because there is  
11 planned overnight sleeping. The door is closed. The  
12 lights are out. If I didn't get in to get my space,  
13 my space is no longer available.

14 So, some of the concerns that were lifted up were  
15 from young people directly supporting the vision of  
16 being open 24/7 to provide service to welcome young  
17 people in any time of day or night.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, in terms of... When  
19 you issued the directive, was your guidance vetted by  
20 providers? I feel... I felt like that I heard an  
21 ambivalent, like maybe there was one round of  
22 conversation post-directive in terms of feedback.  
23 But, was that at all a collaborative process, or was  
24 it simply DYCD issued the directive, put it out, and  
25 then you had that kind of response from providers?



1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: It was not a  
3 collaborative process. And it was consistent with  
4 what we fund providers to do in a 24-hour drop-in  
5 center.

6 So, it was... Neither was it a collaborative  
7 process that the ,you know, that the practices became  
8 more and more resembling shelters. Like, we were  
9 clear, again, in our RFP, in our contract, in our  
10 monitoring of contract services, about what our  
11 expectations are. And the guidance was completely  
12 consistent with that.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Sure, it sounds like the  
14 practice, uh, the day to day practice differed quite  
15 significantly from probably what the contract  
16 permitters have been. And that has been a culture of  
17 practice over many years.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I don't know if I  
19 would say many years. I certainly feel things ,you  
20 know, I don't know, COVID-19 impacted a lot of  
21 [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I will... I will say this  
23 practice has been going on for a good number of  
24 years.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Mm-hmm

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Uhm, a good number of  
3 years.

4 In terms of, uh, in terms of this CityFHEPS  
5 vouchers program, what is the expected needed  
6 capacity for that? You... You mentioned serving  
7 300. But, what is the expected capacity to be able  
8 to fully serve the need?

9 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Thank you for that  
10 question.

11 This is... It is really important to note that  
12 as the emergency housing vouchers are leased up, we  
13 want to increase the capacity to offer young people  
14 CityFHEPS shopping letters. So, it would be a ramp  
15 up period. So ,you know, the total capacity...

16 (CROSS-TALK)

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: You mentioned the  
18 300 [INAUDIBLE]...

19 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yes, so right... So, if  
20 we had... So, we had 600 EHV vouchers available to  
21 us. And, so, we would like a number similar to that  
22 available to young people.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, 600...

24 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-  
25 TALK)

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: vouchers are... are  
3 issue, in total and you used... You have been able  
4 to utilize or successfully place 300 and some odd  
5 young people... (CROSS-TALK)

6 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Three-hundred plus  
7 another 100 are linked to apartments and will be  
8 moving in.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And there is... So, that  
10 leaves about 200?

11 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: So... So, the... We  
12 would just always want that capacity to be available  
13 to young people in the RHY programs.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So [INAUDIBLE]...

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Some [INAUDIBLE]  
16 people might have shopping letters [INAUDIBLE]

17 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: They, uhm, most of the  
18 people... The Emergency Housing Voucher program  
19 stopped taking applications in September. And, so,  
20 at that point, we ramped out CityFHEPS shopping  
21 letter output. And, so, like, 54 young people have  
22 shopping letters [TIMER CHIMES]. And we are... You  
23 know, we want... We would like to have a continuous  
24 capacity to be able to offer permanent housing to  
25 young people. And, so, you know, it is going to

1  
2 be... You know, so we were really were able to be  
3 leasing out the 600 young people from the EHV. And  
4 that is like a first large group of vouchers that  
5 were available. And, so, we would like to continue  
6 to have access around that same amount moving forward  
7 since we are able to accommodate that many young  
8 people getting leased up.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And, so, is the request...  
10 Is it a funding request that you need to be able to  
11 maximize and use that entire amount? I am... I am  
12 having a little challenge understanding. You want a  
13 larger scale, you have it, but you haven't met it, is  
14 there a funding issue? I'm... I'm having a  
15 problem... (CROSS-TALK)

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: No, I think it's...  
17 The process has a little bit of lag time. So, we are  
18 going to get... We are going to get to 500 on EHV,  
19 and we are going to get to... Is it 60 or 50 with  
20 CityFHEPS?

21 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yeah, we are at 600...  
22 600 EHV and 50 [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: [INAUDIBLE] 50...  
24 We're gonna get there. There are... Before you get  
25 to move-in, you've got lease up. Before lease up,

1  
2 there's apartment search. All of that work is what  
3 the Peer Navigators and the Housing Navigators are  
4 doing with young people now.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And is that... Is that  
6 program at all... I'm sorry, Chair...

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, no, no go ahead.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: uhm, impacted by the last  
9 round of PEGS?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: No.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And, then, lastly, going  
12 back to the other issue, could you tell me what  
13 percentage, uhm, of referrals are young people being  
14 referred into the adult system when they don't have  
15 an appropriate space in a youth facility?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I don't know that we  
17 have complete information on every young person who  
18 isn't able to access. But, we do have information...  
19 We have two pieces of information that I think are  
20 valuable: One is the streamline. Do we have the  
21 numbers on...

22 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yes.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Uhm, is young people  
24 who are in DYCD funded programs who have like a  
25 facilitated connection to DHS, whereby they can

1  
2 bypass intake. Because, that is one of the ,you  
3 know, that is something that young people say. Like,  
4 hey, I feel like ,you know, you already have all of  
5 this information about me, do I need to go through  
6 that process again with another agency? And we have  
7 been successful working with DHS to minimize that.

8 And, then, we also have a, uhm, shelter access  
9 report that we provide to City Council, and it is  
10 also posted on our website about when young people,  
11 at a drop-in center, for example, are not able to  
12 access a DYCD funded bed for capacity reasons.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Right, I haven't seen that  
14 report, but do you have a sense of... of that trend?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yes, give me one  
16 second. Sixty-one young people in 2022 took  
17 advantage of the streamlined process to DHS. Which  
18 is typically representative of young people who are  
19 aging out of DYCD funded programs.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, and, listen, I think  
21 for the record... I am going to hand this back to  
22 the chair. You know, I am... I understand an  
23 interest in... It sounds like the rationale around  
24 the directive addresses a little bit of mission  
25 creed, but addresses the fact that there is a need

1 that is not being met, but really utterly feels cruel  
2 to young people. And what we have been hearing, and  
3 the fact that providers have been trying to meet ,you  
4 know, it sounds like they are trying to meet a need.  
5 Right? And to keep young people safe, we should  
6 be... I don't know who the safety concern is for.  
7 Uh, it seems that the safety concern is very far away  
8 from actual young people. Seems like the safety  
9 concern is more around a contract, uh, potential  
10 litigation. It just feels very removed from keeping  
11 young people safe and doing what they... what we  
12 need to do, uh, to make sure that that is the case.

14 So, I hope we resolve this situation. And, I  
15 hope we understand... that we learn how to be  
16 utterly compassionate. And if this means that we  
17 need more space, and we need to design space  
18 differently for young people, then that needs to go  
19 the top of the list, so that we have that available  
20 to them. Because, it seems like there is a severe  
21 disconnect here. And I am deeply concerned about it.  
22 We need to do better. This is not acceptable for us  
23 as a city and all of the work that we have tried to  
24 do.

25 So, I think, with that, uh, Chair...

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, Council Member  
3 Avilés.

4 I just wanted to go back to a question regarding  
5 the drop-in centers.

6 I am hearing that providers are a little bit  
7 confused around the resting, and that they have  
8 reached out to DYCD around... for clarification.  
9 Because, I know that, uh, Susan, you just stated,  
10 uhm, in one of the questions that young people  
11 shouldn't be woken up if they do fall asleep and  
12 those types of things.

13 So, could you give clarify around what that  
14 should look like, and how providers should be  
15 supporting young people in the moments of this  
16 crises -- if they do fall asleep.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yeah, I think one of  
18 the things we have been speaking about is sort of an  
19 FAQ just taking into consideration some of the  
20 conversations that we have had and the questions that  
21 have gotten that we are trying to answer in real  
22 time, but to have something more documented to get to  
23 some of those questions about like, for example, if a  
24 young person comes in the middle of the night, and  
25 there is, like, impromptu, they're falling asleep,



1  
2 they're... There is... this is ,you know, there is  
3 not a referral until the morning, and how that is  
4 ,you know, differentiated from planned overnight  
5 sleeping in a congregate way.

6 So, we are working on an FAQ.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, that guidance hasn't  
8 been given to the providers as of yet?

9 Do you know when that will be available for them?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I, uhm... No, we  
11 can put something together for them soon. But, I  
12 would say that we have been speaking pretty regularly  
13 to providers to answer some of those questions. "Do  
14 you want me to wake young people up?" No. You know,  
15 that kind of thing.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, because... Just so we  
17 are clear, I have had providers reaching out to me --  
18 right now -- saying that they do not have clarity on  
19 what that looks like. Which is why I was saying,  
20 could you give that clarity now?

21 But, please get that to them as soon as possible,  
22 because, once again, there is a clear disconnect  
23 between what DYCD is communicating and what the  
24 providers are understanding.

1  
2 And, so, I think what that clarity looks like is  
3 going to be really important. So, you might have had  
4 those conversations, but they might not understand  
5 the guidance. So, I think that that is going to be  
6 really important.

7 Just another question, uh, you had brought up  
8 earlier around the youth count, and I did join you  
9 guys out there during the youth count. And some of  
10 my colleagues participated. And that is the type of  
11 thing I love to see when everyone is really getting  
12 involved in being a part of this work with young  
13 people.

14 When can we expect the results of the youth  
15 count?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think I may, uhm,  
17 turn to my colleague, Tracey, to answer this, who  
18 works on aggregating the activities, our count with  
19 their... the larger effort.

20 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: So, if you come to the  
21 feedback session on Thursday...

