

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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September 13, 2022

Start: 1:17 p.m.

Recess: 5:01 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers-City Hall

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala,  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Cabán  
Crystal Hudson  
Linda Lee  
Chi A. Ossé  
Lincoln Restler  
Kevin C. Riley  
Althea V. Stevens  
Sandra Ung  
Nantasha M. Williams  
Erik Bottcher  
Gale A. Brewer

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Marricka Scott-McFadden  
Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and  
Legislative Affairs-Department of Social Services

Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner, Department  
of Homeless Services

Christine Quinn  
President and CEO of WIN, Women in Need

Deborah Berkman  
Coordinating Attorney of the Shelter Advocacy  
Initiative at the New York Legal Assistance Group  
or NYLAG

Robert Desir  
Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society

Nicole McVinua  
Director of Policy at Urban Pathways

Eric Lee  
Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless  
Services United

Jacqueline Samone  
Policy Director at the Coalition for the Homeless

Amy Blumsack  
Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors  
Together

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

Juan Diaz  
Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens  
Committee for Children

Sara Wilson  
Disabled and a Former Shelter Resident

Sharifah Harvey  
Currently experiencing homelessness

Milton Perez  
Member of Vocal New York Homeless Union

Douglas Powell  
Disabled

James Lee  
Been in the DHS Shelter Since December of 2021

Alexandra Dougherty  
Senior Staff Attorney and Policy Counsel at the  
Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender  
Services

Patrick Boyle  
Assistant Vice President with Public Policy with  
Volunteers of America

Kenisha Atkinson  
In Favor of Intro. 92

Sara Newman  
Director of Organizing for the Open Hearts  
Initiative

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

Jonathan Gaffney  
Housing Campaign Manager here with Neighbors  
Together

Mimbeu Oshagara (SP?)  
Paraplegic Paralyzed from the Chest Down

Nora McCarthy  
Director and Co-Founder of the New York City  
Family Policy Project

Helen Strom  
Benefits and Homeless Advocacy Director at the  
Safety Net Project at Urban Justice

Katrina Corbell  
Experienced shelter stay

Towaki Komatsu

Kimberly Blair  
Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York  
City or NAMNYC

Scott Hutchins  
Vocal and Neighbors Together

1 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a sound check for the  
3 Committee on General Welfare. Today's date is  
4 September 13, 2022, being recorded by Danny Wang in  
5 the Chambers.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: And once again, good afternoon  
7 and welcome to the Committee on General Welfare. At  
8 this time, we ask you please place your phones on  
9 vibrate or silent. Thank you for your cooperation.  
10 Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [GAVEL] Good afternoon every  
12 one, my name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy  
13 Speaker of the New York City Council and Chair of the  
14 General Welfare Committee. I'd like to begin by  
15 thanking everyone for joining us this afternoon.

16 Today, our Committee is holding a hearing on 11  
17 bills. Intro. 92, which I have sponsored along with  
18 Intro. 522 sponsored by Council Member Bottcher.  
19 Intro.'s 513 and 132 sponsored by Council Member Ung.  
20 Intro. 421 sponsored by Council Member Riley, Intro.  
21 229 sponsored by Council Member Cabán, Intro.'s 431  
22 and 124 sponsored by Council Member Salamanca.  
23 Intro. 276 sponsored by Council Member Ossé, Intro.  
24 190 sponsored by Public Advocate Williams, Intro. 108  
25 sponsored by Council Member Holden.

3 Since many of the sponsors of these pieces of  
4 legislation are here to speak about their respective  
5 bills. I will not get into specific details of each.  
6 Instead, I want to uplift the fact that we are here  
7 to discuss these bills because our homeless shelter  
8 system in New York City is broken.

9 We need to find ways to make the system run as  
10 efficiently and effectively as possible for some of  
11 our most marginalized population. And what we have  
12 seen, especially in the last few months is that there  
13 is a lot of work yet to be done.

14 These bills include solutions for how we can  
15 close gaps in the system at large including my bill  
16 Intro. 92, which would create an advisory board for  
17 accessibility of shelters. We have heard anecdotally  
18 of clients in the DHS shelter system who have a  
19 disability, being placed in shelters where there is  
20 no working elevator, and they have no way of getting  
21 to their bed. This is unacceptable and just last  
22 week; we saw what occurred at the Bedford Atlantic  
23 Armory between a recent migrant who is an asylum  
24 seeker and a DHS shelter police officer. What are we  
25 going to do to improve conditions in our shelters  
including client safety?

3 The legislation that we are hearing today  
4 includes several bills that require training, so that  
5 the city can improve client staff relationships and  
6 effectively de-escalate situations that call for a  
7 trauma informed approach.

8 Over the last few weeks and at our last Committee  
9 hearing, we also heard about so many of the issues  
10 with shelter intake, especially for families with  
11 children at PATH.

12 Today, we are hearing several bills that address  
13 how we can ensure a smoother intake process including  
14 empowering community-based nonprofit organizations to  
15 conduct intake. The bills we are hearing today also  
16 include bills that will call for increased mental  
17 health services among shelter clients and reduce  
18 barriers to accessing permanent housing by making  
19 City FHEPS rental assistance vouchers more usable in  
20 practice. If we truly want to reduce the challenges  
21 of the city's overburdened shelter system, we need to  
22 have more conversations about how the system operates  
23 on the front end and on the back end.

24 Today, in hearing these bills, we are seeking to  
25 have these nuance conversation. I want to thank the  
Administration, the advocates, legal service

3 providers, volunteers and any individuals with lived  
4 experience who have taken the time to join us. At  
5 this time, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues  
6 who are already here today, Council Members Riley,  
7 Cabán, Lee, Ossé, Bottcher, oh, did I miss anyone?  
8 Yeah, I think I have everyone. Uhm, and I would also  
9 like to thank my Committee staff who worked to  
10 prepare this hearing Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel,  
11 David Romero Counsel, Cristy Dwyer, Senior  
12 Legislative Policy Analyst, Julia Haramis, Senior  
13 Finance Analyst, Rose Martinez, Assistant Deputy  
14 Director, Nicholas Montalbano, Senior Data Scientist  
15 and my staff [INAUDIBLE 4:21] Deputy Chief of Staff.

16 I will now turn it over to the sponsors of the  
17 bills that we are hearing today to give brief  
18 remarks. We will start with Council Member Bottcher.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you Deputy  
20 Speaker Ayala. I am really grateful for this hearing  
21 today and for your co-sponsorship of our bill and for  
22 your leadership on this and so many other issues for  
23 many years. I also want to thank my prime co-  
24 sponsors Chi Ossé and Carlina Rivera and the 35  
25 Council Members who have signed on to cosponsor  
Intro. 522. We are here on behalf of the over 10,500



3 families including 17,000 children who slept in New  
4 York City shelters last night. We're here because  
5 families deserve mental healthcare too and I'm so  
6 excited that our legislation that will help ensure  
7 that they get that care, Intro. 522 is getting a  
8 hearing today.

9 Intro. 522 would require mental health  
10 professionals to be made available in each family  
11 shelter and for the Department of Homeless Services  
12 to provide onsite mental health services. The bill  
13 would require DHS to maintain a ratio of at least one  
14 full time mental health professional for up to 50  
15 families with children and it would require DHS to  
16 annually report on these services to the Mayor and  
17 the Speaker and publicly.

18 I say our bill, because this bill is the result  
19 of a collaborative effort between the City Council  
20 and direct service providers. Women in need WIN and  
21 their CEO Cristine Quin were instrumental in the  
22 creation of this bill. I actually attended a panel  
23 discussion earlier in the year when where the lack of  
24 mental health services in shelters was identified as  
25 a major issue facing families.

3 And you know a lot of times at these panel  
4 discussions, there's lots of notes taken but not  
5 necessarily a lot of follow up but in the weeks and  
6 months that followed, we developed this legislation  
7 to address this critical issue.

8 I talk a lot about why this issue is personal to  
9 me. I am someone who got mental health care. When I  
10 was in high school, I spent a month in a mental  
11 health hospital upstate after a series of suicide  
12 attempts and that health care is why I'm here today.

13 But that kind of mental health care is not  
14 available to most people. It's just not.  
15 Particularly if you are a person of color in this  
16 country, a person living near or below the poverty  
17 line and especially if you're a person living in  
18 shelter and that's wrong and that's why we're here  
19 today. I really look forward to this hearing and I  
20 want to thank the Adams administration folks here for  
21 devoting your lives to this important cause and for  
22 all you do and for working with us on this  
23 legislation. And thank you to Deputy Speaker Ayala  
24 and all my colleagues.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Council Member. We  
want to hear from Council Member Cabán.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you Chair and thank  
4 you to the Committee Staff and for all the folks who  
5 are here. I am so excited that today's agenda  
6 includes Intro. 229, which I've introduced in  
7 partnership with Chair Ayala. When the Department of  
8 Homeless Services, DHS deems a New Yorker eligible  
9 for a housing voucher to rent an apartment, they  
10 receive a so-called shopping letter that identifies  
11 the maximum rent a recipient can pay based on  
12 household size and income level and unfortunately,  
13 this maximum rent often includes utility fees. And  
14 it's forcing many voucher recipients to stay in our  
15 shelter system for much longer than they should.

16 And this bill will eliminate the utility  
17 allowance from the equation. Move people from  
18 shelter, housing, into permanent housing more quickly  
19 and get us closer to a city where comfortable,  
20 reliable housing is treated as a basic human right,  
21 not a wealth acquisition scheme for developers and  
22 landlords.

23 And so, thank you to advocates that have worked  
24 with our office on this bill and to all of you that  
25 have taken the time to give us feedback today and I  
will pass it back to you Chair.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Council Member. We  
4 will now hear from Council Member Ossé.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you Chair and Deputy  
6 Speaker. Homelessness is a trauma. I think all of  
7 us know that in this room and I think that's why  
8 we're all here doing the work that we are doing with  
9 these various pieces of legislation.

10 According to the Substance Abuse and Mental  
11 Health Services Administration, people experiencing  
12 homelessness have to deal with a multitude of  
13 challenges. Such as loss of home, instability and  
14 adjusting to shelter life. On top of this  
15 individuals and families experiencing homelessness  
16 also experience other forms of trauma, such as  
17 domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse or  
18 growing up in poverty in and of itself.

19 When people are experiencing trauma, they need to  
20 be met with care, compassion and understanding,  
21 especially from the people who are supposed to help  
22 them get back on their feet. Under Intro. 276, my  
23 bill that I'm having a hearing on, that we're having  
24 a hearing on here today, the Department of Homeless  
25 Services will be required to provide their staff with  
trainings on techniques to improve professionalism,

3 increase cultural sensitivity, de-escalate conflict  
4 and use trauma informed theory. With homelessness on  
5 the rise because of an affordable housing crisis and  
6 an influx of asylees staying in our shelter system,  
7 we need to ensure that all individuals and families  
8 who are experiencing a form of homelessness in our  
9 city are addressed with care, compassion and  
10 understanding.

11 I've said it before and I'll say it again, you  
12 know we often talk about homelessness and mental  
13 illness as a homeless problem or a mental illness  
14 problem, but I see it as a problem of New York City  
15 government, a failure of New York City government and  
16 that's why we are all taking the steps here today  
17 with these various pieces of legislation.

18 Now more than ever, we need to pass my bill like  
19 Intro. 26, 276 to ensure that we get individuals and  
20 families the resources and services they need while  
21 treating them with dignity and respect. Thank you  
22 Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We'll now hear  
24 from Council Member Riley.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you Chair Ayala.  
Adequate encompassing data, reporting as key to

3 identifying areas of opportunity within our city  
4 infrastructure. Intro. 421 will require the  
5 Department of Homeless Services to produce regular  
6 reporting on families with children in homeless  
7 shelters given more insight to identify the needs of  
8 New York families. Not only does it provide further  
9 data transparency in our shelter system, but the  
10 extent of these reports will provide a further look  
11 into expanding our resources and services to uplift  
12 these families. Having access to the total numbers  
13 of families with children entering the shelter  
14 system, their average length of stay and the total  
15 number of families leaving the shelter to permanent  
16 housing can pinpoint the individualized needs of  
17 families placed in the shelters.

18 This legislation would monitor the school  
19 enrollment and attendance with children living in  
20 shelters, empowering our New York City schools to  
21 provide a supportive, learning experience and ensure  
22 that these students have the tools that they need to  
23 succeed in spite of challenges their families may be  
24 facing.

25 As a city, we must protect New York families,  
prevent them from entering the shelter system but

1  
2 also creating a sustainable plan that helps them get  
3 out. I encourage the support of Intro. 421, which  
4 would add an adequately expanded, preventive and  
5 restorative services such as long-term family  
6 planning, financial building and personal,  
7 professional development.

8       Importantly to effectively address the crisis of  
9 homelessness in New York City, we must continue to  
10 understand the ends and outs of the shelter system,  
11 especially when it pertains to our youth or the  
12 future of our communities. This legislation seeks to  
13 provide a foundation to mobilize the equity,  
14 accessibility and efficiency of the resources due to  
15 the Department of Homeless Service. I would like to  
16 thank Chair Ayala for signing onto this bill, Council  
17 Member Louis, Council Member Nurse, Council Member  
18 Krishnan, Abreu, Velázquez and Williams and I  
19 encourage the rest of my colleagues to sign on as  
20 well. Thank you.

21       CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I will now turn  
22 it over to Committee Counsel David Romero to  
23 administer the oath to witnesses from the  
24 Administration.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are now going to call on  
4 members of the Administration Marricka Scott-  
5 McFadden, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental  
6 and Legislative Affairs, Department of Social  
7 Services and Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner,  
8 Department of Homeless Services.

9 Will you please raise your right hand. Do you  
10 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
11 but the truth before this Committee and to respond  
12 honestly to Council Member questions?

13 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I do.

14 MOLLY PARK: I do.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin  
16 when ready.

17 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Good morning, I want to  
18 thank the General Welfare Committee and Deputy  
19 Speaker Ayala for holding today's hearing and the  
20 opportunity to testify.

21 My name is Marricka Scott-McFadden, and I am the  
22 Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and  
23 Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
24 Services, and I am joined by my colleague Molly Park,  
25 First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of  
Homeless Services.



3 Today's hearing will focus on several bills  
4 impacting DSS, the Human Resources Administration HRA  
5 and Department of Homeless Services DHS. We look  
6 forward to discussing these proposals today and  
7 better understanding their intent. Before we start,  
8 I want to emphasize that it is our priority to ensure  
9 clients have access to the services they need,  
10 however, many of these proposals are duplicative. We  
11 ask that this Committee seriously consider the cost,  
12 programmatic and staffing impacts these bills would  
13 have on our system as we discuss them today, and to  
14 keep in mind the many reforms we've implemented to  
15 better serve New Yorkers in need. Moreover, several  
16 of these bills are still being reviewed by our legal  
17 teams. With that in mind, we look forward to today's  
18 conversation.

19 Intro. 522 would require mental health  
20 professionals to be made available in families with  
21 children shelters for DHS to report on the provision  
22 of such services. While the intent seems helpful, we  
23 have several concerns about this proposal. First,  
24 implementing the bill would be extremely costly as it  
25 requires hiring a significant number of mental health  
professionals. Additionally, given recent national

3 shortages of mental health professionals, it could be  
4 difficult to comply with the bills requirement at any  
5 price point.

6 In addition, DHS already provides social work  
7 professionals in family shelters as part of the  
8 shelter model budget. These professionals conduct  
9 biopsychosocial evaluations and make referrals to  
10 other professionals when appropriate.

11 Most importantly, given that families will be  
12 transitioning from shelter, it would also be more  
13 effective to refer them to services in the community.  
14 Lastly, the reporting requirements would be  
15 burdensome to the administration given the absence of  
16 resources included in the legislation. We look  
17 forward to speaking with the sponsor to further  
18 discuss these proposals.

19 Introductions 132 and 513 would represent  
20 tremendous challenges for the agency. Intro. 132  
21 would require DHS to establish additional intake  
22 centers for families with children in boroughs  
23 without existing intake centers. As last stated by  
24 our Commissioner to this Committee, this proposal  
25 would have significant costs to the city, an  
important factor that this bill fails to thoroughly

3 consider. DHS opened the Prevention Assistance and  
4 Temporary Housing, PATH, intake facility after  
5 revamping its intake and eligibility protocol to  
6 improve and expedite the processing of applications  
7 and provision of conditional placements for families  
8 into temporary emergency housing.

9 Our centralized shelter intake was specifically  
10 designed and built for families with children and  
11 allows for consistent screening of critical factors  
12 and assessments for conditions related to medical  
13 needs, mental health, substance use, adult and child  
14 protective services, and domestic violence. A  
15 significant issue in the families with children  
16 population. Moreover, centralization fosters the  
17 continuity of services by utilizing interagency  
18 linkages such as with the Department of Education,  
19 Administration of Children's Services and others.  
20 Decentralizing the intake process loses the economies  
21 of scale built over time. Dilutes the safeguards in  
22 place for vulnerable families and will slow the  
23 process of placing families in shelter.

24 Related to shelter intake, Intro. 513 would  
25 require DHS to report to the feasibility of  
partnering with community-based nonprofit

3 organizations to accept and process applications for  
4 shelter intake for families with children. We have  
5 several concerns about the proposals in this bill.

6 As noted above, there are significant service  
7 benefits with a consolidated intake process. In  
8 addition, devolving such a critical and meticulous  
9 process to community organizations could result in  
10 families receiving inconsistent services.

11 Lastly, there could be client privacy and quality  
12 of service concerns. The fact is that would take  
13 substantial resources and funding to oversee and  
14 execute by DHS.

15 Intro. 92 would require DHS to create an  
16 accessibility advisory board on issues related to  
17 accessibility in city shelters. Our agency has  
18 concerns regarding this proposal as accessibility is  
19 currently governed by the Butler consent decree and  
20 DHS is following this process. We look forward to  
21 discussing with the sponsor to understand the full  
22 intent of this bill.

23 Intro. 190 would require DHS to produce a  
24 homeless bill of rights to inform New Yorkers  
25 experiencing homelessness about their rights and  
services available to them. DHS already ensures our

3 clients experiencing homelessness are aware of  
4 services available to them and their rights, and we  
5 work to communicate this at several touchpoints  
6 across our system. We are open to the bills  
7 proposals, and we look forward to working with the  
8 sponsor to explore implementation.

9 Introduction 431 and 276, would require DHS to  
10 conduct customer service training and report on this  
11 training. The requirements in these two bills are  
12 duplicative, as they present similar training topics.  
13 DHS conducts a series of fundamental courses focused  
14 on client engagement to ensure our staff and  
15 providers provide New Yorkers with the upmost care,  
16 compassion and professionalism. We look forward to  
17 working with the sponsors to further understand these  
18 proposals.

19 Introductions 421 and 108 would introduce new  
20 reporting requirements for DSS-DHS. As previously  
21 mentioned to the Council, we value the importance of  
22 transparency and accountability that our agency  
23 reporting brings to our discussions with the Council  
24 and public. However, we want to emphasize the  
25 significant cost and resources it takes to produce  
reports, which is why we want to stress the

3 importance of streamlining reporting requirements to  
4 avoid duplication and wasted resources.