22 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I just found out about  
23 the feedback session today at this hearing. So, maybe  
24 I will send it to my scheduler..

1  
2 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Okay, we will double  
3 check that. But, we are going to give some initial  
4 information about the success of the youth count for  
5 2023.

6 One of the things that we think is really  
7 important is to provide context with the hope count  
8 that DSS conducts. And, so, we all pull our numbers,  
9 send it to HUD, and then HUD publishes, uhm, sometime  
10 in December/January -- November sometimes --  
11 publishes like the city... The New York City full  
12 list of young people who are unsheltered. And that  
13 is when the youth count is finalized at that point.

14 But, on Thursday we are going to give some  
15 information about what we found during the count.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And just because I am nosey,  
17 do we have any preview about it? Because I know  
18 there was a lot positive energy around it. And,  
19 there was a lot of energy that people felt. And it  
20 actually was not zero degrees outside, so people were  
21 actually able to go out. I remember I had to take my  
22 lining out of my coat, because it was so hot that  
23 day. Uhm, and, so, even having that and the weather  
24 playing a part to be able to actually be out there

1  
2 and talk to these young people.... Could you talk  
3 about any of the successes that might have happened?

4 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yeah, we had a lot of  
5 success. Like, The City Council involvement was  
6 definitely high on the list. We conducted, uhm,  
7 3,422 surveys, which is the highest number of surveys  
8 conducted ever.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Wait. What did you say?  
10 Three-thousand...(CROSS-TALK)

11 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: There were 3,422...  
12 (CROSS-TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, my!

14 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Uh, and it was ,you know,  
15 thanks in large part to community stakeholders, like,  
16 City Council, also just... DYCD, as one agency.  
17 Lots of involvement from our community park programs.  
18 The Youth Action Board was involved, and we are  
19 grateful for their involvement. And a lot of other  
20 stakeholders really stepped up, so this was... We  
21 ,you know, DYCD had mobile vans, people were  
22 surveying, and it was a really... It was a great  
23 effort... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: They had really nice  
25 jackets...

1  
2 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Really nice jackets with  
3 linings that you could zip out.

4 [LAUGHTER]

5 Uh, so, yeah, so, ,you know, it was... It was a  
6 great event, and ,you know, we are just really  
7 appreciative of the support that The City Council  
8 showed.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, I mean, what are some  
10 of the things that you think really... Like, some of  
11 the lessons learned , that you didn't do in the past,  
12 that you did at this one, so that we can continue to  
13 moved forward? And if we had 3,000 this year, do we  
14 have a goal to have 4,000 next year?

15 What are some things and lessons that were  
16 learned this year?

17 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: I think that having  
18 involvement with people who are in youth serving  
19 systems and organizations is really key. So, having  
20 our Beacon Programs, and COMPASS Programs, and  
21 Cornerstone Programs as part of this whole work, it  
22 was really helpful. I also thought that using the  
23 outreach vans in the boroughs was really helpful.  
24 And getting a change for people to not only count and  
25 survey young people, but actually hear about RHY

1 services, get our palm cards, understand that these  
2 services are available, so should they, or a  
3 neighbor, or a relative or friend need these  
4 services, they will know who to call and where to go.

5 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Great.

6 I am happy that we increased those numbers this  
7 year, and I look forward to us getting to 5,000 next  
8 year, because why not? Right? You know, I am going  
9 to keep pushing that envelope, because it is what I  
10 do best.

11 So, in December, DYCD came before the Committee  
12 as a whole to discuss the delivery services of  
13 migrants. Since, this time, what has the agency done  
14 to address the needs of the providers who are asking  
15 for support?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: One of the things...  
17 I mean, certainly staying in close contact with  
18 providers. This is something we are checking with  
19 them regularly on. Tracey leads some of the inquiry.  
20 We have strengthened our communication with agency  
21 partners. You know, this have been, like, relativity  
22 new over the course of the past year. And, so, we  
23 are staying in close contact in terms of like getting  
24 access to the Navigation Centers. That is more  
25

1 evolved now, but it was staying close in the  
2 beginning, uh, and helping our providers understand  
3 how to access HERCS (Humanitarian Emergency Response  
4 and Relief Centers) for young people who may show up  
5 at the drop-in centers or one of the residential  
6 programs. We are connected, uh, it is a smaller  
7 group of minors that we have seen connection with.  
8 But, we are working closely with ACS should those  
9 circumstances come up. And we... In talking closely  
10 with the providers and monitoring kind of the impact  
11 on service, we acknowledge that Covenant House,  
12 largely because of their proximity, I think, to Port  
13 Authority at the time, had the largest service  
14 impact. And we gave Covenant House some one-time  
15 funding to support bilingual services and help with  
16 young people who had legal needs.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

19 Do all DYCD connected programs no-cost access to  
20 automated translation services through LanguageLine?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: During business  
22 hours, uh, providers can call Community Connect (1-  
23 800-246-4646), they can get access to the  
24 LanguageLine. And 3-1-1 also refers to Community  
25 Connect.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so that... That is  
3 only during business hours through, like, 9:00 a.m.  
4 to 5:00 p.m. ?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: That's right.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Providers have said that  
7 there are long legal consultation waitlists with few  
8 trained attorneys. Has DYCD explored providing  
9 funding and Immigration Law training with onsite  
10 attorneys at RHY programs?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think... We have  
12 been, again, I forgot to mention MOIA [Mayor's Office  
13 of Immigrant Affairs], but obviously we have been in  
14 close contact with MOIA, who are doing legal support  
15 services, making sure our providers know about the  
16 resources that are being ,you know, brought through  
17 MOIA.

18 And, then, just to say again, we had one-time  
19 funding for Covenant House to support some of those  
20 needs.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so, that is not  
22 something that we are looking to explore? Because,  
23 even from the young person who was on the panel  
24 today, talked about a need for immigration services,  
25 and even supporting the staff at these centers around



1  
2 the training. Because ,you know, it was  
3 heartbreaking to hear that ,you know, we have young  
4 people going through these services, and sometimes  
5 the staff was not even aware that they are not  
6 eligible for those services until the got to the end  
7 of the process.

8 So, what does the training look like for those  
9 staff members? And is this something for us to start  
10 thinking about possibly having a trained person to do  
11 immigration services? Whether it is a lawyer or not,  
12 right? To even say, like, okay, I know that these  
13 are the things that we can provide to these young  
14 people and things like, is that something that is an  
15 option?

16 I know that was a lot of questions in that...

17 (CROSS-TALK)

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: No, I think that is  
19 a really good point. I think we need to stay  
20 committed to the needs of this area, and we will. I  
21 understand why Wyatt (sp?) is putting together some  
22 legal clinics to address that, and we will stay in  
23 touch to make sure our providers know about that.

24

25

1  
2 But, as the situation evolves, we will continue  
3 to try to respond to the needs that are lifted up by  
4 providers.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so, just another  
6 question while thinking about, like, even with  
7 providers who are having some troubles, do we then  
8 refer them to MOIA? How are they working together  
9 and talking? Are they talking regularly? Because,  
10 I know... And, I mean, even at the committee of the  
11 whole, a lot of the questions were geared directory  
12 towards DHS, and we often forget that we have young  
13 people who come to your shelters. We are not the  
14 same thing.

15 Are you guys having the same... Do you have the  
16 same access as the DHS shelters? How are you guys  
17 working in close proximity with ,you know, other city  
18 agencies, and what does that look like?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: You know, we have,  
20 like, a Youth Homelessness Coordinator who sits on  
21 The City Hall team for Health and Human Services.  
22 And, so, we have our regular check-ins there about,  
23 again, like what new recourses are available. How  
24 can Runaway and Homeless Youth Services programs  
25

1  
2 access those resources? And that is part of a  
3 regular scheduled, ongoing coordination that we have.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, I think we should  
5 probably start thinking about how to have some deeper  
6 connections and things like that. Especially as we  
7 see this is continuing. And I think that it is going  
8 to continue to grow. So, we should definitely think  
9 about some ways to continue and expand that.

10 Is DYCD tracking and coordinating placements for  
11 unaccompanied minors who present themselves at RHY  
12 programs?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I mean, I think  
14 certainly we are coordinating. As I mentioned like,  
15 we have a lot of connection points to make sure that  
16 runaway and homeless youth providers are aware of the  
17 citywide services. We are not tracking to get... I  
18 mean, you raise a good point about access to services  
19 -- Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, there are no  
20 barriers to immigration status to access our  
21 services. And, so, we are coordinated, but we don't  
22 track immigration status.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, and I can see why you  
24 wouldn't, but ,you know, that is something that I

1 think we need to kind of figure out so that we can  
2 make sure to address it a little bit better.

3 Okay, so, just to going into some of the bills  
4 that we have:

5 Introduction 977 would require drop-in centers to  
6 participate in the streamlined intake process for  
7 youths aging or timing out of shelters operated or  
8 funded by the Department of Youth and Community  
9 Development, and who intend to transfer to adult  
10 shelters.

11 On average, how long does a young person  
12 typically stay in a DHS assessment or intake shelter  
13 while waiting to receive placement in an adult  
14 shelter?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I don't have  
16 information about that.

17 TRACEY THORNE: So, part of the streamlined  
18 process is that they don't have to go to that  
19 assessment shelter. They can go right from DYCD's  
20 programs to a DHS bed in a youth shelter for DHS.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is that happening?

22 TRACEY THORNE: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What feedback has DYCD  
24 received about young people residing intake or  
25

1  
2 assessment shelters... Residing intake or assessment  
3 shelters? Have you received any feedback from young  
4 people around that?

5 TRACEY THORNE: One of the main reasons for the  
6 streamlined process is that it is... The intake  
7 assessment shelter are not safe. And, so, they...  
8 This is... This process was established in, I think  
9 it began in 2017. But, we started implementing it in  
10 2018 in order to ensure that young people are able to  
11 access DHS shelters without having to go through the  
12 intake assessment shelters.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: On the report that  
14 we do for the streamlined process, of, like, 61 young  
15 people who were facilitated, nine declined the offer.  
16 Which could be for a number of reasons. Sometimes  
17 the person circumstances change, they are reunited  
18 with a family or a relative who lets them stay. But  
19 we are tracking how many decline an offer.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

21 Does DYCD have any concerns about the  
22 implementation of Intro 54, which includes financial  
23 literacy training as part of all Youth Employment  
24 Programs and programs for runaway and homeless youth?  
25

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: No, we don't have  
3 any concerns about that. I wanted to just  
4 acknowledge that we were very excited through  
5 Opportunity Starts with a Home -- which we discussed  
6 in the testimony a little bit -- and the commitment  
7 of the Youth Action Board. This is a priority. We  
8 have launched financial literacy services. So, I  
9 understand the young people on your panel have not  
10 had too much contact with that, but it was partly due  
11 to their advocacy that we are launching this  
12 initiative that we are excited about.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And just even around that, I  
14 know we... The drop-in centers have, uhm, Financial  
15 Coaches, are those full-time positions?

16 ADMINISTRATION: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

18 And, just something else that I wanted to  
19 acknowledge, too, because I remember having a  
20 conversation with some young people, and some of  
21 them... And obviously financial literacy is a need.  
22 And, I think, I mean, I said this in the beginning as  
23 well, I think that this should be taught in schools.  
24 It should be taught in afterschool programs. It is a

25

1  
2 real necessity, because this is something that we  
3 actually need to be able to thrive as adults.

4 But, one of the things that I... I have heard  
5 from young people is that it is really hard to talk  
6 about having financial literacy skills and teaching  
7 them about skills when they are, like, I am homeless.  
8 I don't have a job. I would like stability before we  
9 talk about that.

10 So, even with the Financial Literacy Coaches, can  
11 you talk about like that really looks like in real  
12 time? Because, I know if I am homeless, and, then,  
13 you're, like, Well That's Have This Financial  
14 Literacy Workshop, I would be, like, Wait what are  
15 you talking about? It seems a little disconnected.

16 So, could you talk about a little bit what that  
17 looks like? And what are some of the things that  
18 are covered and how are they covered? Because, I  
19 could see why a young person.. And, I know this is a  
20 lot of feedback... I can see why a young person  
21 would give pushback, like, okay, I don't want to do  
22 this right now.

23 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yes, thank you for that  
24 question.

1  
2 We are... The main point that you... And you  
3 just brought it up ,you know, we have to meet the  
4 young people where they're at.

5 So, some young people are interested -- when they  
6 are looking for their house, their new apartment,  
7 they start talking about budgeting and how to work on  
8 that. And, then a group can form, and then the coach  
9 can work through this kind of ad hoc group that has  
10 formed. They also have scheduled groups around  
11 budgeting. But they may get, like, what do you want  
12 to ,you know, what are your dreams? What are your  
13 goals? So, it is youth development focused. We have  
14 a lot of the model... So, our partners, uh,  
15 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, ,you  
16 know, they run the Financial Empowerment Centers.  
17 And, there is a long, uh, assessment that adults are  
18 going through in order to use the centers. And we  
19 wanted to change that model, and make sure that ,you  
20 know, whatever the young person comes with, that is  
21 what they are helped with at that moment. So, there  
22 is ,you know, the one on one counseling is whatever  
23 they questions they bring. That is the help they are  
24 going to get. And, as more and more people are part  
25 of this, uh, process, they are going to just keep



1  
2 tailoring it to whatever the young people need. So,  
3 it is ,you know, banking, credit, debt, taxes, all of  
4 the things that the Youth Action Board Members  
5 mentioned.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no, I just wanted to  
7 acknowledge that. Because, like I said, I did have a  
8 conversation with some young people , and they're  
9 like, "Yeah, I don't want to talk about that, I'm  
10 trying to find an apartment." And, so, I am also  
11 just thinking about how we prioritizing these  
12 conversations, and in what step in the process we are  
13 doing it. Which is why I am just going to reiterate  
14 that this needs to be something that is not just done  
15 here, and if we had it at different touch points,  
16 then it would be a lot more helpful. Right?  
17 Because, if I already started learning this in  
18 school, it is only like a refresher when I'm in these  
19 centers.

20 I also just have a quick question around the  
21 Financial Coach, is that funding expected to expire  
22 this year?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: That is funded  
24 through June 30th.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, what is the plan after  
3 June 30th?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think ,you know,  
5 we are learning lessons, and we are developing  
6 recourses through this that we will continue to put  
7 to use in the next fiscal year, and whether or not  
8 the program is continued to be funded.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, you're still trying to  
10 figure out if there is going to be funding available  
11 for this... for the service?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: That's right. Right  
13 now it is just June 30th.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

15 Does DYCD have a concern about the implementation  
16 of Intro 976, which would require the Department of  
17 Homeless Services (DHS) and the Department of Youth  
18 and Community Development (DYCD) to report quarterly  
19 on the number of LGBTQ homeless persons who inquire  
20 about or seek DHS and DYCD services?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I think it is pretty  
22 consistent with the demographics reporting that we  
23 are already doing right now in the residential  
24 programs.

25 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: So, we would be  
3 happy to expand that. We have looked for ways to  
4 merge that into similarly timed reports. I think  
5 that would be more beneficial to the reader of the  
6 reports as well. But, no, we have no objections to  
7 that.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, thank you.

9 At this time, I do not have any more questions.  
10 My colleague has a question.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: In terms of the Financial  
12 Coaches, and I am sorry if this is a repeat question  
13 that I missed, but how many young people have been  
14 served to date with a Financial Coaches that are made  
15 available?

16 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: So far we have, through  
17 the workshops, about 67 young people have been  
18 supported. And, uhm, a dozen more have been  
19 supported with the one on one financial counseling.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And how does it work? Is  
21 it normally a workshop and then follow up individual,  
22 uh... (CROSS-TALK)

23 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yes, after the workshops,  
24 young people are asked if they want to do a one on  
25 one counseling session, and then they can sign up.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And, are there... And how  
3 are they distributed, I guess, across the sites?

4 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Uh, I would have to get  
5 back to you... (CROSS-TALK)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Does every site have...  
7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yeah, I would have...  
9 (CROSS-TALK)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Does every site have a  
11 financier counselor?

12 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: Yes.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: [NOT MIC'D]  
14 [INAUDIBLE] every drop-in center... (CROSS-TALK)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Every... Every drop-in  
16 center?

17 And is the expectation that that will be  
18 continued in to the new... At the same program  
19 level, continued into the fiscal year?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: [NOT MIC'D]  
21 [INAUDIBLE] at this point we are funded through...  
22 We still have a few months to ,you know, get its  
23 [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Is that part of the  
25 request of DYCD to continue to same level?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: We would like to see  
3 it funded. And we know that will come ,you know,  
4 through the budget process' many priorities.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Have you received any  
6 feedback from the young people that you have engaged  
7 with these services to date?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: We will  
9 definitely... That's a good question...

10 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: We have a survey...

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yeah.

12 DIRECTOR TRACEY THORNE: [NOT MIC'D] [INAUDIBLE]

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yeah, we are pretty  
14 newly launched with the partnership with the  
15 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, and we  
16 will definitely incorporate some feedback loops for  
17 young people. That is an important question.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great, thank you.

19 And in terms of the... You noted that the  
20 complaint portal was... Somewhere in my notes...  
21 Hotline Community Connect is where young people would  
22 submit any concerns or complaints about their  
23 experiences at any drop-in center or any... any DYCD  
24 program engagement? Is that like one main portal for  
25 all young people?

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COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

110

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: I would say that it is something we want to have visibly represented and that we monitor and go out on the sites, that tells young people, like, if you have questions, comments, and concerns, like, here is somebody that you can reach out to have questions. You know, sometimes they are making direct calls to Sam, because they have access to her information. But, really they're... We just want to make sure that anybody walking through the site that has feedback feels like they know exactly who they can reach out to anonymously, share your feedback.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, it is... It is posted?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: It is posted...  
(CROSS-TALK)

DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: It's posted...

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: It's posted? Offered to young people? And have you received... Uh, I think you said you received maybe a handful of complaints. How often is that monitored, and how does that work?

DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: Well, we do a report monthly on the numbers that we collect from 3-1-1 and

1  
2 Community Connect. And let me find my paper, I can  
3 give you our current numbers. So...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: That's year to date?

5 DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: Year to date, we  
6 have... (CROSS-TALK)

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Actually that's only  
8 through December. That's like [INAUDIBLE]

9 DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: Right, December.  
10 Okay, so, from July 1st until December 31st, we have  
11 had 72 calls under general information; 42 from  
12 youth; and 31 from adults. We have had four  
13 complaints, and they call came from youth. And that  
14 is it so far, yes.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And last year?

16 DIRECTOR SAMANTHA DAWKINS: For FY 22, we had a  
17 total of 175 calls; 96 were directly to our Youth  
18 Connect; and 79 were transferred to our Youth Connect  
19 from 3-1-1; we had 168 questions about genera RHY  
20 services; and seven complaints all by youth.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it, thank you.

22 And, are these... Is this portal language  
23 accessible?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HASKELL: Yes.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Great, thank you.

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COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

112

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, that concludes this panel.

ADMINISTRATION: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now turn to public testimony.

And, our next panel will be Lauren Galloway, Gina Michu, Nadia Swanson, and Jamie Powlovich.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Whenever you guys are ready.

LAUREN GALLOWAY: Good, afternoon, my name is Lauren Galloway, pronouns are she/they, and I am the Advocacy Coordinator at The Coalition for Homeless Youth.