5 With that said, we have significant concerns  
6 about both reporting bills. Introduction 421 would  
7 require an onerous amount of reporting regarding our  
8 families with children shelter population. First,  
9 the reporting requirements duplicates some of the  
10 reporting requirements of the revamped Local Law 37  
11 of 2011, as amended by Local Law 79 of 2022.

12 Moreover, some of the level and granularity of  
13 data being requested by this bill does not exist so  
14 it would create administrative burden on the agency.  
15 The bill also requires data coordination with other  
16 city agencies such as Department of Education and  
17 Administration for Children Services, which raises  
18 privacy concerns about confidentiality – confidential  
19 information particularly for minors and the  
20 requirement for parental consent. The monthly  
21 reporting requirements are unrealistic given the  
22 concerns just mentioned.

23 Introduction 108 requires reporting that would be  
24 duplicative of existing metrics provided by the  
25 agency and an administrative burden to carry out in  
the manner proposed by the bill. We look forward to

3 further understanding the full intent of this bill  
4 with the sponsor.

5 Introduction 124 is in relation to designating  
6 housing specialists in HRA and DHS shelters. DSS,  
7 HRA, DHS staff and providers work each day to  
8 transition and place New Yorkers in need into  
9 permanent housing and this critical work is done  
10 through the many case workers and housing staff  
11 embedded throughout our HRA and DHS shelters, or who  
12 visit the sites regularly. All DHS shelters are  
13 already funded to provide housing specialists on-site  
14 as part of the model budget.

15 Given this, we find that the requirement of this  
16 bill would be duplicative of our current work and  
17 cost considerations must be taken into account for  
18 any additional requirements placed on the agency. We  
19 look forward to further understanding the bill's  
20 intent.

21 Introduction 229 is in relation to monthly rental  
22 assistance payments for households with rental  
23 assistance vouchers. We believe that the Council  
24 intends to protect tenants, but we have significant  
25 concerns about the drafting of this bill, as we  
believe it could actually be harmful to tenants for

3 several reasons. City FHEPS, like Section 8, is  
4 based on the Fair Market Rent, which is the maximum  
5 the program can pay if all utilities are covered in  
6 the rent.

7 If the agency is forced to pay the landlords the  
8 full rent regardless of what utilities they offer and  
9 in most New York City units the tenant is responsible  
10 for paying the utilities, then we will not be able to  
11 subsidize the cost of utilities for tenants.

12 When DSS has finished building in modifications  
13 to our subsidy payment system, we intend to ensure  
14 that the utility allowance is provided to the tenant.  
15 Either as part of the public assistance benefit or as  
16 a reduction of their rent contribution. We would not  
17 be able to pass the utility allowance to the tenants  
18 who pay for their own utilities because it would have  
19 been provided to the landlord.

20 Additionally, we are finally at a place where all  
21 city subsidies are mostly aligned with each other,  
22 and landlords cannot discriminate between voucher  
23 holders. If City FHEPS is not deducting utility  
24 allowance from the landlord, each Section 8 voucher  
25 holders will have a more difficult time securing



3 housing. We believe we share the same goal and look  
4 forward to discussing further with the Council.

5 We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback  
6 of these proposals and we look forward to working  
7 with the Council to serve New Yorkers in need. Thank  
8 you and I look forward to any questions you might  
9 have today.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to recognize that  
11 we've been joined by Council Members Restler,  
12 Stevens, Williams and Hudson and we've also been  
13 joined by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, who I  
14 believe is going to give a statement.

15 JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank you so much Madam Chair.  
16 As mentioned, my name is Jumaane Williams, Public  
17 Advocate for the City of New York. I want to thank  
18 the Chair and the members of the Committee on General  
19 Welfare for holding this hearing.

20 First, of course, I always want to make sure we  
21 mention in the issues of housing and homelessness,  
22 the number one need here is actual housing that  
23 people can afford. My office is going to continue to  
24 work on a plan. I started when I was running across  
25 the state to help build and preserve moving units,

3 where people would pay no more than 30 percent of  
4 their rent in income.

5 But with that said, in the winter of 2020, there  
6 were nearly 80,000 people unhoused in New York City,  
7 the highest number in the city's history. In June  
8 2022, there were over 50,000 people including over  
9 one-third of children sleeping each night in New  
10 York's municipal homeless shelter. The city's  
11 current efforts to combat homelessness are clearly  
12 not working. The system as it stands now is at best  
13 inefficient and at worst in many places, inhumane.

14 We know the solution to homelessness is not more  
15 shelters, it is more permanent, affordable housing  
16 for adults, young people and families experiencing  
17 homelessness. The path to housing assistance is  
18 filled with red tape, confusing and sometimes  
19 conflicting requirements, stress and suffering.

20 For people with disabilities, mental health or  
21 other medical needs and people whose first language  
22 is not English, the process is especially difficult.  
23 While some experiencing homelessness maybe lucky  
24 enough to have an advocate or social worker to guide  
25 them through the shelter system, most are expected to  
navigate their process on their own.

3 For these reasons, I have introduced Intro. 0190,  
4 which would require the Department of Homeless  
5 Services to produce a homeless bill of rights. This  
6 document, which DHS would be required to make  
7 available on their website and to shelters and social  
8 service offices for distribution to people  
9 experiencing homelessness, would inform people  
10 experiencing homelessness about their rights and  
11 services available to them. This includes but is not  
12 limited to: The right to shelter; access to legal  
13 services; the right to request an interpreter and  
14 translation services; how to file a complaint,  
15 educational options for children; the right to vote;  
16 housing and financial assistance; protections against  
17 discrimination; the right to request accommodations  
18 for disability.

19 In addition, the document would include the  
20 people, the right of people in shelters, including  
21 the right to meet privately with advocates and legal  
22 representatives be placed in a room with a person who  
23 identifies as the same gender, a private room with a  
24 lock for families experiencing homelessness a secure  
25 locker for single adults experiencing homelessness,  
access to bathrooms, access to washing machines and

3 dryers or money for laundry, access to space and  
4 equipment to bathe and change babies and small  
5 children, meals and accommodations for dietary needs  
6 and restrictions.

7 The legislation is vital, as it brings together  
8 already existing rights under one section in the  
9 city's Administrative Code, and it codifies existing  
10 case law. The congregation and posting of rights  
11 enable people experiencing homelessness and advocates  
12 to easily access and be informed of their rights.

13 I want to thank my colleagues in the City Council  
14 who have co-sponsored this critical pieces of  
15 legislation, and I look forward to working with the  
16 Council and the Committee on General Welfare to end  
17 homelessness and achieve true housing equity in our  
18 city and I want to thank you for your comments and  
19 look forward to working with you on the bill. Good  
20 to see you again.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. So, we're going  
22 to be hearing - I think the fairest way to do this is  
23 we want to be hearing from the Council Members who  
24 have introduced legislation today but considering how  
25 we have a little special guest here, I'm not sure if  
the Public Advocate has some questions that he wanted

3 to ask. And you're only getting this privilege  
4 because of the baby.

5 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: I need to bring him  
6 often. Thank you, I appreciate that. Good to see  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Good to see you.

9 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: So, I heard that the  
10 interest in working with me on the bill. I also  
11 heard mention that you already do some of the things.  
12 And so, as I mentioned, our objective here is not to  
13 create new laws, it's to try to put everything in one  
14 place because what we find is people don't always  
15 understand their rights even though they are there  
16 and even though parts of them may be informed.

17 So, is it something they think can be worked on?

18 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yes, as stated in our  
19 testimony, DSS performs many of the tasks that you've  
20 outlined and we focus on the touchpoints throughout  
21 the system, actually making sure that our clients are  
22 aware of their rights and so, we welcome further  
23 discussion.

24 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Alright, I just want -  
25 I always try to be clear because sometimes further  
discussion is never the sole - do you think we can

3 come together and get a bill of rights that's like a  
4 one thing that we can be giving two folks who are  
5 unfortunately experiencing homelessness?

6 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think it's fair that  
7 even though it may be a nebulous statement, we really  
8 want to work with you on this because we feel that we  
9 are already doing it.

10 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Okay, that sounds kind  
11 of no-ish, but I feel like there is things being done  
12 but they're not happening all in one place and we're  
13 trying to make it so that people can have access to  
14 the stuff in one place without searching around. But  
15 uhm, I will pause now and hopefully we will continue  
16 the conversation so we can - I guess we can speak the  
17 language that we're both trying to say at this moment  
18 and time and be on the same page. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I have just a few  
20 questions and then I'm going to turn it over to the  
21 Council Members but there were some things that were  
22 stated in briefing. Uhm, so regarding Intro. 92,  
23 understanding that the butler decree, consent decree  
24 really dictates right, the way that we look at the  
25 design right of our shelter system in a way that  
meets the needs of individuals with disabilities.

3 The bill kind of came from conversations with  
4 primarily individuals living at Wards Island and  
5 complaints of individuals being placed in shelter  
6 settings where there had to be you know, elevators  
7 were necessary where elevators sometimes were not  
8 functional. Individuals that maybe have power  
9 operated wheelchairs and had no access to outlets  
10 because there were a minimal numbers of outlets in  
11 the facility. Individuals who had difficulty getting  
12 in and out of the bathroom because of the way that  
13 the door opens is very important right, you know if  
14 you're a person using a wheelchair.

15 This came up a couple of years ago. We had a  
16 discussion under then Council Member Levin, and you  
17 know we, obviously this is kind of the follow up to  
18 that. But I wanted to hear like, if an individual  
19 that is a wheelchair user is coming in and it's  
20 placed on the third floor, that's a need not a  
21 reasonable accommodation.

22 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you. Thank you  
23 for your question. I want to just affirm that the  
24 butler consent decree is a multiyear statement and  
25 therefore it does speak to ADA accessibility, and we  
are working within the confines of that decree that

3 being set out around my colleague to speak to some of  
4 the specifics that you just talked about.

5 MOLLY PARK: Thank you and thank you to the  
6 Council for having us here today. I'm Molly Park,  
7 I'm the First Deputy Commissioner. I can't obviously  
8 speak to the individual cases, but in general, when  
9 an individual comes in, an individual or family comes  
10 in to intake, there is an assessment process about  
11 whether or not they have specific physical needs that  
12 would dictate their shelter placement. If something  
13 is what we all reasonable and apparent, so you know  
14 somebody in a wheelchair, there's no paperwork  
15 necessary, they should absolutely be assigned to a  
16 site that is accessible.

17 If they have a need that is not reasonable and  
18 apparent, that we can't just witness, there is a  
19 formal, reasonable, accommodation process. Peoples  
20 circumstances can certainly change after they come in  
21 through intake. They can file for a reasonable  
22 accommodation process at any point and time. We do,  
23 there are posters about reasonable accommodation and  
24 how to file a reasonable accommodation in all of the  
25 shelters and it's something the case worker should be  
working with clients if they need help doing that.



1 Clients can request the help or not request the help;  
2 it is up to them whether or not they want to complete  
3 the HIPAA documentation.  
4

5 You know that's certainly not to say that there  
6 aren't cases where mistakes have been made or that a  
7 client has you know their circumstances have changed  
8 and they haven't file a reasonable accommodation. We  
9 are always happy to work with individual clients to  
10 make sure that we get them to the placement that we  
11 need to.

12 We have within our agency have hired in the last  
13 18 months or so, a disability affairs coordinators.  
14 So, whose job it is to work specifically with clients  
15 and make sure that they are getting access to the  
16 shelter placements that they need, and I think, the  
17 last thing that I would say is that we also have a  
18 consultant contract where we have construction  
19 experts in accessibility who are out and looking at  
20 all of our new shelters to make sure that as we are  
21 going forward, that we are adding a significant  
22 volume of accessible capacity.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Well would you be able to  
24 tell me how many electrical outlets exist at you know  
25 Wards Island facility that would allow a person with

3 a wheelchair that needs to be charged or a person who  
4 requires the use of a sleep apnea machine to breath  
5 at night be able to connect to that outlet.

6 MOLLY PARK: So, I don't have that data with us,  
7 it's something we can follow up on but again, if that  
8 was something that wasn't available, that is  
9 absolutely the kind of situation where a client could  
10 file a reasonable accommodation and where we would  
11 make other arrangements.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know what the length  
13 of time is from the time is that a person files to  
14 the point where a resolution is determined?

15 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, it depends a little bit on how  
16 complicated the situation is. How much paperwork is  
17 provided by the medical providers. It's generally  
18 fairly short. You know there were I think -the ways  
19 during COVID but we are doing it in real time at this  
20 point.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: My sense and I mean, I have  
22 gone to, to, to quite a few shelters settings is that  
23 they are not retrofitted. They've been retrofitted  
24 for you know general you know population. I don't  
25 remember and I may be wrong. So, this is not a  
statement but rather question. Seeing any you know

3 any type of setting where that level of accommodation  
4 is evident.

5 So, you know I'm an individual you know doing  
6 intake at Bellview and I'm sending someone to Wards  
7 that has a specific need. I know that that need can  
8 you know can be met there as opposed to sending them  
9 to you know someplace else maybe in Brooklyn. The  
10 Brooklyn Armory right.

11 MOLLY PARK: So, there absolutely are facilities  
12 in our system that cannot accommodate people with  
13 disabilities. Uhm, that is something that we are  
14 addressing by making sure that as we add new  
15 capacity, that it is accessible. It's very much a  
16 priority for us and closing sites that don't live up  
17 to our standards. So, there is a site on Wards  
18 Island for example that we'll be closing because it  
19 doesn't meet those standards. So, that is a process.  
20 Right, because we are at a point right now, where not  
21 all of the capacity in the system is accessible, it's  
22 a process with our placement team. What's worked  
23 between intake and the placement team to ensure that  
24 people are placed in shelter assignments that do meet  
25 their needs because it isn't everywhere.

3 Again, if needs change between intake and exiting  
4 the shelter or you know it looks like a placement is  
5 going to work and then it turns out it doesn't, that  
6 is something that we can change going forward.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Does that include the  
8 older adult population because as we're seeing more  
9 and more senior citizens enter the shelter system,  
10 they obviously come very unique needs.

11 MOLLY PARK: So, we have some shelters that are  
12 specific for - that have age restrictions on them.  
13 They are specifically for older adults. Those  
14 generally have particular physical accommodations  
15 there but there are older adults that buy either uhm,  
16 preference or other needs. You know, they wanted to  
17 be in a particular - needed to be in a particular  
18 geography, something like that are not in shelters  
19 that are dedicated for that population but again, we  
20 will look to meet physical needs.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And does the Butler Decree  
22 require that there are accommodations for the  
23 visually impaired as well? Is information available  
24 through the rail uh -  
25

3 MOLLY PARK: Uhm, I believe so but I'm going to  
4 have the legal team circle back with you because I  
5 don't want to give incorrect information.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I appreciate that, but  
7 I think that you kind of get the sense of where we  
8 were heading with this. Again, a lot of this  
9 information was received from individuals that are  
10 currently living in the shelter system who have had  
11 great difficulty accessing you know things as simple  
12 as you know, electrical outlet and we make sure that  
13 obviously you know there's a person that is equipped  
14 to identify and that can you know, is assessing  
15 right.

16 The accessibility of all of the sites that we're  
17 currently using, so that we you know we're making  
18 sure that people are living as dignified as possible  
19 and you know, not having to struggle to have access  
20 to a breathing machine at night. Any more questions  
21 regarding the - Council Member Bottcher's bill, which  
22 I'll let him speak on. I think that what was said  
23 was that the implementation of this bill would be  
24 extremely costly, and it would require higher in the  
25 significant number of mental health professionals and  
that given that families will be transitioning from

3 the shelter into communities, that it would be easier  
4 to refer them to communities. Is that something  
5 that's happening today? I mean, what assurance can  
6 you give this body that those connections are being  
7 made. Because in fact, what we are hearing is that  
8 families often times are receiving a certain level of  
9 support while they're in shelter and then, when  
10 they're exiting shelter, they are kind of striped  
11 away of that right. And they are kind of left a  
12 little bit vulnerable.

13 So, I just wonder whose responsibility it is to  
14 make the connection and who's making the referral?  
15 Do we have social workers that are you know sitting  
16 with folks and determining that this is a specific  
17 need?

18 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, at our families  
19 with children shelters, we do have social workers  
20 that make those assessments at the point of contact  
21 and they're able to make those referrals into the  
22 community as we have testified to today. And so, the  
23 opportunity is to keep those connections open as they  
24 move into shelter, permanent shelter outside of our  
25 facilities.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I think that my  
4 concern is that as an individual, uhm, it's very  
5 difficult to access mental health care because we  
6 don't - you know, it's not readily available in our  
7 communities and where there is opportunity because  
8 it's limited, uhm, the wait time you know can be  
9 pretty lengthy. Sometimes upwards of six, seven  
10 months before you are able to see someone.

11 Uhm, so my concern is that if there's no  
12 quantifiable data that really - that says hey, you  
13 know these are the amount of people that have been  
14 referred out successfully, then there's no reason for  
15 us to you know, to assume that that is a given.  
16 Yeah, are they able to? Are they you know in a  
17 position where they would be - where the workers  
18 would be able to make that referral? Probably but  
19 are they making it as a different you know -

20 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think that our  
21 concerns are based on being - our goal being  
22 permanency and moving out of shelter into permanent  
23 housing and into the community and making sure that  
24 these resources are available within the community.  
25 We understand that within the shelter, there was a  
goal of stability and so, we work with them to make

3 sure that – we’ll work with our clients to make sure  
4 that that is what’s happening within the shelter.  
5 Our challenges and concerns around the proposal is  
6 around making sure that we don’t concentrate  
7 healthcare within the shelter system.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think, you know I disagree  
9 because I think that you know if – that we should be  
10 dealing with families on a holistic you know, from a  
11 holistic lens and that if we’re not addressing the  
12 mental health needs and you know, it jeopardizes  
13 their ability you know to successfully live  
14 independently outside of you know the confines of the  
15 shelter system and I’m not saying that it’s  
16 impossible but I’m saying it would make life easier.  
17 And I know that you know, I mean, cost is an issue.  
18 That’s not you know, something that you know I’m not  
19 taking this into consideration, and I think that my  
20 colleagues take that very seriously, but you know, at  
21 what point uh, you know, I don’t think that we should  
22 – there’s such a value right to providing this level  
23 of service that uh, it’s imperative that we look at  
24 different ways to identify funding streams to support  
25 it.



3 Now, regarding Intro.'s 132 and 513, okay,  
4 regarding 132, you said that 132 would require DHS to  
5 establish additional intake centers for families  
6 without existing intakes. And so, again, there's a  
7 cost issue, which we did consider you know by the  
8 way, but I believe that you know, when I went into  
9 shelter, I was in shelter in 1991 and I remember  
10 coming to PATH here on Katherine Street, which was  
11 I'm not sure if you still use that site, but it used  
12 to be an intake center. And every borough had an  
13 intake center for a matter of convenience. It's just  
14 you know, borderline inhumane right to make families  
15 that are already struggling, we're asking them to  
16 show up to the intake center with their children,  
17 with their stuff you know when they are already  
18 obviously going through a very traumatic experience.  
19 A very challenging you know time and now they have to  
20 travel and commute outside of their borough to be  
21 able to access services.

22 So, I think that it makes sense to rethink that  
23 model and figure out ways to kind of reimplement it  
24 in a way that speaks to the needs of each community.

25 MOLLY PARK: I think our concerns with this bill,  
these bills go well beyond cost, and we have a lot of

3 services that are collocated at PATH, right. So,  
4 when a family comes in, there's a domestic violence  
5 screening. There is medical screening. DOE is on  
6 site; ACS is on site. We are able to bring all of  
7 these resources together and really do a holistic  
8 assessment and do effective diversion wherever  
9 possible, right. Connect, right, HRA is also on site  
10 able to provide one shot deals, other kinds of  
11 benefits that might help a family stay out of the  
12 shelter system.

13 Because we are all in one place, we can provide  
14 this very robust set of collocated service where we  
15 can look at those holistic needs. So, I think that  
16 provides better services to families. And then the  
17 other piece of it and this is particularly true right  
18 now when we have a very high volume of people coming  
19 in. The team that is managing the placements is  
20 coordinating with one intake site.

21 So, they know very well who needs a placement and  
22 where the vacancies are. That expedites the process  
23 of getting a family to placement. If what you had is  
24 the intake team managing multiple different sites, it  
25 becomes a significantly more complicated process and  
the timeline that it takes to get from through the

3 intake process actually into a placement is going to  
4 be longer.

5 So, that's another form of challenge and trauma  
6 for the families. So, we actually think that by you  
7 know, understand the challenges around travel but we  
8 really think that by providing a single collocated  
9 intake facility that we are providing the best  
10 possible service that we can.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, uhm, alright, I'm gonna  
12 just pass it over to Council Member Bottcher.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Hi, one concern that  
14 you've raised about the bill that would require  
15 mental health services to be provided within the  
16 shelters, is that currently families receive mental  
17 health services externally. That they are referred  
18 externally to community-based health care. Can you  
19 tell us how many families were referred to health  
20 services externally last year? And of those, how  
21 many of those appointments were actually kept?

22 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Uhm, thank you for the  
23 question. Unfortunately, we don't have that level of  
24 data with us today and we'd love to connect with you  
25 and the rest of the Council with a response.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thanks, because  
4 according to the Office of Community Mental Health,  
5 66.7 percent of families have been screened for  
6 behavioral health needs, yet only .4 percent of  
7 families have been able to attend an appointment from  
8 January to March of this year and only 2.3 percent  
9 were able to attend an appointment from April to June  
10 of this year.

11 Can you understand why those numbers would be  
12 alarming to us and to the service providers who have  
13 indicated that the current system isn't working for  
14 families?

15 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, thank you again for  
16 your question. I will uhm, begin a bit by you know  
17 just reiterating the points that we've made in terms  
18 of wanting to make sure that we don't concentrate  
19 health care into the shelter system and how important  
20 it is that we work through permanency and really  
21 working through the process of making sure that that  
22 process includes mental health care after - in the  
23 community. And I'd like to allow my colleague to  
24 speak if she has anything to add.

25 MOLLY PARK: Sure, thank you. We are absolutely  
committed to mental health services for children. I

3 think in the housing blueprint that was released a  
4 couple months ago, one of the initiatives in there  
5 was to expand telehealth, tele mental health services  
6 for children, which we think is a relatively quick  
7 way to access services. I think we acknowledge the  
8 challenge that you all have raised, is that there is  
9 an absolute shortage of mental health professionals  
10 in the City of New York, in the country, frankly.  
11 So, the existing social workers in the shelter, you  
12 know combined with this expansion of tele mental  
13 health service I think are a way to quickly meet  
14 people's needs while they are in shelter but really,  
15 the hope is that the in-shelter piece of it is  
16 relatively short. You know, relatively short. Right  
17 now, we're talking over a year, but you know, even  
18 over a year in the scheme of a child's life and their  
19 ongoing health care needs is not that long, right.

20 And if there is then a gap of you know as the  
21 Chair mentioned, six to nine months to access service  
22 once you leave shelter, that's a problem, right. So,  
23 being able to leverage the resources that exist  
24 within shelter to meet a child's immediate needs but  
25 while also working on that referral so that when that  
family is in permanent housing, that there is an

1 ongoing pathway. We think that that is the right way  
2 to approach it.  
3

4 Whether or not that system works exactly the way  
5 it should, I think is an open question and you know,  
6 as we noted in the testimony, we're more than happy  
7 to work with you on the goals here. We just I think  
8 have some real questions about whether or not  
9 locating it all in shelter is the right approach.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you because what  
11 we're hearing is that, while that might sound great  
12 on paper, in reality, the connections aren't being  
13 met and many connections may be happening but from  
14 some of the largest providers like WIN for example,  
15 the largest provider of family shelter, they're  
16 reporting that the connections aren't being made.

17 You had referenced a shortage of mental health  
18 providers as a barrier to providing this level of  
19 care and that's undoubtedly a big problem. What is  
20 the Department of Homeless Services doing and what is  
21 the Adams Administration doing to help increase the  
22 number of mental health care providers? The number  
23 of people entering the field?

24 Last year, the Adams Administration, earlier this  
25 year announced something great, which is a \$2 million

3 scholarship with CUNY for a video game development,  
4 which I think is great. What kind of efforts are  
5 happening to increase mental health care workers?

6 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think that uhm, thank  
7 you obviously for that question. It's really  
8 important that we really uhm, drill down into health  
9 care and mental health care as well. And I'm sure  
10 the Administration will take into consideration  
11 everything that we talk about here today in this  
12 hearing and I think certainly, it is a part of what  
13 we do every day wanting to be supportive of our  
14 clients, their mental health and bringing them into  
15 permanent shelter. And so, this hearing will go a  
16 long way to inform us in our practices, as well as  
17 the administration.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: Thank you.

19 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Uhm, Council  
21 Member Cabán is next but we're going to kind of skip  
22 you real quick and let Council Member Lee because we  
23 have vote next door real quick. So, she'll go and  
24 then you. Oh, you do to? Okay, so then yeah, so  
25 what we'll do is that uh, she only has a question,

3 but you have a bill. Do you have a bill to Linda,  
4 I'm sorry.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Sorry, hi, really quick  
6 question regarding Council Member Bottcher's bill.  
7 So, is there a way where uhm, because I used to - you  
8 know I started and ran an outpatient mental health  
9 clinic in Article 31 and is there a way for DHS to  
10 work state and the city DOHMH to do almost like sort  
11 of MOU's as a solution? Because I know obviously the  
12 workforce is a huge issue in the mental health sector  
13 right now. So, would there be a way to potentially  
14 partner with some of the outpatient nonprofit  
15 organizations out there that are doing the work on  
16 the ground as an MOU and also, connecting them?

17 So, the way it works also is that if an inpatient  
18 facility, what they do is before they check out the  
19 client, they'll connect them to an outpatient  
20 facility and then send them on their way and make  
21 sure that the continuation of care is there. So, if  
22 there's a family, let's just say in a shelter setting  
23 that needs services, is there a way to have that sort  
24 of similar model or system in place where there is a  
25 seamless sort of uhm, continuation of care and



3 services through either MOU's or partnering with  
4 DOHMH on that?

5 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, thank you for the  
6 question. I think it's important to emphasize again  
7 how important we find mental health and we are  
8 wanting to continue the conversation about this bill  
9 and about many of the ways that we can fully work  
10 with the sponsor and the Council in order to fully  
11 realize the intent of the bill.

12 MOLLY PARK: Because I mean, providers do do warm  
13 hand offs with clients to services in the community.  
14 So, that is a part of our regular protocol because we  
15 absolutely do have an expectation around referrals.

16 In addition, many of our providers have more  
17 formal linkages with services that are in that  
18 particular community. Those are usually  
19 relationships that are brokered directly between the  
20 not-for-profit provider and the referral agency but  
21 we're happy to talk to DOHMH and see if they have  
22 some thoughts about how we can make it a little bit  
23 more global at the agency level.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Because it's also - sorry,  
25 just one quick comment because it is actually  
relatively easy if you have the license to operate an

3 outpatient to do satellite services for example,  
4 places like shelters in other locations, so that  
5 would also be another hopefully possibility to look  
6 at as well.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are you done Council Member  
8 Lee? Okay, I just want to recognize that we've been  
9 joined by Council Member Ung and Council Member  
10 Brewer. Council Member Brewer.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. This might be  
12 a little bit off topic, but my question is sort of  
13 the Rosanne Hagerty kind of question. Can some of  
14 these services be provided before people become  
15 homeless, so that they don't end up in a shelter.  
16 What is the effort toward that?

17 ACS are working really hard to keep children with  
18 families but what does DHS do along those lines?  
19 That's the Rosanne Hagerty question.

20 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you Council  
21 Member. So, the goal at DSS is homelessness  
22 prevention, one of their goals and we work also to  
23 make sure that the services that are provided to our  
24 clients are services that in the end will allow them  
25 to not have to enter shelter but when they do enter  
shelter, we want to make sure that these clients are

3 served as well and with dignity as they can be. I  
4 think maybe there's some more specifics and my  
5 colleague can add.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Molly knows me very well.

7 MOLLY PARK: Sure, I mean I point to a couple of  
8 major initiatives that we do on homelessness  
9 prevention and these actually live at HRA but are  
10 very important to DHS. Homebase obviously is hugely  
11 important where clients can access one shot deals.  
12 You know utility cover, utility arrears, potentially  
13 qualify for City FHEPS voucher. I think you know  
14 that spectrum of services. I think the legal  
15 services is another huge homelessness prevention tool  
16 that has been really effective.

17 Uhm, we have spent a lot of time thinking about  
18 how we can expand homelessness prevention. How we  
19 can do it more. There are - there are certainly -  
20 there's challenges with information. There is not a  
21 great way to if you look at people based on you know  
22 income or even eviction status or outcomes of things  
23 like, some people end up in the homeless system and  
24 some people don't and understanding how to best  
25 target those resources. Like there aren't wonderful  
data. I know a lot of people who are much smarter

3 than me have spent a lot of time trying to do that  
4 prediction and it's really challenging.

5 So, absolutely homeless prevention is a priority  
6 and we're really proud of the initiatives that we  
7 have. Uhm, totally open to looking at ways that we  
8 can focus it but understanding that it is a challenge  
9 in place to understand exactly where to direct  
10 resources.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you for now.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Are you ready?  
13 Okay, Council Member Cabán.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you. So, I want to  
15 ask some questions about Intro. 229 and just would  
16 like to start with why the utility allowance got  
17 factored into the value of the City FHEPS voucher in  
18 the first place and then, sort of the follow-up  
19 questions are, can you explain why approving Intro.  
20 229 would mean that DHS couldn't otherwise pay  
21 peoples utilities? You know, is it lack of funds or  
22 some other barrier? Is there a regulation that would  
23 prevent it? And then, you know also why were utility  
24 - well, yeah, the first piece is like, why were they  
25 originally included and whether those other barriers  
exist or don't exist?

3 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I will immediately give  
4 that question to my colleague.

5 MOLLY PARK: So, this one gets very wonky very  
6 quickly but bear with me. So, the intent here with  
7 utility allowances and the way that this works in  
8 Section 8, is that tenants are paying 30 percent of  
9 their income for housing costs. Housing, meaning  
10 their share of rent and utilities because you  
11 actually have to you know, set this in advance. It's  
12 based on a utility allowance rather than actual month  
13 to month bills, but 30 percent of the income is going  
14 to housing cost large.

15 That is not, I will you know fully concede that  
16 the way City FHEPS is working right now, that's not  
17 exactly how it's working but we are in the process of  
18 a variety of technological changes that will allow us  
19 to do that. Uhm, and I think the best way for me to  
20 explain this is to actually run through sort of a  
21 hypothetical example. I will caveat that all of my  
22 numbers here are fiction, but I think it's the best  
23 way to explain it.

24 So, if you have the rent is \$2,000 for an  
25 apartment, the 30 percent of the tenants income is  
\$300 and the utility allowance if \$100. The way it

3 works in Section 8 and the way it's going to work in  
4 hopefully not too distant future for City FHEPS, is  
5 that the landlord collects \$1,900. The subsidy  
6 payment then is \$1,700. The client is paying \$200 in  
7 rent and \$100 in utilities right. So, the client is  
8 - despite the fact that the client has to pay their  
9 utility bill, they are still paying only 30 percent  
10 of their income for that housing cost at large.

11 If we were to do it the way the bill is  
12 structured, with that same \$2,000, right, the subsidy  
13 payment is \$1,700. The client then is still on the  
14 hook for \$300 and they are on the hook for their  
15 utility allowance. So, the client in that case, the  
16 tenant ends up paying \$400 more than 30 percent of  
17 their income in total housing costs.

18 So, and that is assuming we are holding the city  
19 cost harmless. If we said we're going to have the  
20 higher rent but keep the client, the tenant harmless,  
21 then that increases the cost to the city. It's a  
22 direct transfer to the city to a landlord in exchange  
23 for not providing utilities. Which I actually think  
24 is really - I understand the intent of the bill, but  
25 I think it is really counter to the goal, right.

3 So, we want to align with Section 8, which is  
4 trying to hold landlords – we want landlords to  
5 provide utilities whenever they can. If they are not  
6 providing utilities, we want them to be financially  
7 accountable for the fact that they are not providing  
8 utilities and we want to ensure that tenants are  
9 paying no more than 30 percent of their income in  
10 housing costs.

11 We do need to make technological changes to our  
12 system to be able to do that, so I fully acknowledge,  
13 it's not exactly how City FHEPS is working now but it  
14 is where we are headed, and the bill would really  
15 prevent us from doing that.

16 The reason I think that we are doing the utility  
17 allowance deduction now, even though we don't have  
18 the technological tools in place to do exactly what I  
19 just described, is because you know we the  
20 administration but also in very close collaboration  
21 with the Council worked hard to get all of these  
22 different subsidies aligned, right. So, City FHEPS,  
23 Section 8, EHD and very shortly State FHEPS are all  
24 at the same rent levels, so that you don't have  
25 landlords really picking and choosing which subsidy  
and which client they are going to go with and so,

3 keeping that equity across the different subsidies is  
4 we think really important.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: So, I'd like to - actually  
6 can I have a little bit extra time? I wanted to ask  
7 some follow-ups on your hypothetical and then offer a  
8 hypothetical of my own. But you know, I took in the  
9 information you gave but I think you know, one of my  
10 questions sort of still remains a little bit  
11 unanswered in terms of you know there being - is  
12 there a regulation that would prevent another avenue  
13 or mechanism for utilities to be subsidized or  
14 covered? I think maybe you alluded to it a little  
15 bit of - like is it a lack of funding for example  
16 that would prevent it but like just very interested  
17 in you know whether DHS could otherwise pay peoples  
18 utilities outside of like this current mechanism.  
19 And you know to offer sort of an example that we got  
20 a lot of feedback on, and people shared with us a  
21 lot, which was part of the reason for introducing  
22 this bill, was that civil, you know indigent legal  
23 services organizations and also people who have been  
24 navigating the City FHEPS programming was. Just how  
25 difficult it was. I mean, even as a New Yorker who  
has the means to be able to rent a market rate



3 apartment for example, it is a horrible and  
4 demoralizing process. It's really, really difficult  
5 and so, imagine somebody that's navigating that with  
6 the constraints of you know, the voucher system and  
7 things like that and going and looking for an  
8 apartment, finally thinking that they found one and  
9 I've heard this story many times over. Finally think  
10 they found one; only to find out that actually they  
11 are not eligible because of the utility allocation.  
12 Not being able to rent and you know, getting feedback  
13 from both the folks navigating that system and you  
14 know the legal assistance that they were providing  
15 about the ability to take this out of the voucher, it  
16 would open up eligibility for a lot more you know  
17 units presumably.

18 And so, you know connecting that very real  
19 experience to again, that initial question of you  
20 know where - what are the other mechanisms for you  
21 know DHS to otherwise pay those utilities?

22 MOLLY PARK: We really don't have a mechanism to  
23 pay utilities in any other way and there's the  
24 federal state program but that's really focused  
25 largely on home owners. I don't think it fits that  
well for renters, so -

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: So, could you because  
4 again, is there a regulation that would prevent it  
5 and not allow it?

6 MOLLY PARK: I mean, this is a place where I  
7 would want to talk to our lawyers, but I don't - in  
8 order to be able to make a grant program, I have to  
9 have a regulation that does allow it as opposed to  
10 not something that just prevents it, so as far as I  
11 know I don't have a mechanism to create that program  
12 but that's something that we can certainly talk to  
13 our legal team about.

14 But I think you know really more fundamentally  
15 uhm, paying the max in every circumstance creates an  
16 incentive for landlords to do the least possible in  
17 terms of paying utilities right. So, this becomes a  
18 transfer from the city to landlords for providing  
19 less good service, which I think is problematic.

20 We really want to be in place where we are  
21 incentivizing landlords to be paying utilities  
22 because if they are paying utilities, then they  
23 actually do qualify for that, the maximum rent. I  
24 absolutely think that there is more education that we  
25 can do to explain how the utility allowance works.

3 It has successfully worked in the Section 8 program  
4 for decades.

5 So, I think there's room for us to make sure that  
6 we are talking about it more clearly. You know this  
7 has only been you know we didn't previously do the  
8 utility allowance when the rents were so much under  
9 the fair market rent, but it was something that we  
10 implemented when the rents were brought up to fair  
11 market rent because we were again aligning all of  
12 those different subsidy programs.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABAN: And is there something to  
14 point to that sort of concretely shows that it is not  
15 just very like likely but like highly, highly  
16 probable that the outcome of this kind of policy  
17 change would absolutely result in landlords changing  
18 their already like predisposed offerings.

19 MOLLY PARK: I mean, this is anecdotal  
20 information. I don't have you know quantitative data  
21 on it, but we've absolutely been seeing an increase  
22 in things like electric heat, which is built to the  
23 tenant. Right there has been service. I've heard  
24 stories recently, which really shocked me of  
25 individual water meters for tenants, which is some -  
you know I've worked in the affordable housing space

3 for decades. I had never seen that before, so I  
4 think there is definitely push where landlords are  
5 devolving utility costs to tenants and it can be  
6 really high and if you have a rent that is where  
7 you're paying 30 percent of your income in rent and  
8 all of the utilities on top of it, it becomes very  
9 challenging to be stably housed.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, thank you. I'm going  
12 to ask a few questions and I just want to say that we  
13 have to – we may have a vote, so some of us may have  
14 to run over uhm, but Council Member Stevens has  
15 generously agreed to Chair in our absence.