Thank you, Chair Stevens, and the rest of the members of The Committee on Youth Services for holding today's hearing on the needs of runaway and homeless youth, as well as the Council's ongoing support for youth experiencing homelessness in New York City.

We will continue to submit longer written testimony to address the needs of runaway and homeless youth. And as we have already begun to hear from the youth voices, uh, at the beginning of the hearing, the need for legislative change and Administration accountability when it comes to the



1 needs of more funding, bed accessibility, data, and  
2 youth led care in order to receive the permanent  
3 housing that youth beyond deserve.  
4

5 I want to lean into the three pieces of  
6 legislation being addressed in today's hearing and  
7 how we can impact runaway and homeless youth along  
8 with providers that are helping to support them.

9 As we know, if you don't have voice in choice in  
10 their needs, then they will not be able to create  
11 sustainable futures for them here in New York City  
12 and beyond. So, we are going to recommend the  
13 following for the three pieces of legislation. But,  
14 we look forward to the opportunity to work alongside  
15 the Council to meet these needs.

16 In regards to Introduction 54 of 2022, we thank  
17 the Council for your commitment towards ensuring that  
18 young people and young adults have access to  
19 independent living resources- including financial  
20 literacy. While we fully support the intent of this  
21 legislation, we do have some concerns about how it  
22 will be implemented by DYCD once passed.

23 So, DYCD recently funded a robust financial  
24 literacy programming, that has already been mentioned  
25

1 today, at the RHY Drop-in Centers, but yet no funding  
2 was awarded to RHY shelters to do the same.

3 We also believe that the independent living  
4 programs often fall short of meeting the actual needs  
5 of youth, because they often are under-resourced and  
6 not developed specifically to target the needs of the  
7 intended population.

8 Therefore, we recommend that the legislation  
9 amended to read that RHY programs "shall provide  
10 access to at least two hours of financial literacy  
11 education to all program participants." This would  
12 allow the residential programs the option to host on-  
13 site programming to refer youth to [TIMER CHIMES] the  
14 financial literacy programming... Is it okay to keep  
15 going? Thank you... happening in the drop-in  
16 centers.

17 We also recommend that language be added to  
18 clarify the frequency that these groups must be made  
19 available to youth during the annual reporting  
20 period.

21 Regarding Introduction 0976 of 2023, we thank the  
22 Council for the commitment to serving and making  
23 sure we hear the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, because as we  
24 know, this legislation will finally give them more  
25

1  
2 opportunity to actually depict how they are being  
3 impacted and how that has effects on being unhoused.

4 And really what we wanted to do is make it better  
5 suitable to ensure that these services meet their  
6 needs.

7 However, given that DYCD already reports on this  
8 certain metrics regarding in this legislation, Local  
9 Law 86 of 201815, and that there are vast  
10 differences in the intake and certification processes  
11 for DYCD and DHS shelters, we recommend that the  
12 legislation amend to remove DYCD from the  
13 requirements under Section 1, because there is a  
14 centralized intake in the DYCD system. It would be  
15 most impossible... It would almost just impossible  
16 to accurately depict those numbers of the LGBTQ+  
17 youth and seek serious services for the turned away  
18 youth for DYCD programs. And our fear would be that  
19 that they would use that data from Local Law 79 to  
20 report and populate these reports, which would cause  
21 harm, since we believe that Local Law 79 numbers are  
22 inadequately collected and reported.

23 In addition, specifically regarding Section 1(c),  
24 as written we believe would lead to DYCD reporting  
25 zero. This is because the New York State Runaway and

1  
2 Homeless Youth Act of 1978<sup>17</sup> (RHYA) does not allow  
3 for RHY residential programs to be certified by the  
4 Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to  
5 "reserve" or exclusively serve sub-populations of  
6 youth, including those that identify as LGBTQ.  
7 Although, RHY programs can "specialize" in serving  
8 LGBTQ youth, as many in New York City do. Again, we  
9 anticipate that if the legislation is not amended,  
10 DYCD would report zero for this section, which we  
11 believe could be harmful, although it would be true  
12 given the legislation language.

13 And, just lastly, regarding Introduction 0977, we  
14 want to thank the commitment towards ensuring that  
15 youth and young adults have a transition from one  
16 shelter to another. And we just want to echo our  
17 support of this and the amendment of Local Law 81,  
18 for DYCD drop-in centers.

19 A real quick thing to note on that is, DHS  
20 already agreed to be a part of the Opportunity Starts  
21 with a Home Plan, uh, and this would ensure that this  
22 actually happens -- it would mirror this  
23 Introduction. But, that has not happened yet.

24

25

1  
2 But, again, thank you so much. Please let me  
3 know if you have questions, and I look forward to our  
4 continued partnership.

5 JAMIE POWLOVICH: Good afternoon, my name is Jamie  
6 Powlovich, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the  
7 Executive Director of the Coalition for Homeless  
8 Youth. I echo Lauren's thanks to the Council and to  
9 you, Chair Stevens, for your commitment to runaway  
10 and homeless youth.

11 I am going to focus my testimony on four pressing  
12 issues in the runaway and homeless youth system, many  
13 of which you have already covered in your questioning  
14 of DYCD, so thank you for that.

15 The first one, and I know we have touched on it  
16 many times throughout today's hearing is the DYCD  
17 directive.

18 I want to thank you for really pushing DYCD to  
19 work with providers to clarify what their needs are  
20 and to answer their questions. I know at the  
21 Preliminary Budget Hearing on March 22nd, DYCD did  
22 testify that they had met with the providers on  
23 numerous occasions -- I believe they quoted actually  
24 more than a dozen, and this is just factually  
25 inaccurate. They have only held one meeting with the

1 providers to date -- on February 13th. And I am not  
2 sure which advocates they have met with, but they  
3 have never met with anyone from the Coalition for  
4 Homeless Youth regarding this directive -- nor have  
5 they responded to any of our emails seeking  
6 clarification on behalf of the providers.  
7

8 We would like to echo the Council's position that  
9 was in the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Response, that we  
10 also believe that DYCD needs to rescind this  
11 directive. We believe that it is cruel, and we  
12 believe that it is unjustified.

13 And we also believe that now, three months later,  
14 as they are still trying to figure out how to make  
15 this work, these are things that should have been  
16 figured out before they issued the directive --  
17 because, there was no crisis that warranted it being  
18 issued when it was issued.

19 Secondly, and I know I have testified about this  
20 many times, so apologies for bringing it up yet  
21 again, but we have the CityFHEPS voucher issue,  
22 because DSS is refusing to uphold what we believe is  
23 the intent of the law in Local Law 170 of 2021.

24 DYCD young people do not have access to vouchers.  
25 I know it is kind of confusing, because we have a lot

1 of times sensitive dumps of vouchers [TIMER CHIMES]  
2 that are happening in the City. But, as of right  
3 now, the 50 pilot CityFHEPS vouchers have all been  
4 awarded. We actually have 54 that have been awarded  
5 to young people in the DYCD system. And the portal  
6 for new EHV applications is now closed. So, there is  
7 not current access to new housing opportunities for  
8 young people who don't already have a voucher in  
9 hand.  
10

11 Just really quickly, I want to echo what the  
12 [INAUDIBLE] testified to, and I know that it is in  
13 the Council's Budget Response, the important need to  
14 maintain the Housing Specialists as well as the Peer  
15 Navigator positions, and the Financial Literacy Coach  
16 positions.

17 The one thing I would like to point about the  
18 Housing Navigators specially is that DYCD is the only  
19 system whose Housing Navigators attached to the  
20 Emergency Housing Vouchers are expiring on June 30th.

21 All other Housing Navigators in the City are  
22 being extended into Fiscal Year 2024. And, so, we  
23 just don't understand why DYCD's have not been.

24 And, then, last, and then, really quickly, we  
25 just want to thank you for your ongoing advocacy for

1  
2 advocating for more beds for young adults aged 21  
3 through 24. And we definitely echo the Council's ask  
4 for -- at minimum -- 40 additional beds for this  
5 population. Thank you

6 GINA MICHU: Good afternoon, I am Gina Michu, and  
7 I use she/they pronouns. I am a Fellow Advocate for  
8 the Coalition for Homeless Youth in New York City and  
9 a former Youth Action Board Member of NYC.

10 Thank you to the Youth Services Committee for  
11 allowing me to give verbal testimony today to address  
12 the needs and issues of runaway and homeless youth in  
13 New York City.

14 Today, I want to talk about meeting the needs of  
15 migrant youth. For the past year, New York City has  
16 seen a unprecedentedly number of migrant youth arrive.  
17 However, there continues to be little to no  
18 coordination by the City to meet their needs.

19 The City needs to acknowledge and support these  
20 new New Yorkers, which also includes meeting the  
21 needs of RYH systems. This includes translation  
22 services, transportation support for family  
23 reunification, legal support for presentation, access  
24 to permanent housing, and pathways to employment, and  
25



1  
2 policies to support the needs of unaccompanied  
3 minors.

4 I have personally visited the Asylum Seeker  
5 Navigation Center in Midtown, and, unfortunately, I  
6 must report that just like the Blueprint: The Road  
7 Forward, unaccompanied minors are not being addressed  
8 or serviced.

9 I want to thank our youth and young adult service  
10 providers around the City who have gone above and  
11 beyond serving the YYA migrants and for providing a  
12 safe space in drop-in centers -- and acknowledge the  
13 directive to remove sleeping cots that DYCD  
14 explicitly recommended, but coincidentally ordering  
15 DYCD to remove the cots since the influx of asylum  
16 seeking youth and young adults arrived.

17 The Coalition for Homeless Youth supports Access  
18 to Representation Act30, which will support migrant  
19 youth with legal services.

20 We are against the renewal of Title 42, which  
21 will turn away asylum seekers who are fleeing  
22 persecution in their home countries at the US/Mexico  
23 border.