16 But I have a question regarding Intro. 513. This  
17 bill would require – well, basically I'm not even  
18 going to read the whole bill because we already read  
19 it and it's written but is there any reason why a  
20 family would need to go specifically to the PATH, and  
21 I get that the – you know there was a conversation a  
22 little bit early. You explained the ability to  
23 really manage more efficiently right because of the  
24 different services that were being provided at PATH  
25 and make cities centralize everything. However, I  
have a question because during the pandemic, uhm,

3 families were able to do a lot or not able, but they  
4 were restricted to doing a lot of that via telephone  
5 conference being from the intake center with the case  
6 workers. What prevents them from being able to do  
7 that say from a community-based organization that's  
8 already partnering with DHS in Brooklyn?

9 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you for that  
10 question. I think that you know I'd like to  
11 reiterate that we continue to be willing and wanting  
12 to continue to dialogue around this bill as well as  
13 others and to take into consideration everything  
14 that's being said here at this hearing.

15 We obviously place a value in having the  
16 centralized apparatus and being able to work through  
17 that and so, that's something that we've been able to  
18 discuss here today, and I wonder if my colleague has  
19 anything to add about your scenario.

20 MOLLY PARK: Sure, did I get that right  
21 eventually? Uhm, we did make accommodations and  
22 changes during the pandemic to protect public health,  
23 but I think we also felt like they were in some ways  
24 very much less than ideal. When you are doing a  
25 phone intake, you can't you know and trying to screen  
for domestic violence. For example, you can't know

3 if an abuser is in the room and dictating what's  
4 being said right. Whereas, when we're doing intake  
5 in person, you know the adults are separated to do a  
6 domestic violence screening. That's something that's  
7 important because something like 50 percent of the  
8 heads of households in the families with children  
9 system have a domestic violence history or are  
10 survivors.

11 So, you know, we want, we want to have eyes on  
12 children where we're doing both health and ACS  
13 screening. So, you know, yes, the phone was an  
14 appropriate emergency public health response, but we  
15 think it's less than ideal over the long term.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I just you know, I think the  
17 pandemic taught us you know a lot of you know in  
18 regards to how to pivot and kind of think outside of  
19 the box, right. Like, I don't think that I ever need  
20 to have another in person meeting in my office unless  
21 it's absolutely necessary because of the convenience  
22 that it brings not only to my staff but to the person  
23 that's coming to visit me not having to travel. You  
24 know it's a really big deal but I'm trying to look  
25 here because I had a constituent that was texting me  
from PATH a few months ago, during the pandemic but

3 not too long ago. It was about a couple of months  
4 ago. This was in June as a matter of fact and he and  
5 his family went to PATH and had been waiting there.  
6 This was on actually June 28<sup>th</sup>. They were waiting at  
7 PATH since nine o'clock in the morning and it was  
8 like I mean upwards of like ten o'clock that evening  
9 that we were still having - going back and forth and  
10 he said, you know I'm sitting - we're sitting here  
11 basically waiting for a call and I said, a call from  
12 who. He said, I don't know. They told us that we're  
13 going to get three calls. We got one, so I'm waiting  
14 for call number two and then we have to wait for call  
15 number three. I guess those were the protocols that  
16 were put in place because throughout the pandemic  
17 right.

18 But he wasn't sitting there waiting. He and his  
19 family were not sitting there waiting for any you  
20 know to speak to anyone but rather to provide  
21 information that I think could have conveniently been  
22 provided from some place a little bit more  
23 comfortable, especially because they had children  
24 with them and it becomes - you know, I think it's  
25 very difficult to kind of describe it unless you've  
lived it. Uhm, you know there's a very overwhelming

3 feeling that you know a failure of uncertainty that  
4 you know takes over you when you're in a situation  
5 like that and I think that what the Council Members  
6 here you know through these pieces of legislation are  
7 trying to find is what is the best way that we can do  
8 this. And I understand that this is not easy work.  
9 Uhm, and I applaud you know you're - the agencies  
10 commitment to trying to centralize these services and  
11 to try to ensure that there aren't you know as many  
12 gaps and services as we can eliminate but I think  
13 that there is a real possibility to do some of this  
14 work by partnering with organizations that already  
15 have established relationships and contracts with  
16 DHS. Right, so that way the information is coming  
17 from a trusted source and I just you know, I would  
18 ask that you know there be maybe you know a few more  
19 conversations with Council Member Ung about you know  
20 that possibility because if we did it during the  
21 pandemic and we were able to do it successfully  
22 unless proven otherwise, then I don't see why it  
23 would be that difficult. I'm going give this over to  
24 my best friend here and I will be right back.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Sorry guys. So, the  
next question we're going to ask, does the



3 Administration currently collect information that the  
4 bill requires in Intro. 421?

5 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you for that  
6 question. So, as I stated in my testimony that there  
7 are portions of the bill that are duplicative of  
8 other reporting bills, specifically Local Law 79 of  
9 2022 and then there are also portions of the bill  
10 that is as it is written where we do not collect data  
11 and it would require an interagency connection, which  
12 is for the purposes of this bill and how it is  
13 written may be an issue and provide an issue around  
14 parental consent and also privacy for minors and that  
15 includes ACS and DOE.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, I just want to make  
17 sure I'm clarifying. You collect some of this  
18 information but not all of it but some of the issues  
19 around just parental consent?

20 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: The issues to be more  
21 specific, the one's that we're talking about  
22 specifically around privacy and parental issues are  
23 with DOE and ACS.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay. So, with Intro. -  
25 my next question is, what type of trainings if any

3 does DHS provide staff related to customer service?

4 Molly, could you speak?

5 MOLLY PARK: Sure, so training is something that  
6 is really important to us. Administrator Carter, who  
7 has been running the agency for several years now is  
8 really committed to raising the bar on the services  
9 that we deliver. Anybody who has met her has heard  
10 her use that phrase. So, we have an entire team that  
11 is working on training. We recently rolled out an  
12 online system that we can use to provide training on  
13 a really diverse array of topics to not only to DHS  
14 staff but to all of our providers. We work with more  
15 than 75 not-for-profit organizations in you know 400  
16 different buildings, so the online tool is really  
17 valuable.

18 It allows for both you know prerecorded trainings  
19 and also, instructor led live trainings. We are in  
20 the process of working through the technology issues  
21 to get all of our providers access to that, but we  
22 have already created and teed up a really robust  
23 array of trainings that cover topics like you know  
24 culturally competent, service delivery, de-  
25 escalation, really logistical and operational  
trainings around you know how DHS does the management

2 and sort of very technical specific DHS topics.

3 There is homelessness 101 to make sure that people  
4 understand the context of the work that they are  
5 doing and why they do the work that they do. Uhm,  
6 because you know, frontline staff who are  
7 disconnected from the leadership may not always have  
8 that context.

9 So, we have training that is very specifically  
10 related to security and then also, to different - to  
11 housing specialists right, range of different roles.  
12 So, I'm really excited that we are going to be  
13 rolling all of this out more aggressively and that  
14 this online system is going to allow us to reach  
15 people very efficiently.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, I think for me, some  
17 of the follow-up questions even around this  
18 specifically, this was asking about customer service  
19 and none of the trainings you mentioned were around  
20 customer service and then on top of that, to have  
21 online training around customer service. It takes  
22 away some of the value right, when we're talking  
23 about interacting with humans and how you're giving  
24 quality of care and then saying we have an online  
25 training around that. It seems a little like it's

3 disconnected, which is why I think this bill is being  
4 pushed around. Like, how are we interacting with  
5 folks and what does that look like in a human  
6 perspective because online is nice but like how do  
7 you then follow up with that? What does that look  
8 like? And so, I would love to hear like, what does  
9 your in-person training look like. That is something  
10 that's happening now. Like, yes, it is much  
11 efficient we can say but is that what we really  
12 should be moving to if we are seeing issues with  
13 customer service?

14 MOLLY PARK: So, I think customer service in the  
15 DHS context at least the way that I and we think  
16 about it encompasses things like language access,  
17 like de-escalation, culturally competent service  
18 delivery. Uhm, you know the array and we can  
19 certainly follow-up with a more comprehensive list of  
20 the trainings that we offer but uhm, you know while  
21 we don't necessarily have something that is you know  
22 called customer service with a capital C capital S, I  
23 think the different components of what goes into  
24 customer service of, customer service is about how  
25 we, the agency and we are provide staff interact with  
clients and how do we make that a positive experience

1  
2 for all involved and that's how I think about  
3 customer service and that is absolutely what this  
4 array of trainings is designed to do.

5 You know, I hear you about online. You know, the  
6 reality is, we have you know tens of thousands of  
7 staff people. When you look at the provider staff  
8 right, and particularly some of the frontline roles,  
9 staff do turnover, right. So, how do we make sure  
10 that there is regular routine access to training?  
11 That we are conveying the information that needs to  
12 be conveyed. That people are getting consistent  
13 information. Having that documentation - having  
14 processes where we can roll it out across that very  
15 diffuse system is really important. Hear you know  
16 the in person and we're happy to think about ways  
17 that we can incorporate more of that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, I know I mean,  
19 definitely but I think sometimes with the thought  
20 around like cost efficient or efficient. We say, oh,  
21 we'll do online but understanding that when we're  
22 dealing with humans, we also need to be dealing in  
23 that way. In the same way, even when we're rolling  
24 out trainings and what does that look like? And I  
25 think yes, de-escalation, those things are nice but

1  
2 that is not necessarily customer service right. It  
3 is how we're interacting and showing up each and  
4 every day and because a lot of your frontline staff  
5 are always on the frontline. They often get hit with  
6 a lot, so sometimes you need refreshers on what that  
7 looks like.

8 On how to interact with folks who are coming to  
9 them in a very vulnerable state and in those times.  
10 They need to be able to react in that way, so I think  
11 it definitely is needed to be thinking about how are  
12 we serving people who are coming into these places  
13 who need help, and you know, customer service is part  
14 of that and that should be top priority of how we're  
15 making sure we're providing a service to them.

16 So, I'll yield the floor back to our Chair, who  
17 is back.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Actually, Council  
19 Member Restler had a couple of questions. Council  
20 Member Restler.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Great, thank you very  
22 much. Molly, it's good to see you. I'm a big  
23 admirer of yours and Marricka, it's good to see you  
24 as well. I look forward to working together and I  
25 just want to thank Chair Ayala for this hearing and

3 uhm, bringing forward a really great set of bills.

4 So, thank you for giving the Council the opportunity  
5 to engage on these issues and you know, I want to  
6 thank all of the providers and advocates who are here  
7 like Vocal and WIN and others who are doing such  
8 critical work every day.

9 I'm strongly supportive of many of the bills in  
10 this package. Disappointed by the testimony. To  
11 hear your opposition to just about all of them. You  
12 know from expanding mental health services in our  
13 family shelters to ensuring that families receiving  
14 FHEPS are not paying utility allowances. You know,  
15 there are many really good pieces of legislation. I  
16 appreciated your testimony explaining how you're  
17 working through the utility allowance issues. I  
18 think we need solutions really fast on that.

19 So, anything that we can do to work together to  
20 expedite implementation to ensure that individuals  
21 moving out of shelter are not paying the utility  
22 allowances, who are receiving vouchers is critical.  
23 You know, we want to help and it's critically  
24 important but the thing I wanted to focus on in my  
25 questioning was Council Member Ung's bill around  
decentralizing PATH.

3 I think personally I believe it's a disgrace that  
4 we have one intake facility for the City of New York  
5 for all families with children. I was looking  
6 through the data and do you know which neighborhood  
7 or which community district in the city of New York  
8 sends the most children or sends the most people into  
9 our shelter system each year?

10 MOLLY PARK: I have the data by borough. I don't  
11 have it by community district, so the prevalence is  
12 from the Bronx.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: My recollection is that  
14 the Community District that sends the most people  
15 into our system is East New York, District 5 in  
16 Brooklyn. Do you know how long it takes to get from  
17 East New York to PATH?

18 MOLLY PARK: I certainly understand that it takes  
19 time.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: 85 minutes, 90 minutes  
21 on the train in each direction. That is a very long  
22 commute for a family. That is a whole day gone just  
23 in transit. Uhm, what was the acceptance rate of  
24 PATH in 2021?  
25



3 MOLLY PARK: Data doesn't exclude and think about  
4 it as an acceptance rate. Nobody gets turned away  
5 right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Well, certainly they do  
7 right? I mean, go ahead, I'll give you a chance.

8 MOLLY PARK: When a family comes into PATH, they  
9 go through the screening process. They and the first  
10 thing, they go through an initial screening process  
11 at intake. Everybody gets a conditional placement.  
12 Uhm, so everybody is placed - I should caveat. A  
13 family might be diverted right. Meaning they - a  
14 one-shot deal is gonna or a City FHEPS voucher or  
15 something else is going to solve their problems but  
16 anybody who is pursuing shelter, is given a  
17 conditional placement.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Deputy Commissioner  
19 Park, with all due respect, that's a very rosy  
20 assessment. I do not agree with it. 24 percent of  
21 families were accepted into shelter last year. They  
22 may receive a conditional placement for the night,  
23 but they're told the next day that they are not  
24 welcomed in the shelter system. That is the facts.  
25 That is down from 45, 50 percent just a couple years  
ago, which is not an acceptance rate that I think we

1 should be proud of but 24 percent, three out of four  
2 families applying for shelter on their first occasion  
3 are rejected.  
4

5 MOLLY PARK: With all due respect, let me clarify  
6 how the conditional placement process works. So,  
7 people are given a conditional placement. That is a  
8 10-day conditional placement. So, a family is in  
9 place. It's not a bed for a night. They are in a  
10 standard tier 2 shelter.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But it's a short-term,  
12 very interim placement and they are then sent packing  
13 on their way three out of four times.

14 MOLLY PARK: No, if they are found ineligible,  
15 they are able to reapply. What has been in place -

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay, so what was the  
17 percentage of people who applied? What was the  
18 number of people? What was the number of people who  
19 applied more than four times? The percentage of  
20 people who applied more than four times to shelter,  
21 if I have this data right, you can correct me Deputy  
22 Commissioner, increased from 14 percent in 2019 to 30  
23 percent in 2021.

24 So, the number of people who applied more than  
25 four times, doubled in just two years. And if I have

1  
2 this data right as well, the number of people who  
3 applied more than once before succeeding increased  
4 from 38 percent in 2019 to 59 percent in 2021. So,  
5 we went from two out of five families applying more  
6 than once before succeeding to three out of five  
7 families, which means people are coming back and back  
8 and back again and you think about that family from  
9 east New York who's traveling an hour and a half each  
10 way, coming back three times, four times, five times,  
11 six times.

12 We've all read about the horrible instances of  
13 the families applying 20 times, 20 visits to PATH.  
14 To this one location in the Bronx. I do not  
15 understand how we could possibly continue to require  
16 these families to travel such a distance.

17 MOLLY PARK: So, I think there's a number of  
18 different factors that are getting conflated here,  
19 that I think are really important to pull apart here.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay.

21 MOLLY PARK: So, in the time period that you're  
22 comparing, we made some quite significant changes to  
23 operations in response to COVID.

24 So, the way it worked before COVID was if you  
25 were found ineligible, you went back to PATH to

3 reapply. During COVID, we put in place in order to  
4 keep people separate that you could reapply from your  
5 unit. What we found – so, first of all, all of those  
6 reapplications that you're talking about, nobody was  
7 commuting. They were doing it from the unit in which  
8 they were.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yes, temporarily during  
10 COVID, those policies are no longer in place.

11 MOLLY PARK: No, they still are.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay, so – oh, they are?  
13 You can still reapply without having to go back in  
14 person?

15 MOLLY PARK: At this point and time yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Is there a date when  
17 they're no longer being – then when they're being  
18 discontinued?

19 MOLLY PARK: At this point and time, those  
20 policies are still in place but let me, if I can talk  
21 through the process.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sorry.

23 MOLLY PARK: What we found that was – there was –  
24 because households didn't need to – knew that they  
25 didn't need to come back to path, that the process of  
collecting all of the information that we need to do

1  
2 to look at eligibility was just typically taking  
3 longer. That there wasn't the same level of  
4 engagement in the process. I say this not to point  
5 any fingers. I think there's probably multiple  
6 levels, places with that level of engagement but  
7 there were more you know noncooperation cases, things  
8 like that. And so, families were - it raised the  
9 number of reapplication substantially, not because of  
10 a policy change around eligibility screening but  
11 because the barrier to those reapplications was a bit  
12 lower.

13 Uhm, that being said, we have heard a lot of  
14 feedback around the reapplication process and  
15 reapplication numbers, and we made some changes  
16 earlier this year to our families with children  
17 eligibility screening process. Looking at what one  
18 of the reasons why a family might be deemed  
19 ineligible if PATH determines that they have other  
20 housing to go to. We changed our standards for what  
21 constituted acceptable. Other housing, whether or  
22 not you know if the primary household member was or  
23 wasn't a family member. You know how we handled you  
24 know if that family - if the households that is  
25 potentially available, housing is objecting, we will

3 try some mediation if that mediation doesn't work,  
4 that is deemed not acceptable housing, that family  
5 would be found eligible.

6 So, we made a number of eligibility screening  
7 changes that have affected families intake into PATH  
8 right. So, we were starting to see that increase the  
9 eligibility rate. You're not going to see that in  
10 immediate data right now, just what we have right now  
11 is as I think most people know, just a very, very  
12 significant number of asylum seekers because their  
13 family situations are so very different. Most of  
14 those are remaining in conditional placements right  
15 now for the time being as we are standing up our  
16 sanctuary system for asylees.

17 But so, the data right now is a little bit uhm  
18 murky but essentially earlier this year, you were  
19 seeing a fairly substantial uptick in families with  
20 children eligibility associated with those policy  
21 changes that I just made.

22 So, you know, again people are commuting multiple  
23 times to reapply -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: As a temporary pandemic  
25 policy.

3 MOLLY PARK: The change, even so they wouldn't be  
4 coming from - if they did need to go to PATH, again,  
5 they would be coming from wherever their shelter site  
6 was, uhm, and not with children for reapplications  
7 that's something that is ongoing.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Temporary pandemic  
9 policy but welcome to all the same.

10 MOLLY PARK: It's not a pandemic policy that no  
11 children at reapplication. Uhm, we do think -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But it's certainly  
13 impossible to work if you're coming back four or six  
14 or eight or ten or twelve times, an hour and half  
15 each way. I mean, these are incredible challenges.  
16 And I apologize Chair Ayala, I'll shut up after this  
17 but to me, this is a system designed to keep people  
18 out and one of the most obvious manifestations of  
19 that is to have one location in the Bronx as far away  
20 from places like Brooklyn or Southeast Queens or  
21 other parts of New York City as you can possibly get.  
22 And we should be providing shelter to everyone we  
23 need.

24 When we're ejecting three out of four families  
25 that's a problem. That is a real problem and the  
people who need help and support are not getting it

3 and we're sending them through the ringer and making  
4 it so hard and causing such trauma in that  
5 application process that is designed to keep the door  
6 closed.

7 One of the most obvious ways we can change it is  
8 by decentralizing PATH. Having an intake center in  
9 each borough and if no one else, I'm happy to say, we  
10 would welcome it the 33<sup>rd</sup> Council District. It  
11 should be in Brooklyn. Downtown Brooklyn is an easy  
12 place to get to. I'm happy to help identify a space  
13 for you all. I've got a location in mind even. We  
14 can have that conversation, but we should  
15 decentralize PATH and if you're all not prepared to  
16 do it, then we should pass Council Member Ung's bills  
17 tomorrow to get that done. Thank you.

18 MOLLY PARK: Council Member, I'm very grateful  
19 for your openness to shelters. It has always been a  
20 tremendous pleasure to work with you and your team.  
21 I do think there's very real reasons why the services  
22 that we are able to provide at a single collocated  
23 site and the efficiency that we can get in actually  
24 making those housing, the shelter placements, are  
25 really valuable things that it would be a  
programmatically very challenging to lose.



3 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm confident that we  
4 could consolidate and collocate those services in  
5 Brooklyn as well. So, I look forward to trying to  
6 make that happen together. Thank you again.

7 I just will say, you're all job is really hard.  
8 It's really right now with the increase in asylum  
9 seekers and folks in need. Appreciate the hard work  
10 you do every day to try and look out for the most  
11 vulnerable. In giving you all a hard time, it is not  
12 coming from a place of - there is respect in the work  
13 that you do, and I know how much you do for our city  
14 and for the New Yorkers in need and I appreciate it,  
15 so thank you.

16 MOLLY PARK: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How do we measure the  
18 efficacy of the centralization of these services?  
19 Like is someone from DHS physically at the site? You  
20 know, trying to kind of you know, just make an in-  
21 person assessment of how things operate and ways that  
22 we can be a little bit more efficient?

23 MOLLY PARK: So, first of all, absolutely we have  
24 DHS is very robustly staffed there and not just the  
25 frontline staff that agency leadership is there on a  
regular basis as well. We're always looking for ways

3 that we can make operations better. You know whether  
4 it's use of technology or clear communications on the  
5 process, uhm, right we have a children's play space  
6 that has been closed that we're working to reopen.  
7 It was closed because of COVID but making sure that  
8 we are expanding the services and the benefits that  
9 we can provide to clients.

10 I think frankly one of the most important things  
11 that we can do to make sure that the PATH experience  
12 goes as smoothly as possible is really making sure  
13 that we have robust shelter capacity to place people  
14 in. Right, because -

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Or more housing.

16 MOLLY PARK: Or more housing but uhm, you know I  
17 can talk about the pieces that are more within my  
18 control and that's the shelter pipeline. Right, the  
19 smaller the vacancy rate, the harder it is to find  
20 the unit that is most appropriate for that family and  
21 the longer the placement process can take.

22 So, making sure that we have a solid vacancy  
23 rate, so that we can place families near their  
24 child's school. That we can get the right size unit.  
25 That if there are accessibility needs, to your point  
earlier, that we can meet all of those is really

1  
2 important. So, really look forward to working with  
3 all the members on that shelter pipeline.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that, and  
5 Council Member Salamanca and Holden are not here but  
6 I had a question related to Council Member  
7 Salamanca's Intro. 124 that would require in relation  
8 to housing specialists within the Human Resource  
9 Administration and the Department of Homeless  
10 Services.

11 So, his question is, how many shelters in DHS and  
12 the HRA systems currently have housing specialists  
13 and is there a rate of moveouts into permanent  
14 housing that is higher in shelters with housing  
15 specialists?

16 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, I can begin by just  
17 also highlighting that the agency is very important  
18 and the primary goal to move out of shelter into  
19 permanent housing.

20 And so, because this is a goal, we utilize case  
21 workers in this role that will a little bit more than  
22 the housing placement, but they substantially do  
23 housing placement and so, in those cases that we have  
24 caseworkers that work with clients who will then work  
25 them through at the ability to look for housing.

3 They will have that ability to either be placed  
4 within with the site where they actually are, or they  
5 visit the shelter site throughout – on a regular  
6 basis.

7 So, in terms of housing specialists, just to get  
8 back to your question, we have that particular  
9 workstream under the case worker basis.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

11 MOLLY PARK: Let me chime in. Virtually, all of  
12 our shelters, DHS shelters have dedicated housing  
13 specialists. There are a handful as my colleague  
14 noted where there aren't dedicated housing  
15 specialists and the case workers are filling that  
16 role, but it is virtually all of them that have  
17 dedicated housing specialists, so I can't actually do  
18 the comparison of the non because the housing  
19 specialist is so prevalent.

20 We also have a team within DHS that could provide  
21 a housing specialist that could go out and provide  
22 support as needed as well. So, they work out in the  
23 field. We are doing a little over 200 subsidized  
24 placements each week. That is systemwide, so we're  
25 really, really focused on permanent housing. It's a  
huge priority. You know, we were talking earlier

3 about training, I don't know that this is - it  
4 certainly doesn't constitute customer service  
5 training but it's something that we're really proud  
6 of. We did a four-day, full time training on  
7 permanent housing tools over the summer and we had  
8 more than 600 participants for each of the four days.  
9 Really saw a tremendous engagement in focusing on the  
10 permanent housing and on the processes and tools that  
11 are available and we're really seeing that in our  
12 numbers. We have strong moveouts.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, uhm, and regarding  
14 Intro. 108, okay, so this is Council Member Holden's  
15 bill in relation to creating an annual report on the  
16 performance of Department of Homeless Service  
17 providers. Does the Administration currently collect  
18 that data? The data that is required as this bill?

19 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Again, thank you for  
20 the question regarding this bill. We believe that  
21 there are certain aspects of the bill data are  
22 duplicative of the reporting that we do, we currently  
23 do and also, would like to emphasize that there are  
24 elements of resources and costs that go into  
25 producing reporting at this level and we want to  
reiterate that transparency is always something that

3 we want to do as an agency. We want to participate  
4 at that level and be a part of working with the  
5 sponsor and to really figure out the absolute intent  
6 of the bill and then work toward that intent.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the total number of  
8 providers on the contract with DHS?

9 MOLLY PARK: It's about 75. Many providers have  
10 multiple contracts of course.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, so that's not that  
12 many. I mean, I just assumed that it was a larger  
13 number. I mean, I just have to be honest that you  
14 know and again, I get the sensitivity of the matter  
15 and I think, you know I've never, you know in our  
16 office, you know we have I think five staffers in the  
17 office at a given time and you know we're trying to  
18 figure out ways to help our constituency right. We  
19 represent a two-borough district, and you know we  
20 have older adults, people with disabilities, people  
21 with children, people who are working and can't  
22 afford to take the day off but really need to speak  
23 to somebody. And so, we try to offer virtual  
24 options, emailing, calling, walk in hours, you know  
25 later hours so that people have you know access to us  
in all ways possible. You know, we work really hard

3 on our customer service skills because we understand  
4 that people come in and sometimes it's so you know  
5 tied down you know to whatever issues they are going  
6 through that they may you know inadvertently take  
7 that out on you, you know in that moment.

8 So, we learn that it's not a matter of if it  
9 happens but when it happens, how do we react? These  
10 are all things that are really important to this  
11 body. But with DHS, I think that my concern has  
12 always been that whenever I have to counsel someone  
13 that has to go into shelter, the conversations are  
14 never pleasant to have right because the feedback  
15 that we get from just about maybe I would say 99.9  
16 percent of the people that come in contact. I  
17 actually do not have a case where a person came to me  
18 and said, I loved, you know, I loved my setting. I  
19 was in the best shelter ever, right.

20 And so, we have to mentally prepare folks that  
21 are entering the system. That are going to PATH.  
22 When I'm sending somebody to PATH, I have to say you  
23 know, you have to take a book, take food, take water.  
24 You know, be prepared because you're going to be  
25 there all day. And that's the reality and I think  
that's with the package of bills, what we're aiming

3 for is to ensure right, that we're addressing what  
4 we're hearing on our end from the constituents that  
5 are being serviced by these providers. And I'm not  
6 in any way shape or form saying that we don't have  
7 providers that are providing you know good quality  
8 services but if there's no real way to measure that,  
9 uhm, then we're being reactive, right.

10 Whenever something then hits the news, now we're  
11 trying to figure out well, what happened and when.  
12 When that probably could have been averted if there  
13 was some sort of streaming process that allowed us to  
14 gauge the efficacy of each organization and their  
15 delivery of service.

16 You know, in organizations, it's housing families  
17 in buildings that are substandard. We should know  
18 that ahead of time before you know something horrible  
19 happens. And you know we're not seeing a lot of  
20 evidence to that, and I get it, my mother used to  
21 say, when too many start to soup it doesn't come out  
22 right. And I think there's no greater example of  
23 that than in you know agencies such as DHS and DSS  
24 and you know NYCHA where they just were so large at  
25 some point that it makes it almost impossible right  
to know what's happening at every given time.



3 And so, I appreciate you wanting to mitigate that  
4 by centralizing some of the resources, but we don't,  
5 you know I don't know that that works for the general  
6 public.

7 And I would really encourage someone to take the  
8 train from Brooklyn to PATH, you know and to take -  
9 you know to have that experience to really appreciate  
10 and then sit there all day to really appreciate the  
11 discomfort and the trauma that we are you know  
12 putting on families unnecessarily because there are  
13 probably other ways to do things that we just you  
14 know haven't - because we get comfortable doing  
15 things a certain way because that's the way that it's  
16 always been done. It doesn't mean that it can't be  
17 done any differently.

18 So, I would love to see what reporting bill  
19 exists now that would conflict with Council Member  
20 Holden's bill because I actually think that this is a  
21 really good bill and I think that it's necessary. I  
22 want to know that my providers are doing the best job  
23 possible and that constituents that I am referring  
24 are you know, having access to the services that they  
25 deserve. More specifically, in the single shelter.

3 You know, there was a bill here on de-escalation.  
4 We saw what happened a couple of days ago. You know  
5 we fought the people that work at these shelters,  
6 they're human beings too. They are forced with you  
7 know, some very difficult situations day in and day  
8 out with individuals that have you know substance use  
9 disorder, mental health issues, people that are  
10 stressed out, that are pissed off that day that are  
11 going to take it out on you and we saw what happened  
12 right, when someone kind of reacted, right. Was kind  
13 of caught up in that and reacted in a way that was  
14 unprofessional, and I appreciate that the  
15 Commissioner immediately addressed that, however,  
16 that is not the first case where something like that  
17 has occurred. I know an individual who suffers from  
18 mental health issues and was punched in the face by a  
19 security guard in one of the Brooklyn sites you know  
20 because he was you know, probably being  
21 inappropriate. However, those security guards should  
22 be armed with the resources to learn how to  
23 deescalate and to address an individual that is in  
24 crisis. An individual that you know, maybe under the  
25 influence of something and it's just not evident in  
the work that we're doing. There seems to be some

1  
2 sort of you know, of I don't know I would call it a  
3 donut hole right, in between what you're seeing  
4 versus what we're seeing and uhm, you know so, again,  
5 the members took a lot of time to help - you know to  
6 get these bills drafted for a reason and any  
7 consideration, any you know maybe communication with  
8 each individual office to kind of help us help you if  
9 you will, is greatly appreciated. And with that, I  
10 think our final questions will come from Council  
11 Member Ung.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you and thank you  
13 Chair Ayala for putting it so ably about why they're  
14 here today you know dealing with the issues that we  
15 are in our districts. And I'm just going to mention  
16 again, this is my bill Intro. 132. I have heard a  
17 lot back and forth. You know actually I did visit  
18 the PATH center in the Bronx, and I was actually very  
19 impressed by the amount of services that was given in  
20 the center, and you know I understand it's not just a  
21 center where you know you do the process for intake  
22 but actually a center of where you provide service to  
23 people facing homelessness.

24 I guess you know, not so much a question but a  
25 comment is, cost is a factor of cause but other than

3 that, what is to prevent providing all those same  
4 services at a different borough, at a different  
5 location for different families? And I also say this  
6 was coming from a district in Flushing, yes, the  
7 commute is hard but moreover, it's also an immigrant  
8 community where it's a very scary experience when  
9 someone's facing homelessness and to tell them to go  
10 to the Bronx, where they probably have never been  
11 before. Take this public transportation. Go to a  
12 new place where they never, ever you know, language  
13 is a barrier and I do, I visited there and you know I  
14 appreciate that you've shown me that I know people  
15 there do speak different languages addressing the  
16 community but I'm just coming also from a community  
17 where, and that's where I think I also had the other  
18 introduction about working for not-for-profits  
19 because often when you know a community, an immigrant  
20 community, where they are facing a risk of  
21 homelessness, they are actually the first place they  
22 would go to is the trusted not-for-profit.

23 I'm not here to make life more difficult for any  
24 of you on this whole thing as Chair Ayala was saying,  
25 that we can work together more and see how we can

3 really address these issues for the different  
4 communities in New York City. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I have a final  
6 question. Actually, I just received something, some  
7 information that there were 60 individuals that were  
8 denied placement last night at the intake facility  
9 for single adult men. Do you know why?

10 MOLLY PARK: Denied placement isn't exactly how I  
11 would describe it. We had a very challenging day  
12 yesterday. We got bus after bus after bus from  
13 Texas. We had more intake yesterday than we would  
14 typically see in a week and we did not place  
15 everybody in the time that - there were single adults  
16 that we did not place in the time that we needed to  
17 do it because of just the volume.

18 They've all been placed. We are absolutely doing  
19 everything that we can to add even more emergency and  
20 surge capacity, but I think you know the politics  
21 that have been played with people's lives and the  
22 influx of people is straining the DHS system to the  
23 breaking point. We are you know, the woman who runs  
24 PATH was there from noon yesterday till you know, I  
25 was talking to her at eight o'clock this morning,  
right. You know, it is an incredible effort from

3 public servants to make sure that we are dealing with  
4 the volume of clients who need. We have both a legal  
5 and moral obligation. We understand that the volume  
6 has just been tremendous.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What was the number of  
8 individuals that arrived yesterday?

9 MOLLY PARK: The total systemwide of asylees was  
10 close to 500 people.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yesterday?

12 MOLLY PARK: Yesterday.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, the 60 plus that didn't  
14 make it in by the allotted time, do those individuals  
15 that leave and come back or were they still -

16 MOLLY PARK: They were placed. Sorry, they were  
17 placed, they just weren't placed in the timeframe  
18 that they should have been.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, how are we doing in  
20 terms of capacity building? I know that the vacancy  
21 rates were really, really, really low and I really  
22 do, I don't know how you guys are getting through.  
23 Even if we have planned for the worst-case scenario,  
24 I think we would still be kind of in a jam, but I can  
25 appreciate how difficult it must be to identify

3 places to properly house families and individuals and  
4 I'm wondering, how is that going?

5 MOLLY PARK: It's certainly challenging. We've  
6 been opening hotels very rapidly. You know many of  
7 the Council Members have heard from us and you will  
8 unfortunately continue to hear from us with very  
9 last-minute openings. Really grateful for the  
10 providers who have stepped up. We have uhm, you know  
11 agency staff that are working the extra shifts to  
12 help staff these emergency facilities, but it is, we  
13 are - so we are moving as absolutely aggressively as  
14 we can to keep up with the volume. We did just - we  
15 had a gap in that volume last night. We should be in  
16 a better place for this evening.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you share, was it a  
18 processing issue or uhm, we just didn't have places  
19 to put folks?

20 MOLLY PARK: It was the volume of people coming  
21 in and then you know the way single adult system  
22 works is that people are placed in assessment beds  
23 first. So, it was volume of assessment beds, volume  
24 of people coming in, but I think it was really you  
25 know having multiple buses show up at 30<sup>th</sup> Street

3 late at night that all at one time, that caused that  
4 bottleneck.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that, okay,  
6 alright, thank you so much. You know, again, you  
7 know I can appreciate how difficult this time has  
8 been and you know this body is here you know to try  
9 to be helpful to the best extent of our ability, but  
10 we really are working hard to address a lot of the  
11 issues that have been raised by the constituents that  
12 we represent and average you know New Yorkers that  
13 are going through a really difficult time.

14 So, thank you for being here today and uhm, for  
15 sticking it through. I look forward to having more  
16 continued conversations about the issue, the asylum-  
17 seeking families and how we can be helpful there.

18 MARRICKA SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you.

19 MOLLY PARK: Thank you for having us.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now be calling on  
21 members of the public. I will call up individuals in  
22 panels. Once your name is called, you may begin your  
23 testimony once the Sergeant at Arms sets the clock  
24 and gives you the queue. All testimony will be  
25 limited three minutes. I would like to note that  
written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by



3 Committee staff maybe submitted to the record up to  
4 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing  
5 it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). The first panel  
6 will be an in-person panel and it will consist of  
7 former Speaker of the New York City Council Christine  
8 Quinn, Deborah Berkman, Robert Desir and Nicole  
9 McVinua.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can begin. Welcome.

11 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you. Uhm, well, thank  
12 you Chair Ayala and the other members of the  
13 Committee who are here and who have been here today.  
14 My name is Christine Quinn and I'm the President and  
15 CEO of WIN, Women in Need. And I'm here to express  
16 our strong support for and discuss the importance of  
17 Intro. 522, which would require the city to fund  
18 onsite mental health clinicians at every shelter for  
19 families with children at a ratio of one clinician  
20 for every 50 families.

21 WIN is New York City's largest provider of  
22 shelter and services to families with children  
23 experiencing homelessness. We operate 14 shelters  
24 and nearly 600 supportive housing units across the  
25 five boroughs. More than 6,200 people call WIN home  
every night including 3,490 children. In total, we

3 house over ten percent of all the homeless families  
4 with children in the City of New York.

5 Becoming homeless and experiencing homelessness  
6 in and of itself is a traumatic experience. Every  
7 family living in shelter in this city including those  
8 at WIN have experienced trauma for being evicted to  
9 fleeing an abusive partner to navigating the city's  
10 onerous intake system for homeless families, as you  
11 guys have discussed. Many of those families also  
12 have unaddressed mental health needs such as PTSD,  
13 depression or substance use disorders.

14 I want to thank the sponsor of 522 who just  
15 joined us, Council Member Erik Bottcher and as he  
16 mentioned at the press conference, I may go over  
17 three minutes. I hired him for his first  
18 governmental job when he was 28 and now look, he's in  
19 the seat I used to hold. Pretty damn good if you  
20 think about it. Yeah, there you go.

21 Sorry, where was I? Okay, a homeless shelter  
22 should be more than a roof over a family's head. The  
23 time a family spends in shelter is an opportunity to  
24 eliminate barriers to mental health care by  
25 uncovering their needs, reducing the stigma and  
initiating treatment. To truly support families in

3 their journey towards wellness and permanent housing,  
4 family shelters need clinical resources to offer  
5 their residents. That is why WIN worked hand and  
6 hand with Council Member Bottcher, our clients with  
7 lived experiences, shelter and mental health  
8 providers and advocates to develop this bill.

9 As mothers experiencing homelessness fight  
10 structural barriers, many also face complex personal  
11 histories. Trauma can impact people in ways that are  
12 subtle, insidious, and destructive in both the short  
13 and long term. Mental health and substance use  
14 issues are more prevalent among adults with exposure  
15 to traumatic events and experience and circumstances.