24 We know that migrants [TIMER CHIMES] will  
25 continue to arrive, and implementing such polices

1  
2 will only harm and delay the immigration system in  
3 the US.

4 Current migrant youth are reporting their  
5 experience of lack of work authorization and funds  
6 due to supporting their families in their country by  
7 sending the majority of their funds made with jobs  
8 under the table. We know that immigration policies  
9 are creating fear over labor and over representation.

10 We urge the City to echo the need of immigration  
11 lawyers and/or funding lawyers to take immigration  
12 courses in order to aid the influx of representation.

13 Migrant youth and young adults deserve work  
14 authorization and a permanent housing solution. I  
15 encourage The Committee on Youth Services to help us  
16 change the policies that exclude migrant youth and  
17 young adults from accessing housing vouchers.

18 As a former Youth Action Board member, who  
19 experienced chronic homelessness in the DHS system  
20 due to my social status and loss of work  
21 authorization, I can attest that those systems and  
22 lack of services create trauma.

23 Thank you to the small but powerful grassroots  
24 team at the Coalition for Homeless Youth who helped  
25 me escape my homelessness experience. Together we

1  
2 are here today to continue to fight and advocate for  
3 the needs of runaway and homeless youth and  
4 unaccompanied migrant youth. Thank you.

5 NADIA SWANSON: Hello my name is Nadia Swanson, I  
6 use they/them pronouns, and I am the Director of  
7 Technical Assistance and Advocacy at The Ali Forney  
8 Center. Thank you to the Committee on Youth Services  
9 and Chair Stevens for your continued advocacy for  
10 your support of youth of New York.

11 I am testifying in support of Introduction 0976  
12 and 0977. The needs of LGBTQ+ youth have been  
13 categorically underserved across all RHY programs in  
14 New York City. The lack of accurate data reports from  
15 DHS and DYCD has been a major contributing factor.  
16 Time after time the numbers contradict what we all  
17 know as providers to be the reality of increased  
18 LGBTQ youth in our services. This has now been  
19 exacerbated due to the increase of migrant youth,  
20 trans rights being stripped across the country, and  
21 an overall increase to 51 percent of youth  
22 identifying as LGBTQ+.

23 All of that makes Introduction 0977 equally as  
24 important. While DHS is not where we want youth,  
25 especially LGBTQ youth to have to go, until there are

1  
2 enough quick and safe options for stable housing for  
3 RHY, it is our duty to minimize the trauma and  
4 barriers that exist in the system for those who need  
5 it.

6 In regards to the other funding issues being  
7 discussed today, I would like to state our alignment  
8 with the Coalition for Homeless Youths. And I want  
9 to focus my testimony on the 21 to 24-year-old beds  
10 and the drop-in issues.

11 And, also, just off script, I want to thank you  
12 for your line of questioning and your passion,  
13 because, I, like you, share the view that the rule  
14 does not make sense. Why are we doing it? And I  
15 really appreciate you leading with that today.

16 When we advocated for raising the DYCD runaway  
17 and homeless youth age to 24, it was because of the  
18 six plus month wait that exacerbated trauma that our  
19 youth, especially our queer and trans youth 21 and  
20 over, were dealing with.

21 Now fast forward five years, and the wait is down  
22 to three months, but for the 34 youth currently on  
23 AFC's waitlist -- who are over 21 -- who come to us  
24 at night, that can feel like a lifetime.

1  
2           Where do you expect them to go for those three  
3 months? How bad is their mental health supposed to  
4 get before they deserve housing? How much more trauma  
5 must they endure before they deserve housing?

6           We do not want youth to have to rely on drop-in  
7 centers for sleeping each night, but without safe,  
8 stable housing options they are left with no other  
9 choice. [TIMER CHIMES] Without these things, youth  
10 will be forced to seek out high risk couch surfing,  
11 the subways, and the streets. For trans youth they  
12 risk death every night that they are forced out into  
13 the streets.

14           Ultimately, we need more youth-specific permanent  
15 supportive housing, but until then it is our duty to  
16 meet their immediate need for safety.

17           There shouldn't even be a debate about this, it  
18 is common sense and decency to fund safety for youth  
19 that are forced to rely on these systems.

20           The answer to this problem is right in front of  
21 us. It is now the City's job to listen and to take  
22 the obvious and appropriate action for the safety of  
23 our LGBTQ+ youth. Without this, our youth will not be  
24 able to focus on the necessary next steps to get out  
25 and stay out of homelessness.

1  
2 DYCD needs to immediately rescind this directive,  
3 fund an adequate increase of at least 40 more youth  
4 adult beds, and respond to our request for guidance  
5 so that we can provide the best support to youth have  
6 rely on our 24 hour drop ins and housing. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just want to say, one,  
8 thank you guys for all testifying today, and also  
9 just a shout-out to Ali Forney, who has been leading  
10 the charge and really standing their ground, around,  
11 like, we will not do anything that does not support  
12 young people and that does not allow them to be safe.

13 So, I really want to thank them for their courage  
14 in standing in their purpose.

15 And, like I said, I will support and fight with  
16 them, because, to me, it is true, I think Jamie said  
17 it, there was no cause for this to happen. It was  
18 literally a directive out of the blue which makes no  
19 sense. So, even when they cite concerns around  
20 safety, it just does not make sense. Was there any  
21 incident that happened? Like, what happened that is  
22 so unsafe? Because, this is not something that just  
23 happened because of COVID. Right? Because that was  
24 said, but we know that it is not the case, and that  
25 this has been going on for a number of years.

1  
2 And here is the other thing, and I have said this  
3 to DYCD directly, the reason they are coming there is  
4 because there is a glitch in the system. There is  
5 nowhere for these young people to go. And, so, do  
6 they want to be there? NO. Do the providers want to  
7 have to have them there? NO. But, there are no  
8 other options.

9 And, so, if they are not giving us options, or  
10 even giving us support around directives, to me, it  
11 just does not make sense. And, it is not okay for  
12 them to just say that it is unsafe and they youth  
13 need to just figure it out.

14 Because, like I asked, is it safe for young  
15 people to be on trains in the middle of the night?  
16 Is it safe for them to be couch surfing? And we know  
17 what happens with this young people. They end up in  
18 really bad situations, because there is nowhere for  
19 them to go.

20 So, this is something that I will continue to  
21 fight for with you guys, and I will continue to stand  
22 with you guys to continue to push forward.

23 Because, this is heartbreaking to me. I cannot  
24 imagine being a young person and having nowhere to  
25

1  
2 turn. And, then, people, who are supposed to there  
3 to support you, who can -- can't.

4 And this is also putting our providers in a bad  
5 position, because they want to help, but they are  
6 literally being told that they cannot help.

7 So, a special shout-out to Ali Forney, and  
8 continue to fight, and I am in this fight with you --  
9 along with my colleagues - because, even when the  
10 article came out, everyone jumped into action, and  
11 asked what we could do.

12 So, you not only have me, you have this whole  
13 council; you have state electives who are also asking  
14 how we can make this stop, because this directive  
15 just does not make sense.

16 I just wanted to ask Jamie a specific question  
17 around the CityFHEPS vouchers. And just explain it a  
18 little bit more, because I feel like there is a  
19 disconnect. Because I was hearing the Administration  
20 say that they have all of these vouchers and all of  
21 these things that are happening. But, then, you just  
22 testified saying that it is not the case.

23 And, so, could you please clarify and explain it  
24 me like I am a five year old? Because I feel like we  
25 are missing something.



1  
2 JAMIE POWLOVICH: I am going to try. So, I think  
3 the first thing that is confusing is that there are  
4 two sets of vouchers, and they are very different.

5 So, there are Emergency Housing Vouchers, which  
6 are tenant-based Section 8 vouchers that were issued,  
7 well, all across the country, but also to New York  
8 City, which were attached to pandemic relief coming  
9 from HUD in Washington, D. C.

10 And, so, New York City as a whole, got a little  
11 less than 8,000 of those vouchers. That's it. It's  
12 a one-time dump.

13 And, so, each City agency that was going to be  
14 given access to these vouchers, was given an  
15 estimated number of vouchers that their department  
16 would use.

17 And for DYCD, it was a huge success -- that we  
18 were estimated at 600 vouchers for runaway and  
19 homeless youth -- especially, because, at that time,  
20 we did not have access to CityFHEPS at all.

21 But, the issue is with EHV (Emergency Housing  
22 Vouchers), is that one, the portal has been closed  
23 since early fall. So, if a young person does not  
24 already have an application for one of those  
25 vouchers, they are not getting an application in.

1  
2 And what is happening now, because it is a  
3 citywide allocation, is that it is a citywide race to  
4 lease up.

5 So, once New York City leases up, I think it is  
6 7,788 -- don't quote me on that, but the number is  
7 around there -- the exact number of vouchers. Once  
8 we reach that number in leases, they are gone  
9 regardless of whether or not DYCD is still stagnate  
10 at 300-something leases, or if they are all the way  
11 up to 600 leases. We are not guaranteed 600  
12 vouchers.

13 And, so, for the CityFHEPS issue, we passed a law  
14 that we thought was finally going to give youth the  
15 access to CityFHEPS, and I will just note that that  
16 was after the previous administration lied for many,  
17 many years and said we were going to get access to  
18 LINC, but we never did. Right?

19 Then we were told that we would be getting access  
20 to CityFHEPS, which also never happened.

21 So, we passed the law, but DSS is refusing to  
22 uphold it. Although, the one thing that everyone can  
23 agree on, is that that law will count time in DYCD  
24 shelters towards the 90-eligibility, but it still  
25 does not allow young people the ability to

1  
2 administered the voucher in the DYCD system. They  
3 would still have to go into DHS, even for a shorter  
4 amount of time, to be able to get a voucher.