16 Given the intersectionality of trauma and  
17 homelessness, it's not surprising that mothers  
18 experiencing homelessness are disproportionately to  
19 suffer mental health needs and substance abuse  
20 disorders than those who are not. Research  
21 repeatedly finds alarming high rates of psychiatric  
22 disorder amongst homeless mothers, most commonly  
23 PTSD.

24 Now, I'm not going to go on and on because it's  
25 only three minutes but let me just say in summary  
that this is challenge for all of us who run shelters

3 for families. That we don't have funds that  
4 specifically can be used for hiring or contracting  
5 with clinicians. At WIN, we probably raised more  
6 private money than any of the other providers just  
7 because we're bigger and we still don't have the  
8 money to set aside for this and for these types of  
9 clinicians.

10 Two weeks ago, one of our clients, we gave them a  
11 mental health referral to the floating hospital,  
12 which is an excellent partner, an excellent partner.  
13 Three and a half months wait till the first  
14 appointment, and we all know the first appointment  
15 you know nothing really happens right. And, we have  
16 constantly on a regular basis, particularly children  
17 who demonstrate suicidal ideations and I'm telling  
18 you, when the police come and EMS come and they take  
19 them to the hospitals, nine times out of ten they  
20 just come back the next day and eight times out of  
21 ten without a referral.

22 This bill will not only help people do better  
23 when they are housed, which is the critical issue and  
24 remain intermittently housed permanently, it will  
25 also save lives and I'm just so grateful to Erik and  
to you Madam Chair and to the veto proof majority

3 that is on this bill because often our mothers feel  
4 forgotten. They feel like they are for the forgotten  
5 face of homelessness, and you have said to them today  
6 that they and their children are not forgotten and  
7 will not be forgotten as long as this City Council  
8 sits in these Chairs in this esteemed building.

9 So, thank you very, very much and just lastly I  
10 want to say, all of your questions were f'n fabulous.  
11 You were on point. You got it right. I was so  
12 impressed. I don't mean it to sound patronizing as  
13 that does but really, so good but you made me proud.  
14 I believe in this institution, and you made me proud  
15 so thank you. Sorry, for taking too much time.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, no, no, that's the power  
17 of having people, representatives with lived  
18 experience representing you. [APPLAUSE]

19 Thank you for all that you do. I wanted to share  
20 because Former Council Member Quinn, it's uh, you  
21 know I shared my experience this morning, but you  
22 know I have my oldest son, who wants to be my  
23 favorite son. He's not, the little one is the  
24 favorite but he uh, and I'll go on record. They  
25 know, it's not a secret anymore but he was a very  
difficult child, and you know I was going through the

1 shelter system. His father had been you know  
2 murdered while I was pregnant. I was a teenager. I  
3 had like no sense of direction and my mother didn't  
4 understand me. I didn't understand her, and I  
5 remember you know vividly like this kid, he had  
6 attention deficit, hyper activity disorder and his  
7 mother was 16, 17 years old and didn't know what like  
8 ADHD was. All I knew was that everybody was  
9 shuttered. You know close the shutters on the door  
10 and pretend they weren't home when I was on my way  
11 because they didn't want to deal with him and I felt  
12 even further isolated because I felt like you know he  
13 was somehow preventing me right from being able to  
14 live you know, like any other young mother. And I  
15 remember being at home with him one day and he was  
16 just like, everywhere we would go, people would say,  
17 have you taken him to see somebody? Have you taken  
18 him to see somebody? Because he was like all - he  
19 would jump out of you know out of the building and  
20 fly through the stairs. He was bruised and cut and  
21 I'm telling you, he's a wonderful human being today.  
22 He's a functional adult but he was a horrible baby to  
23 take care of when you're 16. But I remember one day  
24 it was a really, really, really bad day at home and I  
25

3 share this story and people sometimes tell me, why do  
4 you tell this story? It's a horrible story but it's  
5 an important story because it's a true story and that  
6 day, I just, like I don't know, I don't know what  
7 happened, but I remember grabbing him through his  
8 shirt and shaking him like so aggressively and I  
9 dropped him and I thought oh, my God. Like, I wanted  
10 to hurt him in that moment. I was just so blinded by  
11 everything. The stress of it all and I remember  
12 picking up the phone and calling you know and trying  
13 to make an appointment to see a psychiatrist for him  
14 because I thought, obviously he's the one that had  
15 the problem. And I couldn't get one. And I was at  
16 my wits end and I said, you know, the last person I  
17 called, I said, if you don't give me an appointment,  
18 I'm jumping out of the window and I'm taking him with  
19 me.

20 And they immediately gave me an appointment. And  
21 I was not going to jump out the window obviously, but  
22 I felt so suffocated in that moment that I knew  
23 enough to recognize that I needed the help, but the  
24 help was not readily available for me. And the fact  
25 that I had to say that to be able to access that  
level of care speaks to the dysfunction that we have

3 in a city. New York City, one of the richest cities  
4 in the world and we still, this was – my son is 32  
5 years old now. I know I look like a baby but he's  
6 32, remember I was a teenage parent and still 30  
7 years later, we're having the same discussion about  
8 the need and the importance for mental health  
9 services for families. I really applaud you and I  
10 want to thank you know obviously you know you've been  
11 a champion of this, but you know most people don't  
12 understand. And my hair is you know, just how  
13 important this piece of legislation is and the impact  
14 that it would have on so many families. So, thank  
15 you, thank you and thank you.

16 CHRISTINE QUINN: Deputy Speaker thank you  
17 because you know, we can have and I think everyone on  
18 the panel agree, we can have a million statistics but  
19 at the end of the day, all the whole packet of  
20 legislation today is about people, and you put a  
21 human face on this in a way that is powerful given  
22 the positions you have reached in your life. Many  
23 people would hide in shame, which we would not want,  
24 and you've broken through that, so thank you for  
25 that.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. You can proceed.



3 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Thank you for sharing that.

4 Deputy Speaker Ayala, Council Members and staff, good  
5 afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to  
6 the Committee on General Welfare on all of this  
7 legislation that will impact people experiencing  
8 homelessness. My name is Deb Berkman and I'm the  
9 Coordinating Attorney of the Shelter Advocacy  
10 Initiative at the New York Legal Assistance Group or  
11 NYLAG.

12 The Shelter Advocacy Initiative provides legal  
13 services and advocacy to low-income people in and  
14 trying to access the DHS shelter system. NYLAG  
15 supports all of the legislation introduced today and  
16 I have provided you with written testimony supporting  
17 each of the bills. But because I only have a short  
18 time, I'm going to focus on a few bills. I want to  
19 start by responding to something that the DHS  
20 represented as Ms. Park said about Intro. 92 and I  
21 assume - she said this as part of I think trying to  
22 explain what a good job that DHS was doing dealing  
23 with peoples disabilities and accommodating them.

24 And one of the things that she said is that DHS  
25 now has a disability affairs coordinator. While it  
is true that DHS does have a disability affairs

1 coordinator, they do not have a mechanism to help  
2 people find providers to get the reasonable  
3 accommodations that they need in order to get the  
4 changes to the system that they need to access  
5 shelter.  
6

7 So many of my clients who are experiencing street  
8 homelessness would be able to come inside if they  
9 could get a reasonable accommodation, but they are -  
10 either they don't have insurance or they have  
11 insurance and they're not able to find a provider to  
12 give them the medical documentation they need to get  
13 either the single room or the relaxation of certain  
14 rules that they would need to access shelter.

15 And as a result, they are on the street. I have  
16 called the Department of Homeless Services and asked  
17 them to help me find providers to create  
18 documentation so these people can come inside and  
19 there is not a process by which to do so. They do  
20 not have providers to send me to. There have been  
21 times that individual employees at the Department of  
22 Homeless Service have gone into their own rolodex's  
23 to try to help me get someone inside, but they do not  
24 have a process to comply with this part of the Butler  
25 Law Suit Settlement.

3 So, that's a real problem. I also, at some  
4 point, I also wanted to respond to something else  
5 that was said today. Someone had asked what the  
6 current PATH eligibility rate is. I don't know if  
7 that person is still here, but I want to report that  
8 in July of 2022, the eligibility rate was 18 percent.  
9 So, that means that 82 percent of families  
10 experiencing homelessness were denied – were found  
11 ineligible for shelter in July of 2022. Now, what  
12 DHS will say about that, is that it's because of the  
13 influx of migrants but that shouldn't be the case,  
14 because asylum seekers don't have to comply with all  
15 the same eligibility requirements that non-asylum  
16 seekers do. So, they are not the same opportunities  
17 to find them ineligible. So, it really doesn't make  
18 sense that there should be such a low number.

19 I wanted to support Intro. 522 and NYLAG  
20 enthusiastically – oh, thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead.

22 DEBORAH BERKMAN: NYLAG enthusiastically supports  
23 the provision of mental health services in shelter  
24 and of course, we want to echo everything that was  
25 just said about the trauma of leaving one's home and  
that clients who offer mental health counseling

3 should have every opportunity to receive it. We do  
4 want to urge protections to be added to ensure that  
5 mental health services are only provided to families  
6 that voluntarily seek out the treatment. And to make  
7 sure that residents aren't coerced into entering  
8 mental health treatment and understand that it is  
9 voluntary. And also, we want to make sure there are  
10 protections to comply with HIPAA and make sure there  
11 are no sharing of information between a mental health  
12 provider and the rest of the shelter staff and DHS.  
13 We think that - and ACS of course and ACS.

14 So, that is what - but we absolutely support this  
15 bill. We also want to support Intro. 276 that  
16 requires DHS to train the public facing employees on  
17 professionalism, cultural sensitivity, de-escalation  
18 and trauma informed theory but we would also ask that  
19 this Council go further. This is a very necessary  
20 first step to training, but we also think that this  
21 Council should create an effective oversight  
22 mechanism to record and investigate the reports of  
23 abuse and if warranted, to impose penalties for bad  
24 actors and penile violations where warranted. And  
25 finally, we want to enthusiastically support Intro.'s

3 132 and 513. One intake site for families with  
4 children is wholly insufficient for a city this size.

5 In July of 2022, 1,829 families, not people,  
6 families applied at PATH. I represent a number of  
7 those families, a number of them and I know there's  
8 been a lot of controversy about this, but a number of  
9 those families reported to me that they stayed in the  
10 PATH intake center for days on end.

11 They were given food, they were given water, but  
12 they slept there and that is just far too long for  
13 them to stay there and many families who find  
14 themselves needing shelter as many members of this  
15 Council recognize have no connection to the Bronx.

16 Uhm, so creating community-based intake centers  
17 would obviously decrease their trauma but allowing  
18 community nonprofits to process the applications  
19 would reduce the trauma even further because a lot of  
20 our clients already have relationships with community  
21 nonprofits, so they would be going to a place that  
22 they and their children already know is a safe space.  
23 And we think that would really go along ways to  
24 reducing the trauma. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

3 ROBERT DESIR: Good afternoon. My name is Robert  
4 Desir, I'm a Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid  
5 Society. I submit, we submitted our testimony  
6 already in conjunction with the Coalition for the  
7 Homeless. I want to thank the Chair of this  
8 Committee and also the Committee for holding this  
9 hearing on this important issue of homelessness. We  
10 want to mainly talk about Intro. 229 and City FHEPS.  
11 We support Intro. 229, which will fulfill the City  
12 Council's intention of structuring city subsidies to  
13 work as Section 8 and will maximize tenant  
14 flexibility in their apartment search.

15 While Section 8 allows tenants who pay utilities  
16 a discount on their rent obligation that they can use  
17 to pay for utilities. FHEPS requires tenants to pay  
18 utilities in addition to 30 percent of their income  
19 towards rent. So, we support the suggested changes  
20 to Intro. 229. We would say that Intro. 229 should  
21 be amended to require HRA to reduce the tenant shares  
22 to reflect the cost of utilities as is done with  
23 Section 8. While preserving tenant flexibility to  
24 rent apartments at the statutory maximum.

25 We would also urge the Council to make funds  
available for HRA to upgrade its computer system to

1 handle this and some of the other policy changes that  
2 I want to turn to.  
3

4 In addition to 229, I think there are a number of  
5 other issues that should be addressed in order to  
6 maximize the effectiveness of City FHEPS and allow as  
7 many people as are eligible to be able to use the  
8 program and come out of homelessness. I first want  
9 to turn to the rent reasonableness requirement.

10 Because of this requirement, someone can find an  
11 apartment with the rent within the payment standard  
12 only to learn that the rent is not reasonable and  
13 that their application will be rejected.

14 In some cases, this determination is not made  
15 until after there have been extensive dealings over  
16 weeks, even months. This also negatively effects  
17 tenants who receive City FHEPS to prevent eviction.  
18 While they're in court, they may negotiate a rent  
19 that will allow them to stay in their apartment and  
20 it's very problematic if they sign an agreement that  
21 says this is what their rent is going to be only to  
22 present that rent to the administrators of the  
23 program to have that number rejected.

24 So, the City Council should eliminate this to  
25 ensure tenants are not unfairly prevented from

3 renting apartments at or below the payment standard.  
4 Another issue that's causing a lot of people who are  
5 in shelter to not be able to leave shelter is the  
6 issues around immigration status.

7 Despite there being no immigration status base  
8 restrictions in the laws authorizing City FHEPS.  
9 Many without status languish in shelter because the  
10 city has not extended eligibility to them. Further,  
11 federal law that seems to limit eligibility leaves  
12 room for the city to extend eligibility to those  
13 without status. Also, these laws have been found  
14 unconstitutional and unenforceable and they do not  
15 preempt the city or state of New York from extending  
16 a benefit like City FHEPS to any U.S. citizen - non-  
17 U.S. citizen New Yorker.

18 Okay, so I'll just quickly touch on other issues  
19 such as uhm, source of income discrimination. I  
20 think it's very important that there's a commitment  
21 and funding to the Commission on human rights, so  
22 that source of income discrimination cases can be  
23 pursued and that we have staff that can offer real  
24 time solutions and help people who are experiencing  
25 this pernicious form of discrimination.



3 Lastly, I would speak to the unacceptable delays  
4 that we see in the application process that uhm,  
5 cause people to wait very long times before they can  
6 access an apartment and actually, uhm, cause people  
7 to lose apartments. Uhm, the review process needs to  
8 be streamlined so that any errors that are uncovered  
9 can be addressed quickly, so that communication is  
10 such that uhm, any issues can be dealt with and  
11 worked out without uhm, you know this kind of  
12 mechanical rejection of applications and people  
13 starting all over again. And meanwhile, time is  
14 lost. People languish in shelter, and you know also  
15 lose out on opportunities.

16 I think that the city should set benchmarks for  
17 approving packages. Shelter staff should be trained  
18 to deal with the systems and to kind of learn the  
19 ends and out of the different programs to assist  
20 people in quick order and there should be processes  
21 to make sure that apartments uhm, are inspected  
22 timely and improved timely and that's not a source of  
23 delay.

24 So, these changes in addition to the passage of  
25 Intro. 229, which strengthen the City FHEPS program

3 and help more New Yorkers move out of shelter. Thank  
4 you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

6 NICOLE MCVINUA: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker  
7 Ayala and members of the Committee. My name is  
8 Nicole McVinua and I'm the Director of Policy at  
9 Urban Pathways. Thank you for the opportunity to  
10 testify today.

11 Urban Pathways is a nonprofit homeless services  
12 and supportive housing provider. We serve over 3,900  
13 single adults annually across four boroughs and for  
14 the purposes of time, I'm not going to read my whole  
15 testimony, so please refer to my written testimony  
16 for further comments on additional pieces of  
17 legislation. But I also wanted to focus on Intro.  
18 229 today.

19 At the end of last year, a major step was made  
20 towards making the City FHEPS rental subsidy more  
21 effective by increasing the maximum rental rates to  
22 the fair market rent to FMR, which was intended to  
23 also increase the number of apartments on the market  
24 that were accessible to these voucher holders. But  
25 unfortunately, the city's application of the utility  
allowance has effectively decreased the value of the

3 City FHEPS voucher by requiring that the total rental  
4 amount include utilities and when utilities are not  
5 included, deducting the utility allowance off the top  
6 of the overall voucher value.

7 And the current application you know excludes  
8 City FHEPS recipients from accessing the majority of  
9 the apartments on the market that are rent FMR  
10 because most apartments don't include all the  
11 utilities. And this is at a time when the city is  
12 experiencing the largest average monthly rent  
13 increases ever. So, this undermines the  
14 effectiveness of the voucher and prolongs  
15 homelessness, which is why we support Intro. 229, as  
16 sponsored by Council Member Cabàn.

17 We believe that applying the Section 8 rules,  
18 like the administration spoke to would work with this  
19 bill and that the wording of the legislation would  
20 allow for the Section 8 rules to be applied. Which  
21 would credit back the utility amount to the tenant by  
22 deducting their payment amount. So, you know we  
23 agree with the administration that that would be a  
24 good application, but we need to make it move faster.  
25 I know that we've spoken to the Administration about  
them changing their computer systems and updating

3 their technology, so you know we would like to see  
4 that happen as soon as possible.

5 I also wanted to speak to you know the fact that  
6 a lot has come up today about the need for quality  
7 services, increased reporting, and all these things  
8 are extremely important. The success of the city  
9 shelter system and getting people housed quickly and  
10 having quality services is based on the city's  
11 investment in the system and the only way to have  
12 high quality services is for our contracts to be  
13 fully funded, which is just not the case.

14 You know, and we really need to support the  
15 workforce who are the backbone of these services.  
16 Our DHS contracts budget minimum wage at \$15 an hour  
17 maintenance workers. So, that means that our staff  
18 are going home and they're worrying about how they're  
19 going to feed their own families. How they're going  
20 to pay their rent and we're just creating this  
21 cyclical system.

22 So, we really need our contracts to support our  
23 workforce, so that our workforce can be focused on  
24 what they are doing, providing the best quality  
25 service as possible. And also, so that we can  
maintain a qualified workforce. I know I'm out of

3 time, but I just want to say really quickly that you  
4 know our organization is at a 32 percent staff  
5 vacancy rate and has been for months because we  
6 cannot pay enough because our contracts do not  
7 include enough funding to pay our staff adequately  
8 and so, we have this constant turnover.

9 And we know that that negatively impacts our  
10 clients right and that's not what we want but without  
11 the proper funding, it's really, really challenging,  
12 and you know we want to open more safe havens. The  
13 city's talking about opening more safe havens, which  
14 is wonderful, but the contracts really need to be  
15 evaluated at the funding rates.

16 We recently opened a safe haven, and we cannot  
17 staff it. We have 20 vacant positions which is  
18 causing us to actually outsource you know our  
19 security and things, which is costing more money in  
20 the end. It just really doesn't make any sense, so I  
21 hope that the Council will consider you know cost of  
22 living adjustments in our contracts in the next  
23 budget cycle. We haven't had a true cost of living  
24 adjustment included in our contracts in the last  
25 three budgets. You know we had a workforce  
investment but it's not a continuous COLA that's

3 supplied every year and you know we really – that’s  
4 really what we need if we want to make sure that our  
5 services are as high quality as possible. Thank you  
6 very much.

7 CHRISTINE QUINN: Madam Chair, if I can just add  
8 two points on what was just said. You know, the  
9 prior Council right towards the end of the term  
10 passed a piece of legislation that required that  
11 security guards at shelters get paid a living wage.  
12 So, that was probably I don’t know 18 months ago by  
13 now, maybe 24 months ago. None of us have gotten a  
14 penny, not a penny. And when you ask DHS, when are  
15 we going to get the money, maybe by the first of the  
16 year but they don’t know. And then the money that  
17 was put in by all of you in the budget last year, the  
18 COLA or workforce investment or whatever we’re  
19 calling it, we’ve not seen a penny of that.

20 And they can’t even maybe or [INAUDIBLE 2:25:44]  
21 is different, they can’t even give us an estimate of  
22 when we’re going to get that. So, we too have big  
23 gaps in you know, in employment with vacancies and  
24 also, we have big retention problems and employees  
25 are now mad because they’ve seen in the paper, money  
was promised and then to tell them, we don’t have it

3 because the city hasn't given it to us for two years,  
4 it's just terrible. So, I just wanted; you reminded  
5 me of that.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I agree and thank you for  
7 that. Council Member Cabàn.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: Yes, thank you. I mean,  
9 first I just want to express gratitude to the entire  
10 panel for your testimony. I just wanted to note that  
11 the representative from Legal Aid, I have your  
12 testimony here. Would really love to learn more and  
13 dig into the edits that you're suggesting and would  
14 encourage you to reach out to my Legislative Director  
15 Madhuri Shukla, so that we can engage in that  
16 process. Excited to do that and then just extra  
17 immense gratitude to NYLAG who uhm, you know has been  
18 a strong supporter and really helped us with this  
19 work. So, just really appreciate the work that all  
20 of you all are doing.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

22 ROBERT DESIR: Could you tell me the name again?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÀN: We - I [INAUDIBLE  
24 2:26:58].

25 ROBERT DESIR: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Bottcher.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you to the panel.  
3 Uhm, Chris, can you speak to how we can ensure that  
4 if mental health professionals are coming into  
5 shelters, how do we ensure confidentiality? How do  
6 we ensure that people don't feel pressured to take  
7 that care?

8 CHRISTINE QUINN: So, all of the services in  
9 shelter are voluntary. I mean, we can't, nor do we  
10 try to or try to force people because even if you  
11 wanted to force people, it doesn't work right.  
12 Because if you want to go to job training. They have  
13 to want to go to have their children go to camp or go  
14 to recreation or whatever, you can't force it.

15 So, I think the way we make sure that works and  
16 we have to work with the Council staff on the  
17 language of this, but you just say legislation in a  
18 way that is legally appropriate, that this is  
19 voluntary one. And two, I'm not a lawyer but there  
20 must be examples of this in HIPAA or in other places  
21 within regulations at HHC or DOHMH that these  
22 materials will all be held confidentially. I know  
23 when I ran the New York City GALA's Antiviolence  
24 Project or Crime Victims Assistance Agency, all of



3 the materials that were relevant to victims meeting  
4 with social workers was confidential.

5 So, there are ways to do that and resources like  
6 NYLAG and Legal Aid and others in the medical fields  
7 who can help us do that. I know there are concerns  
8 by some that they feel that on the single side and  
9 it's just not my area of expertise. I can't speak to  
10 it. But I've heard from some folks that they feel  
11 that the psychiatric help or psychological help in  
12 the single side is used in a surveillance way.

13 That's not what we're looking to do, and I think  
14 if you make sure in the legislation that it is noted  
15 that it is voluntary and all HIPAA – and even if we  
16 can go stronger than HIPAA because at times, I feel  
17 like HIPAA when there translation issues gets a  
18 little funky. I was recently in a hospital situation  
19 where like; I knew everything about the guy you know  
20 in the curtain next to me because of translation. He  
21 was very sick but anyway, so I'd like to go even  
22 further but I think we just legislatively you know we  
23 put it in the bill one.

24 Two, if we want to, we can set up some kind of  
25 requirement of training for providers right, that we  
train them on what it means to be in compliance of

3 HIPAA. Train them on voluntary. If we think that  
4 you know it's necessary that I don't think would be  
5 you know any kind of a problem.

6 Third, I just want to say I know the issue of a  
7 lack of psychiatric or psychological professionals  
8 has come up and that's true and I really want to  
9 thank Chair Lee, whose been giving us a lot of time  
10 to help us you know thought process around this.

11 When I was speaker, we had a similar type of  
12 shortage of nurses, particularly nurses who spoke  
13 more than one language. We created a partnership  
14 with Hunter for an accelerated but high-quality  
15 program that brought people to you know having nurses  
16 degree and it made it a big difference and I know  
17 that Hunter and other CUNY's would be interested in  
18 doing this here. Maybe that effects implementation  
19 also but those are all things we can work out and  
20 it's great to have the resources of groups like NYLAG  
21 who are willing to help us do that.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Any other  
23 questions for this panel? No, okay, thank you all so  
24 much.

25 PANEL: Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will now call on the next  
4 panel, which will be a virtual panel. For those  
5 virtual, remember that there is few second delay when  
6 you are unmuted before we can hear you. That first  
7 panel will be Eric Lee, Jacqueline Samone, Amy and  
8 Juan Diaz. We will begin with Eric Lee.

9 ERIC LEE: Hi, good morning. My name is Eric  
10 Lee, I'm Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless  
11 Services United. Thank you Speaker Ayala and members  
12 of the General Welfare Committee for allowing me to  
13 testify today.

14 I will be summarizing my written testimony for  
15 the time allotted. HSU is grateful to the Council  
16 for its steadfast leadership on homelessness and  
17 affordable housing and we stand ready to work with  
18 you towards implementing solutions to strengthen and  
19 improve services for families and individuals  
20 experiencing homelessness.

21 The city's homeless services safety net can meet  
22 the current and future need by focusing on three  
23 priorities: Bolstering eviction prevention and legal  
24 services to meet the overwhelming demand. Establish  
25 a reliable DHS shelter pipeline to create purpose  
build service shelters and normalize the Fiscal

3 operations of homeless service providers and expedite  
4 the placement from shelter into permanent housing to  
5 shorten the time spent homeless.

6 Regarding the legislation discussed today, HSU  
7 supports Intro. 229 to remove rent utility deductions  
8 from City FHEPS vouchers and we would also support  
9 legislation to remove rent reasonable tests from City  
10 FHEPS.

11 For Intro. 522, while HSU members support  
12 additional mental health services in family shelters,  
13 mandating staff positions and case ratios, could make  
14 it difficult for small providers to comply with the  
15 bill given their lower than case ratios. We have two  
16 small providers that currently cannot find an SCSW  
17 for over a year now because of the case ratio.

18 And for larger providers, this bill would not  
19 allow the flexibility to enhance their existing  
20 services with higher levels of care such as hiring a  
21 psychologist at a 100 to 200 case ratio to complement  
22 their LCSW's and be able to prescribe medication for  
23 clients.

24 For Intro.'s 132 and 513, HSU supports a no room  
25 door approach to shelter, and we think that single  
adults would also benefit from additional intake

3 centers and the ability to be directly placed into  
4 shelter by providers.

5 Single adult men often refuse to go to 38 Street  
6 intake center and providers see individuals with  
7 mental health diagnoses being discharged from  
8 hospitals and prisons but lost to the streets because  
9 they cannot place them directly in adult mental  
10 health shelters.

11 For Intro. 190, HSU broadly supports the intent  
12 of the bill to publicize the rights of people  
13 experiencing homelessness and we recommend the bill  
14 include references to where each right incants into  
15 law.

16 For Intro. 92, we support making shelters more  
17 accessible spaces and recommend modeling, monitoring  
18 the progress off of ongoing efforts established by  
19 the Butler settlement. For Intro.'s 108 and 421, we  
20 support measuring out comps to improve the  
21 performance of the sector but feel that measurements  
22 should be made in the context of shelter sizes and  
23 corporate models rather than specific -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: If you can just, yeah, if you  
can just wrap it up.

2 ERIC LEE: Thank you. The Council may want to  
3 consider combining Intro.'s 108 and 421 and  
4 compliment the data reporting bill established by  
5 Intro. 212 to look at how lengths of stays within  
6 different shelter types and sizes correlate with  
7 specific exists from different types to different  
8 types of housing to better understand the  
9 effectiveness of housing resources for specific  
10 populations.

11 For Intro. 124, we support extending housing  
12 specialists to HASA in DV shelters, but the city must  
13 commit additional city tax levy dollars for DV  
14 shelters given that per diam rates are set by OCFS.  
15 We also have significant concerns about the reporting  
16 requirements in this bill given that it could be  
17 misappropriate by nimbies and also would not improve  
18 the provision of housing specialist services.

19 And finally, for training both 276 and 431, the  
20 Department would need to be responsible for  
21 developing the training curriculum and identifying  
22 vendors for shelter providers to be able to easily  
23 comply with the legislation as well as additional  
24 funding to ensure that providers are able to budget  
25

3 for the additional training services. Thank you for  
4 the opportunity to testify today.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Eric. Next,  
7 Jacqueline Samone.

8 JACQUELINE SAMONE: Thank you for the opportunity  
9 to testify. My name is Jacqueline Samone, and I am  
10 the Policy Director at the Coalition for the  
11 Homeless. We submitted joint written testimony with  
12 the Legal Aid Society who already discussed Intro.  
13 229 and needed improvements to City FHEPS. I'd like  
14 to highlight a few other bills today. We support  
15 Intro. 92, which would create an advisory board for  
16 accessibility at shelters. For too long, homeless  
17 New Yorkers with disabilities have encountered a lack  
18 of accessibility when they seek services in the DHS  
19 shelter system.

20 The Advisory Board would complement the work  
21 being done as part of the settlement in the Landmark  
22 Disability Rights Law to help move to City of New  
23 York, in which the coalition is an institutional  
24 plaintiff.

25 As the city endeavors to make the shelter system  
more accessible for people with disabilities under

3 the settlement, an accessibility advisory board could  
4 identify and propose additional reforms. We are  
5 pleased that the legislation requires that at least  
6 two members of the board have lived experience of  
7 disability and homelessness and we urge the Council  
8 to increase the number of such members.

9 We strongly encourage the full spectrum of  
10 disability experiences to be considered in the  
11 creation of the advisory board. The Council should  
12 also ensure that the recommendations of the advisory  
13 board are given thoughtful consideration and that  
14 there is accountability regarding whether their  
15 suggested reforms are implemented. Several members  
16 of the coalitions disability focus group are also  
17 hear today to testify about this bill and we thank  
18 them for their advocacy and expertise.

19 We also support Intro. 124, which would ensure  
20 access to housing specialists. Well trained housing  
21 specialists with manageable caseloads are a critical  
22 resource in helping people move into permanent  
23 housing. However, the city must also proceed staff  
24 with a range of housing options to offer to shelter  
25 residents.



3 The city must eliminate administrative hurdles  
4 robustly enforce source of income discrimination  
5 protections and other fair housing laws and commit to  
6 building at least 6,000 apartments per year for  
7 homeless households and 6,000 apartments per year for  
8 extremely low-income households.

9 Intro.'s 132 and 513 could help homeless  
10 families, depending on how they are implemented but  
11 they do not address the underlying problems with the  
12 family shelter eligibility process that Council  
13 Member Restler laid out today.

14 As previously mentioned, in July, less than one-  
15 fifth of families with children who applied at PATH  
16 were found eligible for shelter and only ten percent  
17 of adult families were found eligible. We encourage  
18 the city and the state to address the many  
19 bureaucratic barriers that families face when they  
20 attempt to enter shelters and to implement reforms to  
21 make it easier for both families with children and  
22 adult families to obtain appropriate shelter  
23 placement. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Jacqueline. Next  
is Amy Blumsack.

3 AMY BLUMSACK: Hi, good afternoon everyone. I'm  
4 Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing and Policy at  
5 Neighbors Together. We are a community-based  
6 organization that is 40 years old based in central  
7 Brooklyn and we work with uhm, I would say over a  
8 half of our members are homeless or unstably housed.

9 So, thank you Chair Ayala and members of this  
10 Committee for the opportunity to speak and for  
11 holding hearing and addressing homelessness.

12 We are here today in particular to uplift our  
13 support of Intro. 229. Last year, City FHEPS  
14 increase was a really big step in the right direction  
15 but there are significant barriers that remain to the  
16 vouchers effectiveness and efficiency and uhm, some  
17 of the additions to the final rule that were  
18 implemented last year are causing a lot of confusion  
19 and really slowing down people's ability to move out  
20 of homelessness. In particular, in terms of Intro.  
21 229 and the utilities deduction, it effectively  
22 undermines the increase that we fought so hard for  
23 over all these last years and uhm, you know in  
24 today's rental market where from this year to last,  
25 rents have gone up over 20 percent in the city. It's  
an historic increase to be undercutting the value of

3 a voucher is short sided and problematic to say the  
4 least and effectively it's keeping people homeless  
5 longer than necessary.

6 Additionally, I think the utility deduction is  
7 confusing. You know many of our members didn't know  
8 that the utilities deduction was added to the City  
9 FHEPS rule. They weren't aware of it, so we have  
10 desperately worked with members to after overcoming  
11 the immense hurdle of source of income discrimination  
12 and actually finding an apartment that will take  
13 their voucher, right. Submitted their application,  
14 waited months for their application to be processed  
15 and then only towards the end of those many months of  
16 waiting, thinking that they had an apartment  
17 available to them, found out that they weren't able  
18 to have the apartment because of the utilities  
19 deduction.

20 So, I think if the goal of the city and HRA and  
21 DHS is to get people out of homelessness as fast as  
22 possible, then absolutely, we need to pass Intro. 229  
23 and remove the utility deduction. We would also  
24 support creating a utility allowance, which would  
25 credit the amount of utilities to the tenants  
portion, their portion of the rent.

3 Uhm, there was definitely one more thing that I  
4 wanted to say. Uhm, oh, right, that it is actually,  
5 it's important to remove the utility deduction and to  
6 give people choice right. People who are homeless  
7 have to make the choices that are very best for their  
8 family, right? And so, uhm, if we are removing the  
9 utility deduction, then they are able to choose you  
10 know, do we want to pay all the way up to the top  
11 end? Like do we want to use all the way up to the  
12 top end of our rental assistance voucher, that might  
13 get them access to an apartment that's closer to  
14 their network, closer to child care, closer to  
15 family. We don't know but we should trust people to  
16 make the decision that is best for their family and  
17 for themselves as individuals.

18 Uhm, and I guess the last thing I want to say is  
19 just to uplift that source of income discrimination  
20 is still a major issue, so, while I understand the  
21 desire to make all vouchers sort of same and similar,  
22 they are all being discriminated against, and I think  
23 that anything that the city can do to address that is  
24 critically important. So, I think removing the  
25 utility deduction, crediting utility allowance and  
you know making that long term investment in people,

3 right is essential and then additionally addressing  
4 the rest of the barriers to City FHEPS, which I'm  
5 going to lay out in our organizational testimony, our  
6 written testimony are critically important as well.

7 So, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Amy. Next, Juan  
9 Diaz.

10 Thank you Chair Ayala and members of the General  
11 Welfare Committee for holding today's important  
12 hearing. Good afternoon. My name is Juan Diaz and  
13 I'm a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens  
14 Committee for Children. A multi-issue children's  
15 advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that  
16 every New York child is healthy, housed, educated,  
17 and safe.

18 Today, I would like to focus my time on two  
19 bills. Intro. 229 by Council Member Cabàn will stop  
20 the deduction of allowance for the maximum monthly  
21 rent for City FHEPS. This bill is important because  
22 it will ensure that the value of the rental  
23 assistance matches actual rent to expenses and will  
24 prevent landlords and brokers from turning families  
25 away.

3 Prior to joining CCC for over three years, I was  
4 a supervisor at Brownsville Homebase. A homeless  
5 prevention program funded by HRA. I witnessed, I  
6 witnessed firsthand how multiple administrative  
7 barriers with housing vouchers get families relocated  
8 in a timely manner and often times into shelter  
9 entry. Landlords and brokers demand the full rent  
10 and commission payments and expressed hesitance about  
11 utility payments.

12 Families confusions grew as they were unsure of  
13 their monthly rent contribution and who is  
14 responsible for paying apartment utilities. The  
15 overall confusion of this unnecessary barriers  
16 created several weeks of delays and eventual  
17 discharge between all parties involved. A utility  
18 allowance could make the process a lot easier for  
19 families to relocate.

20 CCC is also supportive of Intro. 522. Children  
21 in shelter are subject to a substantial level of  
22 stress and trauma and families urgently need mental  
23 health services. We strongly support this bill but  
24 do want to know the few issues we feel should be  
25 addressed. Any bill enhancing services in shelter  
through the family mechanism at the appropriate level

3 to attract and retain providers. To ensure providers  
4 are not being pulled out of communities in order to  
5 work within the shelters, we also feel the city  
6 should explore ways to provide flexible funding and  
7 partner with existing community organizations to  
8 bring providers on site at shelters. These providers  
9 could include existing Article 28 and Article 31  
10 tenants, FQHC's, Health + Hospitals and other types  
11 of providers that offer unique models covered by  
12 Medicaid.

13 Finally, the one to fifty ratio may prove  
14 unimanual for professionals who are already facing  
15 caseloads, it might be worth additional review.  
16 Thank you for the time and your commitment for  
17 children in housing and I plan to submit written  
18 testimony in the coming days.

19 Just to conclude, as I mentioned before, I was  
20 working at a homebase in Brownsville for some time,  
21 some years and I witnessed firsthand how many  
22 families in Brownsville struggle with these vouchers  
23 and even after they move to other boroughs, they  
24 continue contacting homebase with confusion over who  
25 is going to pay utilities. Uhm, not being able to

3 get assistance from HRA, so we truly, truly want the  
4 City Council to focus on this bill. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank Juan. Our next panel  
6 will be an in-person panel. It will consist of Sara  
7 Wilson, Milton Perez, Sharifah Harvey, Douglas Powell  
8 and James Lee.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: One, two, one, two. Okay.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will begin with Sara  
11 Wilson.

12 SARA WILSON: Thank you. Sorry. Okay, good  
13 afternoon everyone. Hi, my name is Sara Wilson. For  
14 identification purposes, I am disabled and a former  
15 shelter resident. I spent two and a half years in  
16 five different shelters. One of which was allegedly  
17 a medical facility or a MICA, which is derogatory  
18 term they used to use. I emphasize this because this  
19 is my experience as someone entering the shelter  
20 system as dual diagnosed, both mental health and  
21 substance dependency. Not that it matters but also  
22 in recovery as well but somebody who came already in  
23 services.

24 Uhm, I speak on this experience because as far as  
25 Intro. 276, trauma-based training, it is imperative  
that that is beyond necessary in these shelters.