5 Outside of that process that we were trying to  
6 do... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, wait I just... So...  
8 Because they just testified that they did not have to  
9 go to DHS shelters, that that time would count. And,  
10 so, you are saying that is not what is happening?

11 JAMIE POWLOVICH: So, there are 50 CityFHEPS pilot  
12 vouchers that are separate from getting categorical  
13 eligibility, which is what we were trying to do with  
14 the law.

15 There are now 54 vouchers -- pilot vouchers --  
16 that have been awarded to young people. So, again,  
17 unless you are one of those 54 youth that have a  
18 CityFHEPS pilot shopping letter, you are not getting  
19 one unless one of those 54 youth gives theirs back.

20 And, so... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Do we know how many DHS  
22 has?

23 JAMIE POWLOVICH: My understanding that it is not  
24 a number. There is no cap to see CityFHEPS.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, DHS has no cap, so  
3 then... I mean, you wouldn't know this, but I am  
4 just asking to have it on the record, do you know why  
5 they would have a cap on DYCD, then?

6 JAMIE POWLOVICH: I believe that it has to do with  
7 deservingness politics, and them not wanting to share  
8 resources across systems, and the historical approach  
9 in New York City where they don't count DYCD young  
10 people as homeless -- where homelessness equals DHS -  
11 - and not someone's actual lived experienced of being  
12 unhoused.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

14 JAMIE POWLOVICH: You're welcome.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for this testimony.

16 Our next panel will be Jonah Dill-D'Ascoli (sp?),  
17 Jayne Bigelsen, and Jimmy Meagher.

18 JIMMY MEAGHER: Good afternoon and thank you. My  
19 name is Jimmy Meagher, my pronouns are he/him/his,  
20 and I am the Policy Director at Safe Horizon, the  
21 nation's largest nonprofit victim services  
22 organization. We help 250,000 New Yorkers each year  
23 who have experienced violence and abuse. And our  
24 Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot  
25 meals, and so much more to homeless and street-

1  
2 involved young people ages 13 to 25, and helps them  
3 to find safety and stability.

4 Thank you, Chair Stevens, for holding this  
5 hearing today, as runaway and homeless youth and  
6 their needs are too often ignored and dismissed --  
7 even though they are one of our most marginalized  
8 populations.

9 I have submitted my full written testimony, but I  
10 would like to emphasize a few points today.

11 So, first, I would like to emphasize that we all  
12 must listen to runaway and homeless youth. When they  
13 say that they need something, listen to them. Trust  
14 them. They understand their safety, their needs, and  
15 their experience better than anyone else. And thank  
16 you for modeling that by allowing young people with  
17 lived experience to testify first -- before the  
18 Administration -- and making the Administration  
19 listen.

20 Second, we believe that the recent 24-hour drop-  
21 in center "no sleeping" directive issued by DYCD is  
22 inhumane and harmful. The City is hurting runaway  
23 and homeless youth while driving more vulnerable,  
24 unhoused young people out onto the streets overnight.

1  
2 And this directive also gets in the way of our  
3 ability to build trusting relationships with runaway  
4 and homeless youth. So, DYCD must rescind this  
5 harmful directive.

6 Third, The City must make youth categorially  
7 eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers and grant runaway and  
8 homeless youth equal access to housing resources. We  
9 are pleading for the City to stop discriminating  
10 against RHY and help them now.

11 Fourth, the City must maintain funding for vital  
12 positions in the Runaway and Homeless Youth system,  
13 increase the number of shelter beds for RHY to meet  
14 the demand, increase access to long term stable  
15 housing, create mental health shelters dedicated to  
16 RHY, and meet the needs of migrant of young people --  
17 especially unaccompanied minors.

18 Lastly, Safe Horizon offers the following  
19 feedback on the proposed legislation:

20 We support Introduction 54, but we are concerned  
21 that as it stands, it can lead to unfunded mandates  
22 on DYCD programs that don't currently receive funding  
23 for Financial Literacy programming and training.

24 We recommend [TIMER CHIMES]... We recommend  
25 funding be provided to RHY residential programs to

1  
2 mirror the financial literacy programming being  
3 funding at drop-in centers.

4 We support Introduction 976, especially because  
5 DHS does not currently track this data. DHS is  
6 notoriously unsafe for LGBTQ+ folks, and not tracking  
7 data on the number of LGBTQ+ folks in the DHS system  
8 allows for DHS to ignore this population and their  
9 needs and to discriminate against them.

10 And, lastly, we support Introduction 977, as we  
11 believe that it would be best practice for a staff  
12 that already know young people to assist with the  
13 intake and assessment process to access DHS shelter.

14 Thank you

15 JONAH DILL-D'ASCOLI: Hello, and thank you very  
16 much. My name is Jonah Dill-D'Ascoli, I use he/him  
17 pronouns, I am actually the Financial Empowerment  
18 Coach at Safe Horizon Streetwork. We didn't plan  
19 this, otherwise we would have dressed in the same  
20 shirts.

21 I just wanted to speak briefly to the needs for  
22 financial literacy at the drop-in centers, and, as  
23 you said, across training and educational  
24 institutions for all youth and people of all ages.

1  
2 We have seen a growing gap between those who  
3 understand the system and those who do not -- i.e.  
4 seeing COVID in 2020 and how that wealth disparity  
5 continues to grow by those who have and those who do  
6 not have.

7 And those most heavily affected by this disparity  
8 are heavily weighed in the BIPOC and now low income  
9 communities. It is extremely important as part of the  
10 long-term housing initiatives that we are putting in  
11 place -- in this committee and also as part of Safe  
12 Horizon -- to help access and retain... Once the  
13 youth have access and retain this housing, we need to  
14 make sure that they understand how to use their  
15 finances in order to retain that housing in the long  
16 term.

17 Understanding the basics of banking, taxes,  
18 credit, et cetera are important in making sure that  
19 young people are not making mistakes now that will  
20 effect their future selves simply through their lack  
21 of access to that financial literacy and that  
22 understanding. So, obviously, I highly support this  
23 not just for my own job, but also for the fact that I  
24 think that is an extremely important piece of long-  
25 term legislation. Not to mention that -- just to put



1  
2 it out there -- Tennessee just passed it statewide,  
3 and if we are not better than Tennessee, I don't know  
4 who is. So, I am just going to throw that out there  
5 for you all.

6 [LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

7 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Very good point!

8 Hello, my name is Jayne Bigelsen, and I am the  
9 Vice President of Advocacy at Covenant House New York  
10 (CHNY). My pronouns are she/her. Thank you, not only  
11 for the opportunity to testify, but just for your  
12 amazing advocacy -- the entire Committee.

13 I wanted to talk a little bit about the migrant  
14 crisis. There has been a lot of public discussion  
15 about it in general, but little to no attention has  
16 paid to the plight of the young adult migrants  
17 between the ages of 18 to 24 who have unique  
18 developmental needs. I don't know if it is our  
19 proximity to Port Authority, but Covenant House has  
20 been the entry point to many of these young people to  
21 the youth shelter and legal services system. I think  
22 the last time that we testified at a City Council  
23 hearing, our numbers of newcomer youths have doubled.  
24 We are not up to 125. Just for context, in previous  
25 years, we had less than 10 undocumented youth. And

1  
2 now that some of these young people have been here  
3 with us for six to 12 months, we have to look at long  
4 term planning, which continues to be immigration but  
5 also housing. So, we have one Legal Services  
6 Attorney at Covenant House, and he is now...

7 UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE]

8 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes, he is doing fulltime  
9 immigration work. He was not an immigration lawyer  
10 before but he is now -- And, thank you, to The Door  
11 for mentoring him. But, what it has done is, he  
12 cannot take any other legal services cases, so those  
13 are all not getting done, or they are being referred  
14 out, or taking more time.

15 The other thing is that they don't have access to  
16 housing vouchers -- undocumented youth. Right? So,  
17 the immigration and the housing make long term  
18 planning for them seem insurmountable. Right? It  
19 would be ideal if there could be a housing voucher  
20 that actually prioritized homeless youth,  
21 particularly undocumented youth -- and of course  
22 legal services.

23 The housing voucher CityFHEPS, I think we all  
24 know, we are all on the same page here, it is just  
25 illogical, expensive, and traumatic to deny youth

1  
2 access to stable, safe housing just because they are  
3 in a youth system. [TIMER CHIMES] Almost done...  
4 But, and ,you know, we worked so hard, as you know,  
5 on that bill and we are just shocked by the fact that  
6 that is not being followed.

7 The 21 to 24 year olds, I would say that are a  
8 continuum motion people under 21, will be able to  
9 find a bed. But, that is not true for the 21 to 24  
10 year olds. The waiting lists are very long. They're  
11 honestly frequently given the choice between to an  
12 adult shelter or sleeping on the streets. And our  
13 young people have told us time and time again that  
14 they do not want to go to adult shelters. So, we  
15 need the City to give more beds for that age group.

16 Finally, the mental health beds were mentioned,  
17 that is something that I have been advocating for for  
18 a very long time. There are no youth mental health  
19 beds in this city at all. And what that means is, we  
20 often... There are young people whose needs we just  
21 cannot handle. Right? We've got 12 social workers  
22 on site. We can handle most mental health needs, but  
23 when you are dealing with active suicidality or  
24 psychosis, there is no place to send them. Right?  
25 So they go to the hospital, who discharges them back

1 and forth. We keep them, because there is no safe  
2 place to send them, but we cannot meet that level of  
3 need. Other cities have dedicated youth mental  
4 health beds.  
5

6 Finally, the last point is the City contracts.  
7 They are short of the true cost of running beds. And  
8 who suffers for that? The young people and our  
9 frontline staff. I mean, I will just... I will end  
10 with the fact that our staff shows up every day,  
11 despite the fact they have emotionally draining jobs.  
12 They were there every day during the pandemic. They  
13 end up with stagnant, low wages which are so far  
14 below their heroic work. And that hurts our young  
15 people. Right? Because, then their staff leaves,  
16 and low retention hurts our young people. Thank you

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you all for being here  
18 today. And thank you for your testimony.

19 I just have couple of questions because... I am  
20 happy that Covenant House is here, because as you  
21 heard, they talked about this one-time funding that  
22 they gave you guys, because you have been leading  
23 this work.

24 Can you talk about what that funding actually has  
25 been able to do? And do you believe that this

1  
2 funding will be continued, since you are saying that  
3 your numbers have... This is not even doubled, this  
4 is, like at a 100 percent over capacity at this  
5 point. So, can you talk about that a little bit,  
6 please?

7 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes, I mean, we are very grateful  
8 to get that \$200,000, and that immediately went to  
9 work in funding bilingual staff. We do now have a  
10 legal assistant who started last week. Which for  
11 this one who was running around, and he... (CROSS-  
12 TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I am aware. He was at the  
14 last hearing, and he has to get some type of trophy,  
15 because... (CROSS-TALK)

16 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Exactly!

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because, what he is doing is  
18 heroic. He is literally a hero for these young  
19 people at this moment.

20 JAYNE BIGELSEN: For sure! He goes to... On  
21 weekends, he's going 24/7. He's always working. And  
22 it is breaking our hearts.

23 But, so the assistant that DYCD... the money is  
24 going to that, and that is extremely helpful. That

1  
2 will give David his first break in this entire  
3 crisis.

4 But, as far as I know, it is one-time funding.  
5 So, we've got... this legal assistant is temporary.  
6 These legal cases are going to take years.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm!

8 JAYNE BIGELSEN: So, the one-time funding doesn't  
9 work for us. So, I think that it is really  
10 important... I mean, that is ,you know, I run the  
11 Legal Department, it is basically David and I, and we  
12 were told that we have the money until the end of  
13 this year.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay.

15 JAYNE BIGELSEN: So, that... I think that is the  
16 problem. If we could just get him full-time help...  
17 But, then, again, that is just us. The Door...

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm.

19 JAYNE BIGELSEN: I mean, they have a waiting list  
20 of over 700 people. That was just the last time that  
21 I checked. I am going to advocate for another agency  
22 here, because they need... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because, it's a system...  
24 We should be talking... (CROSS-TALK)

25 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Right.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: about how we are helping  
3 each other... (CROSS-TALK)

4 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Right.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Because, if they are not  
6 coming to you, they are going to go there, and if  
7 they are not going there, they are going to go to  
8 another one. So, that is all that is happening.

9 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Exactly. So, we need the legal  
10 assistant, they need more lawyers. Right? Citywide  
11 Justice Center is helping us, which is... What is so  
12 nice was to see this... all of us working together.  
13 It was really nice. The Door trained David. The  
14 Citywide Justice Center is helping us. Safe  
15 Horizon... We are all working together, and that is  
16 pretty amazing. But... (CROSS-TALK)

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But, I am going to push  
18 back, because the thing is we should be working  
19 together, and I am all about that. However, we need  
20 to make sure that... Because, and I say this all the  
21 time for the nonprofits, because we are doing this  
22 work because we love it, and we love these young  
23 people; we often shortchange ourselves for pushing  
24 back and for saying when something is unacceptable.

25 And, so, for me, yes, we should be working

1  
2 together, and we should be collaborating and cross  
3 training and all of those things, but that does not  
4 mean that it should be at the expense of the work  
5 that we are doing.

6 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, so, that is my issue.  
8 Right? Like, if we need these services, the City  
9 should be providing support in order for us to  
10 provide those services.

11 And, so we have to do better at that. And, so,  
12 like, yes...

13 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Absolutely, I mean, serious, I am  
14 not kidding, 24/7, David is working. I told him a  
15 few times that he does not have to take every case.  
16 But, then, I go into his office, and the kids are  
17 talking about they went through the jungle and saw  
18 dead bodies. How do you not take that case?

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes.

20 JAYNE BIGELSEN: And for him to only be doing  
21 immigration law now, what about our name changes?  
22 What about any of our other legal cases?

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Mm-hmm  
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COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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JAYNE BIGELSEN: So, we need help... The whole entire system needs more legal services.. (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, you are drowning.

JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes, we are drowning. We are latterly drowning. We are very grateful. That \$200,000 was a lifeline... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, we are not grateful... No, no, no... No, I am not quitting. We are not grateful. Because, once again, what did I say? You don't get rewarded for doing your job. And, so, \$250,000 is a drop in the bucket for what you need... (CROSS-TALK)

JAYNE BIGELSEN: True.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: to actually do this work.

JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes, and the thing is, we need funding that we know is continuous, so that we can hire permanent staff. Because these cases are going to take years.

JIMMY MEAGHER: And I just wanted to add, you make such an excellent point. I am... The nonprofit human services sector, when we are advocating for funding, we are advocating for.. (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Basic...

1  
2 JIMMY MEAGHER: Rounding errors in the City  
3 Budget, in the State Budget. We are always saying,  
4 can you please give us \$2 million? When other  
5 industries are asking for billions of dollars.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes.

7 JIMMY MEAGHER: And our entire city network relies  
8 on all of us. Our state relies on us... (CROSS-  
9 TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And, then we ask for it, and  
11 then they don't pay you guys. You don't need to get  
12 me started.

13 JIMMY MEAGHER: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Don't get me started.

15 JIMMY MEAGHER: Yes, you're preaching to the  
16 choir.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just had a question for  
18 Safe Horizon. Can you talk a little bit about, like,  
19 looking at the drop-in centers before this directive  
20 was given and what it looked like after. What are  
21 you seeing? How does it look? Does it look  
22 different than it did before? And do you see a  
23 decline in young people actually coming into get  
24 those services?

1  
2 JIMMY MEAGHER: So, we don't operate one of the  
3 24-hour drop-in centers. We are in solidarity with  
4 our sibling organizations in that we see this is  
5 deeply impacting.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yes, I am sorry, I was  
7 referencing Ali Forney, I'm sorry.

8 JONAH DILL-D'ASCOLI: I can tell you just from my  
9 experiencing from having conversations with our  
10 youth. They are definitely being woken up and being  
11 told to wake... I mean, we have obviously heard a  
12 lot of pushback, and a lot of our sister agencies  
13 have very clearly said that they will not wake up  
14 kids who happen to fall asleep on a couch for... I  
15 mean, there's a war on comfy couches. It seems kind  
16 of silly. And a lot of these... But, there have  
17 been times when there... at least, I mean, this is  
18 hearsay, I have not witnessed it personally, but I  
19 have heard of kids being woken up at 2:00 a.m.,  
20 because they fell asleep while sitting up in a chair.  
21 And that seems to me to be a little inhumane. You're  
22 kind of tired... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, absolutely, it's a 100  
24 percent... Listen, I know for a fact that, uh, there  
25 were people who came out to the centers in the middle

1  
2 of the night to check to make sure that they were not  
3 sleeping. So, I am very aware of that, because I got  
4 the calls. Because, my providers actually  
5 communicate with me.

6 I believe my colleague has a question?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yes, thank you so much for  
8 all of the work that you do for our city, and we  
9 cannot underscore the Chair's comments enough --  
10 \$200,000 is like a nickel on a \$106 billion dollar  
11 City Budget.

12 JAYNE BIGELSEN: For one year...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: In one year. It is absurd  
14 that resources are an issue.

15 I just wanted to clarify, is this funding that  
16 was done through a special initiative, or was it...  
17 just to understand? And was it specifically for  
18 legal services for migrant youth?

19 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Specifically for the minor  
20 crisis. We called and said we were drowning and they  
21 responded with the \$200,000.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Got it.

23 And the 700 waiting list that you noted for The  
24 Door, is that for legal services as well, or is that  
25 for something else?

2 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yes, that is for legal services.  
3 We used to refer immigration cases to The Door...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Sure.

5 JAYNE BIGELSEN: [INAUDIBLE] David's not  
6 immigration cases. But, we cannot put them on a  
7 waiting list that size. Because you only have a year  
8 to claim asylum, and you have to get your... (CROSS-  
9 TALK)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yeah...

11 JAYNE BIGELSEN: [INAUDIBLE] applications before  
12 you hit 21. So, we cannot put them on a 700 person  
13 waiting list.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just have a question.

15 So, is there... So, are you guys working with  
16 MOIA or the HERCS to kind of like help expedite that?  
17 Do you guys have a contact person to connect some of  
18 that work? Or is it just, like, Hey, guys, you all  
19 just need to figure it out?

20 JAYNE BIGELSEN: We are doing that on our own with  
21 the City Bar Justice Center. But, we are not working  
22 for [INAUDIBLE] MOIA on that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: They can't... Yes, MOIA  
24 is under water. They can't... Everybody is under  
25 water with legal service provision at this point.

1  
2 Across the board. Not only for the migrant crisis,  
3 but in my district we cannot get enough lawyers just  
4 to support the menagerie of complications that city  
5 bureaucracy does with people's lives.

6 JONAH DILL-D'ASCOLI: May I add something just  
7 briefly to what she said as well?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yes, please.

9 JONAH DILL-D'ASCOLI: And this is from speaking  
10 with the youth [INAUDIBLE] speaking to, and just from  
11 the financial side of things. One of the other big  
12 issues is that you are on a year waiting list to get  
13 into... potentially get your asylum, you are not  
14 allowed to work during that year. They get an ITIN  
15 that says, yes, you can be here, but you cannot work.  
16 What are you supposed to do? We want them... bring  
17 us our tired huddled masses yearning to be free, I  
18 believe somebody wrote that somewhere on an important  
19 piece of something. You know? And what would you  
20 do? What are they supposed to do for the next year  
21 and a half of their lives while they're waiting  
22 around for somebody... It is not their fault that  
23 there is a 700 person waiting list. It is not their  
24 fault that there is this big struggle and we have  
25 backlogged the immigration system. How are we

1  
2 supposed to be supporting them financially. I mean  
3 sit down with them, like, yeah, do want to sit down  
4 and do a budget? -- to your point. And, they are,  
5 like, "What are you talking about? My budget is  
6 please don't drown right now. And, by the way this  
7 only is slightly better than what happened to me  
8 previously." And that is a really important point,  
9 we are also keeping them from being able to be  
10 productive members of society, which they want to do.  
11 Every one of them has come to me and said, "I want a  
12 job. I want to work. I want to be part of this  
13 country."

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And, thank you for that.

15 And I want to circle back to the mental health  
16 service provision. I am utterly flabbergasted and  
17 disgusted that we don't have mental health beds in  
18 the City for young people. I cannot explain it. Talk  
19 about a continuance of cruel and unusual punishment  
20 in our society, which is supposed to be a civil  
21 society at that.

22 Talk to me a little bit more about what you're  
23 seeing on the ground.

24 JAYNE BIGELSEN: And this has been something we  
25 have been saying for I think years now. But, what

1 will happen is, because I have sat in many case  
2 reviews, there are always one or two youths that  
3 just... their service needs -- due to schizophrenia,  
4 psychosis, suicidality -- that takes up all of the  
5 staff's time. Right? And we have a psychiatrist on  
6 staff, but it still wasn't enough. They needed 24/7  
7 mental health care. So, we would beg the hospital to  
8 take them, and they would take them for 24 hours.  
9 Not that the hospital is even the right place, but at  
10 least they could keep them safe for a period of time.  
11 But, they would always send them back in 24 hours.  
12 And we would sit there and say, "We are not the right  
13 the place for them," but then we are like, "But, we  
14 can't find anywhere else." So, we are better than  
15 somewhere else. So, we would keep them, but it does  
16 a disservice to them, because we are not meeting  
17 their needs. And it also does a disservice to the  
18 other young people, because our staff is all working  
19 with them when they are having hallucinations in the  
20 middle of the cafeteria.

22 And maybe something for another point, too, when  
23 you call the police... No, I'm sorry, when you call  
24 9-1-1, you get 20 police officers showing up. And  
25 that is not helpful. So, we are in those discussions



1  
2 right now of, we don't know what to do when we have  
3 someone who is actively suicidal, because we don't 20  
4 police officers showing up in the building. But, we  
5 also don't want this young people to hurt themselves  
6 or someone else. So, that is another issue that I  
7 would love to look at ,you know, at some point.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, we really appreciate  
9 that. And definitely we will meet offline and talk a  
10 little bit more about what that looks like and how we  
11 can start figuring that out. Because, this is a new  
12 one for me. So...

13 JAYNE BIGELSEN: And we are in active  
14 conversations about that. Our social workers are..  
15 I was, like, maybe don't call 9-1-1; walk them to  
16 your hospital themselves. And, they're, like, that's  
17 not safe. So... (CROSS-TALK)

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah.

19 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Yeah, we are struggling with that  
20 right now.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, we will definitely  
22 meet offline.

23 JAYNE BIGELSEN: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you to this panel.  
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COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

JAYNE BIGELSEN: Thank you so much. Thank you all.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Yes, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. This concludes our in-person testimony. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table and complete a witness slip now.

We will now turn to remote testimony. And our first panel will be A Francis and Stacy Stewart.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nickesha, you may begin.

NICKESHA FRANCIS: Thank you.

Good afternoon, and thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to testify.

And, thank you, Chair Althea Stevens of the Committee on Youth Services for your bold leadership and advocacy for our youth.

My name is Nickesha Francis, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd Services. Good Shepherd's, Chelsea Foyer Residential Services, provides supportive housing to young adults in their teens and early twenties who have aged out of the

1  
2 Child Welfare system, are homeless, or at risk of  
3 homelessness.

4 As a Runaway Homeless Youth provider, Good  
5 Shepherd supports The Coalition for Homeless Youth  
6 priorities and specifically, I will highlight the  
7 need for youth to access CityFHEPS vouchers, and for  
8 the City to maintain funding for Housing Specialists.

9 In 2021, Coalition for Homeless Youth providers  
10 and youth advocates helped pass legislation that we  
11 believed would finally give homeless youth in the  
12 Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)  
13 Runaway and Homeless Youth system -- as well as youth  
14 exiting foster care -- access to CityFHEPS vouchers  
15 without forcing them to enter the DHS shelter system  
16 first.

17 Unfortunately, this is the not interpretation of  
18 the laws that are being upheld by DSS. After the DYCD  
19 and ACS CityFHEPS pilot vouchers and one-time  
20 allocation of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) are  
21 exhausted, youth will be forced to enter DHS shelters  
22 before they can get vouchers.

23 Youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-  
24 funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs, as well  
25 as youth transitioning out of the Administration for

1  
2 Children Services care, must be made categorically  
3 eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first  
4 to enter Department of Homeless Services shelter  
5 system.

6 This is a critical investment that will support  
7 the Administration's initiatives to eradicate  
8 homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS  
9 shelters unnecessarily... (CROSS-TALK)

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
11 expired...

12 NICKESHA FRANCIS: and to make access to vouchers  
13 easier.

14 The City should maintain funding for the Housing  
15 Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers that  
16 are temporarily funded through federal Emergency  
17 Housing Voucher funding which are set to expire at  
18 the end of the fiscal year in June 2023.

19 Since Housing Navigators were funded in the DYCD  
20 system in FY21, available data shows that there has  
21 been a 350 percent increase in youth exiting  
22 homelessness into their own apartments, since their  
23 inception. These are amazing outcomes for runaway and  
24 homeless youth, and maintaining these positions will  
25 ensure runaway and homeless youth continue to

1  
2 successfully transition to their own apartments and  
3 support the Administration's goal to address the  
4 homelessness crisis.

5 Similarly, in response to the priorities set  
6 forth in Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York  
7 City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness,  
8 funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator  
9 positions across the DYCD-funded drop-in Centers in  
10 FY23.

11 These critical positions provide peer-to-peer  
12 support to some of the most vulnerable youth and  
13 young adults. If this funding is not maintained,  
14 youth with lived experience will lose their jobs, and  
15 countless other youth will miss out on the benefit or  
16 peer-on-peer support.

17 We are also calling for more beds for homeless  
18 young adults and better coordination by the city to  
19 meet the needs of migrant youth.

20 Thank you

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

22 Stacy Stewart, you may begin when the sergeant  
23 starts your clock.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.  
25

1  
2 STACY STEWART: Good afternoon, and thank you for  
3 the opportunity to discuss two bills that aim to make  
4 our emergency housing systems safer and easier to  
5 navigate for one of our young people.

6 My name is Stacy Stewart. I am a Licensed Social  
7 Worker and the Managing Director of The Door's  
8 Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, as well as our  
9 for our housing program.

10 I see firsthand that transitioning from youth  
11 shelters to adult housing placements is a  
12 bureaucratic abyss that discourages young people who  
13 need immediate help.

14 When youth shelters are full -- as they usually  
15 are -- or if young people are over 18, they try to  
16 get housed through DHS.

17 Between a lengthy intake process, delayed  
18 response times to referral requests, and a lack of  
19 beds, young people can be in temporary shelter for a  
20 week or even longer before placement in longer-term  
21 placements.

22 Our young people are suffering as a result, with  
23 their biggest needs remaining unmet. Some stay at the  
24 temporary shelters which lack trauma-informed  
25 services. Others get fed up and try to find somewhere

1  
2 else to sleep on their own. Either way, they often  
3 become despondent and forced into spaces where the  
4 social and environmental determinants of health,  
5 safety, and stability are not addressed. And, out of  
6 frustration, they often disengage from drop-in and  
7 emergency-care systems altogether, returning to  
8 dangerous environments that place them in harm's way.

9       Passing Introduction 977 would ensure that the  
10 process between DYCD-funded drop-in centers and DHS  
11 is timely and seamless for all our young people while  
12 keeping their safety and health in the forefront.

13       The streamlined process would allot sufficient  
14 time for assessing and meeting ongoing care needs --  
15 services that The Door provides internally and those  
16 provided through external partners.

17       With more efficiency and transparency, youth can  
18 navigate the appropriate assessments for their best  
19 housing options without interrupting access to other  
20 crucial services they are already engaged  
21 in... (CROSS-TALK)

22       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

23       STACY STEWART: Thank you for this opportunity.

24       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

1  
2 We have now heard from everyone who was signed up  
3 to testify. If we have missed anyone who would like  
4 to testify virtually, please use the Zoom Raise Hand  
5 Function, and I will call on you in the order in  
6 which you raise your hand.

7 Seeing no one else, I would like to note that  
8 written testimony, which will reviewed in full by  
9 committee staff, may be submitted to the record for  
10 up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by  
11 emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

12 And now I will turn back to Chair Stevens for  
13 closing statements.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I want to thank all of the  
15 providers and young people who testified today. And  
16 I just want to reiterate that we have to make sure  
17 that when we are thinking about policies and issues,  
18 we have to put young people first. Even in today's  
19 hearing, there were new things that I found out that  
20 we need to be advocating for and pushing to make sure  
21 that we get like mental health beds; not  
22 understanding why DHS does not have limits, but DYCD  
23 does all of these things to not make sense.

24 I am very much a person who believes that if  
25 things do not make sense, we need to change it and



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fix it. And, so, I am here to stand with the providers and the young people to ensure that equity is seen and that they are being heard.

So, thank you to all who came here today.

Thank you for DYCD for testifying and for your hard work, because we often know that the work that you do is not easy either. But, you often just have to implement it. So, thank you to everyone.

This hearing is now adjourned.

[GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 9, 2023