3 Just a brief example when it was time for my psych,  
4 social, there was ten different staff members sitting  
5 around eating lunch. Like I would be entertainment  
6 as I discussed every different trauma, therapy,  
7 providers, substance, all details of my entire  
8 history, I had to sit around. And I bawled in front  
9 of all these people who then I lived with. They  
10 giggling, uhm, different responses to all my  
11 different levels of trauma and if I chose not to  
12 answer that then they wouldn't have completed my  
13 paperwork.

14 I was their entertainment and it's just one very  
15 simple issue that is able to continue to go on  
16 because of one reason people are not trained. So, in  
17 addition to that training, other things that  
18 definitely would be necessary to uhm, prevent the  
19 trauma that people are now reexperiencing based on  
20 their stay in shelters. You know uhm, there's no  
21 real reporting as well, which I've heard people  
22 mention around here today, which would definitely be  
23 an issue and just to get on board with your omitting  
24 of the utility voucher, I definitely am in agreement  
25 with that as well and I know that until we actually  
finally do away with the 90 day rule and as part of

2 the City FHEPS voucher as well, that's definitely  
3 holding up the length of stay, which I think I've  
4 heard people say was is over a year and a half but  
5 that will take off a great deal of that length of  
6 time if when people are in their intake shelter and  
7 they can process their City FHEPS application with  
8 those documents instead of waiting an additional  
9 three months.

10 So, I know I have a whole bunch of other things I  
11 want to say but uhm, I'll respect the time and uhm,  
12 yeah, in support of 276. Thank you very much and  
13 have a wonderful day guys.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much for sharing  
15 that.

16 MILTON PEREZ: Thank you Sara, right on time. My  
17 name is Milton Perez, I'm from the Bronx Puerto Rico.  
18 I'm a member of Vocal New York Homeless Union. We  
19 have a prepared statement that's going to be  
20 submitted but I don't feel like reading it right now.

21 Some of those things in the title and in the  
22 statement are due to counter protective rent,  
23 reasonableness or fair voucher deductions, opaque  
24 application process and limited eligibility. I'd  
25 like to speak more on the perspective of somebody

3 that was in the shelter system over five years. Let  
4 me put my glasses back on. The space that you guys  
5 are occupying right now, from the wall to the end of  
6 the desk, that's about the size of the dorm I was in,  
7 and I shared that space with 20 people, 20 total.

8 Where Mr. Eric is right now would be my bed in  
9 that space. There would be a locker where you're at  
10 and there will be another bed where Ayala is sitting  
11 at right now in that close of a space. So, thinking  
12 back on those times, most of what has been said here  
13 is just talk. It is not good enough because if you  
14 spend that much time in the shelter and you're lucky  
15 to get a voucher to find an apartment, and all of a  
16 sudden they pull the rug from under you and they  
17 bring these policies you know that uh, oh, the  
18 voucher, no, no, you're incorrect. Whatever policy  
19 they choose to pull up at the particular time, it's  
20 just not good enough you know. So, what Cabàn is  
21 doing to give up this particular barrier, you know  
22 I'm all for it. Anything that the Council is willing  
23 to do to give up some of these barriers, we're all  
24 for it. That's why we were concerned. There's too  
25 many barriers. This is just one of them.

3 To your bill, bill 92, the shelter I where I was  
4 in, there was a 62-bed shelter. It was technically  
5 an employment shelter uh, but there were - at the  
6 height of it, there were 13 people in wheelchairs,  
7 three blind people. About 7 people with walkers and  
8 uh, people on dialysis, things of that nature and uh,  
9 and I say that because they didn't receive any  
10 special treatment. You would think they would but  
11 no. It didn't matter there were wheelchairs. There  
12 were elderly 66, 75 years old. Uh, they were not  
13 treated in any special type of way. So, your bill,  
14 I'm all for it also to shed some light on those  
15 issues with people with disabilities and how they are  
16 treated in the shelter system.

17 Overall, this needs to be done. You know the  
18 City Council working with not only the city staff but  
19 the shelter providers and the most important people,  
20 the people that are directly impacted. Whether  
21 they're advocates or presently in shelter or formerly  
22 in shelter, we all need to work together. Thank you.

23 DOUGLAS POWELL: My name is Douglas Powell, this  
24 is my ID. I live 111, 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This is my  
25 disability card. Ms. Diana, everything you were  
saying was true. There is no accommodation for us.

3 She sat here and she lied. I wanted to yell at her  
4 and speak but I didn't want to disrespect you, so I  
5 had to hold my patience. But she lied about the  
6 whole situation. I got there 2019, September the  
7 4<sup>th</sup>. December 27<sup>th</sup>, the bed collapsed on me. They  
8 left me on the floor for six hours before they took  
9 me to the hospital because nobody walked. I was  
10 screaming. I was hollering, nobody came. I called  
11 people on the phone, but they were too far to come  
12 and help me.

13 My family had to call up to the shelter. I hung  
14 up on them. They kept calling until somebody picked  
15 up and said hello and they explained to them the  
16 situation and then they came back there to get me. I  
17 stayed in the hospital for six months. They did not  
18 want me to come back to that shelter. The doctors,  
19 the social workers, they all fought for me to come  
20 back to that shelter. They discharged me out of the  
21 shelter. They tried to make it look like I was never  
22 in that shelter because they was trying to cover up  
23 that fall and I'm not walking around.

24 So, I don't know why she would sit here and lie  
25 to you like that, knowing she was lying but she  
26 didn't know I was in the audience and believe me, if

3 I could have yelled out, I would of, but it would  
4 have been totally disrespect and I can't do that. I  
5 can't disrespect nobody. I was doing that when I was  
6 a kid. I'm a grown man now, so I got to wait until  
7 the order.

8 Now, I have an apartment. I had it for four  
9 months. They are supposed to call me but seven days  
10 since they called me. They've been holding this  
11 apartment from me for four months. They told me they  
12 can't hold it no more. I called their supervisor  
13 today; she said somebody was going to call me.  
14 Nobody still never called me.

15 Nobody from HRA still never called me. I went  
16 down their Friday and Wednesday, they said they was  
17 going to call me, they still ain't called me.

18 As far as the 229 bill, I'm with that. Because  
19 the thing about it, she just sat here and told you  
20 all how we're going to spend our money. She ain't  
21 asking us, she told you all we're going to give her  
22 \$50 for light and \$50 for gas. And I know, I'm not  
23 using no gas that's going to cost me no \$50 because  
24 I'm not cooking that much.

25 So, now you just took \$100 from me for nothing.  
Now, maybe the light, even though that's not going to

3 be \$50 because I was always taught just to leave the  
4 bathroom light on because the way we was coming up.  
5 The bathroom light is going to shine the whole  
6 building, the whole apartment.

7 So, why would it cost me \$50 for a light bill?

8 So, if they can help us not pay that light bill, that  
9 electricity bill because somebody is getting over  
10 because one paying \$19 in rent and bill is \$2,218,  
11 where is that \$318 going?

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

13 DOUGLAS POWELL: With that I got to respect you  
14 all again and go.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much and if I  
16 can help you, we'll talk.

17 DOUGLAS POWELL: Yes ma'am.

18 SHARIFAH HARVEY: Good afternoon. My name is  
19 Sharifah Harvey. I am currently experiencing shelter  
20 and homelessness and have been for over year, over  
21 two years, over three years. So, I want to speak to  
22 some of the general issues that are going on with  
23 using City FHEPS but of course, there is the issue of  
24 having uhm, just being able to see an apartment.  
25 Once they know that you have a voucher, you don't get  
a call back. But I wanted to address the issue with

3 the housing specialist as well because some of what -  
4 some of the introductions are addressing having more  
5 housing specialists, which I think is necessary. I  
6 don't think it's appropriate. It's not enough to  
7 have three homeless specialists, three housing  
8 specialists in a shelter that has 100 people, 100  
9 clients. That seems like a set up to fail.

10 And so, they're supposed to be helping us to find  
11 housing. We're looking on our own. They are helping  
12 us but if they're not - if they are not doing their  
13 job, we languish. The clients languish and one of  
14 the things that - I'll just give you an example of  
15 what happened. Yesterday, I got a notice telling me  
16 that I have a viewing yesterday. So, I'm being told  
17 in the morning. So, I'm supposed to go in the  
18 evening to a location and look at an apartment.

19 Now, one of the issues I have is that that's not  
20 a timely notification number one. It's disrespectful  
21 and this is what they really do and number two, there  
22 should be how much, what size unit it is and how much  
23 the unit is for. When I asked them these questions  
24 up front, they act like I'm asking them something  
25 that's like confidential. If it's a one-bedroom  
apartment and it's \$900, that's very different than a



1 studio that's \$2,000. I mean, whatever the voucher  
2 covers, you need to be able to make an informed  
3 financial decision and they're making it seem like,  
4 well, HRA is paying for it. No, they're not. You're  
5 paying for it; you're paying for it. Later, even if  
6 you're not paying for it, immediately now all of it,  
7 you still have to come up with funds to get on your  
8 feet for later. So, they act as if \$2,000 is nothing  
9 because HRA is paying it. That's not how it is.  
10

11 Number two, you need to know what size unit it  
12 is. You need to have valid information. So, it's  
13 more than just training. There needs to be policies  
14 and oversight on how housing specialists look for  
15 housing, where they're sending people. If - I just  
16 got some interesting bit of information from hearing  
17 the Council and to know that they're sending me  
18 multiple times to an area that has the most people  
19 being evicted. Hmm, that's interesting and the  
20 places that they've been showing me when I've been  
21 able to actually see a unit, have been going for \$2-  
22 the landlords have been asking for over \$2,000 or the  
23 maximum rent.

24 Now, that's ridiculous. That's just not making  
25 any sense. So, these are the issues that need to be

2 addressed and I support all the introductions but  
3 there also needs to be oversight and I think that the  
4 report should be more than just yearly, it should be  
5 monthly or quarterly.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I agree and thank you. Can  
7 you put your mic on.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Press the button on the  
9 microphone.

10 JAMES LEE: I pressed the button, thanks.  
11 Alright, well, my name James Lee. Let's see Intro.  
12 124 and Intro. 229 are improvements but more action  
13 must be taken to help people move out of shelters  
14 with vouchers. I've been in the DHS shelter since  
15 December of 2021. Administrative issues and payment  
16 delays must be addressed to restore landlord and  
17 broker faith in the voucher system. Even those that  
18 don't discriminate based on race or income, won't  
19 accept vouchers, if they don't think they'll be paid.

20 When voucher holders are disadvantaged compared  
21 to other applicants, landlords and brokers find ways  
22 to not rent to voucher holders, especially when there  
23 are other applicants for an apartment. So, voucher  
24 holders are left stuck in the shelter system unless  
25 they agree to move into the worst neighborhoods.

3 Straining the shelter system, increasing costs, and  
4 effectively resulting in income discrimination.

5 While these bills address the lack of housing  
6 specialists and the utility allowance, the city  
7 should make additional improvements to City FHEPS to  
8 address these administrative issues.

9 I'm just going to address a couple of other  
10 things that wear said earlier. Uhm, the shelter that  
11 I'm in didn't have a housing specialist since  
12 December and you know like I understand the lady up  
13 here. She said like uhm, they've had housing  
14 specialists and you know, maybe she's just  
15 misinformed or maybe someone's not telling her really  
16 what's going on because I noticed going through the  
17 system, there's a lot of that happening. Someone  
18 tells you something to your face and they're  
19 completely wrong and sometimes you don't get the  
20 impression that they're trying to lie but they're  
21 really wrong. They really are.

22 Uh, let's see, another thing is, do any of you  
23 know how much it costs to put someone in an  
24 individual shelter for - individual adult shelter for  
25 one month? Is it \$4,000 or something like that?  
Okay, right. Okay, so, yeah, I'm going to like bring

3 that up like in my written testimony, which I'll  
4 submit separately.

5 Final question for the Committee on the General  
6 Welfare. Like, is there a way to get in touch with  
7 you guys? Like, I just like, look on the website or  
8 do that?

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, we can get you the  
10 information.

11 JAMES LEE: Okay, yeah, should I leave it with  
12 the men in arms because I have to leave right after  
13 this, so?

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, you can also submit  
15 something to me, and I can forward it to the staff,  
16 and they'll call you.

17 JAMES LEE: I'm sorry, send it to her?

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: To myself.

19 JAMES LEE: To yourself, oh, I'll do that.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, yeah, my information is  
21 online. Thank you.

22 JAMES LEE: Oh, thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Any questions for  
24 this panel? Thank you all so much for coming in and  
25 sharing and don't leave, I want to get your  
information. Great job guys.

3 DOUGLAS POWELL: Notice we all made it within  
4 three minutes. The homeless are always doing their  
5 job, always following the rules. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will now call our next  
7 panel, which is a virtual panel who consists of  
8 Alexandra Dougherty, Patrick Boyle, Kenisha Atkinson.  
9 Alexandra, you may begin when you're ready.

10 ALEXANDRA DOUGHERTY: Hi, good afternoon. My  
11 name is Alex Dougherty, I am a Senior Staff Attorney  
12 and Policy Counsel at the Civil Justice Practice at  
13 Brooklyn Defender Services. I'd like to thank the  
14 Committee on General Welfare for inviting us to  
15 testify.

16 BDS supports the goal of all of today's bills  
17 that the custom barrier is preventing New Yorkers  
18 from accessing shelter and ultimately securing stable  
19 housing. First, we strongly support establishing  
20 borough-based family intake centers. Families  
21 experiencing homelessness are routinely shut out of  
22 the family shelter system because PATH remains the  
23 single point of entry. The intake process has become  
24 increasingly opaque and backlogged in recent months.  
25 The people we serve, many of whom have been  
mentioned, travel for over an hour from all over

3 Brooklyn to the Bronx, have reported waiting at PATH  
4 all night with their kids before receiving temporary  
5 placement. Establishing additional intake centers is  
6 a necessary first step and DHS should further improve  
7 shelter accessibility by easing the many other owners  
8 eligibility criteria that have been discussed today.

9 BDS also strongly supports Intro. 229. The  
10 convoluted utility rules add unnecessary difficulty  
11 for New Yorkers who are already struggling to obtain  
12 and utilize housing vouchers. We repeatedly see  
13 clients find apartments below their voucher rent  
14 limit, only to learn later that the apartment won't  
15 be approved because not all utilities are included in  
16 the rent.

17 For example, one BDS client, Ms. O. was recently  
18 selected for a two-bedroom apartment after two years  
19 of apartment hunting with a voucher. The unit was  
20 \$200 under the City FHEPS payment standard but the  
21 utilities weren't included, so after the deduction,  
22 the unit didn't meet the payment standard.

23 Ms. O. was then put in the position of accepting  
24 a one bedroom, which was too small for her and her  
25 kids or starting her whole apartment search from  
scratch with illuming eviction date. Her moving the

3 utility deduction would simplify the City FHEPS  
4 application and apartment approval process for  
5 everyone involved.

6 And finally, we appreciate the intention of  
7 Intro. 522, and we agree that entering into a family  
8 shelter is a stressful experience, but we're  
9 concerned that introducing mental health  
10 professionals who are mandated reporters directly  
11 into family shelters, which are people homes, will  
12 inadvertently increase surveillance of low-income  
13 families.

14 In our experience, Black and Latinx families are  
15 already vulnerable to unnecessary reporting to child  
16 protective authorities because of biased reporting  
17 that completes poverty with neglect. The near  
18 constant surveillance in family shelters puts these  
19 families at increased risk of reporting. And placing  
20 mental health professionals who are mandated  
21 reporters, within this setting, only amplifies the  
22 risk.

23 Yet, City Council consider providing mental  
24 health services that are community based, culturally  
25 competent, flexible and importantly funded outside of  
DHS and ACS. Thank you again and I'll direct you to

3 our written testimony for additional comments.

4 Thanks.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Alex. Next,  
6 Patrick Boyle.

7 PATRICK BOYLE: Thank you so much to the Chair  
8 and to the members of the Committee for the  
9 opportunity to testify today. My name is Patrick  
10 Boyle, I'm an Assistant Vice President with Public  
11 Policy with Volunteers of America. We're a social  
12 services organization working to end homelessness in  
13 the greater New York area by 2050. We're also a  
14 nonprofit developer of affordable and supportive  
15 housing as well as a homeless services organization.

16 Our full testimony will speak to our comments on  
17 the full range of bills being heard today but in my  
18 limited time, I just wanted to point to a few  
19 reactions we had to a number of them.

20 The first one I'd like to point to is Intro. 0108  
21 that's tracking social service providers like VOA and  
22 others across a number of different metrics. At VOA,  
23 we're very open to you know all scrutiny of nonprofit  
24 providers. We feel like it's a very important part  
25 of the process. However, we're concerned with some  
elements of this legislation and some of the metrics



3 being tracked, lacking necessary context and nuance.

4 As if the previous speakers have spoken to. We don't

5 want to create a system where there's

6 misinterpretation of this data and metrics in a way

7 that unfairly leads to scrutiny on providers like

8 ours, based on program types, program sizes and other

9 such metrics.

10 We also wanted to comment today on 0190, on

11 homeless bill of rights. This is a concept that

12 we're very supportive of. We're also an organization

13 that is very committed to ensuring all clients that

14 come through our programs here in the city understand

15 their full range of rights, their ability to file

16 complaints, to seek information across a whole range

17 of services. However, we just want to ensure that

18 this legislation is merely capturing rights and

19 regulations that already exist and aren't creating

20 anything new and isn't in conflict with anything that

21 we're required to do as providers.

22 So, I think there's some further analysis needed

23 of this to ensure that there's nothing that's

24 conflicting with our existing obligations as

25 providers.

3 Another bill I want to address today is 0137,  
4 which is the legislation to encourage intake shelters  
5 in all boroughs. So, as many previous organizations  
6 that we work with have commented on, we're very  
7 supportive of this legislation. We feel it would  
8 greatly reduce the burden of individuals and travel  
9 times and other hardships related to seeking their  
10 legal right to shelter. And so, we really encourage  
11 the Council and the Administration to take this up  
12 and to you know really kind of push back against some  
13 of the obvious political complications that arise  
14 from citing. We're very encouraged by the Council  
15 Members who said that they would encourage this  
16 within their own Council Districts. I think that's  
17 more of a leadership that we need.

18 So, again, I just want to thank the Chair. Thank  
19 the other members of the Committee for the  
20 opportunity to host this hearing and for hosting a  
21 hearing that's really focused on the shelter world  
22 and the shelter experience particularly for clients,  
23 which is really important to us as an organization.  
24 So, thank you.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Patrick. Next,  
Kenisha Atkinson.

2 KENISHA ATKINSON: Hello, can you guys hear me,  
3 hi. Thank you for this opportunity to speak here.  
4 My name is Kanesha Atkinsons. Thank you for the  
5 opportunity to speak on behalf of myself and the New  
6 York shelter residents. I was taught from when I was  
7 a young child that closed mouths do not get fed. If  
8 you want change, sometimes you have to be the voice  
9 of reason.

10 As a young individual living with disabilities in  
11 the shelter, I stand by Intro. 92 to create and  
12 advise accessibility advisory board. This bill will  
13 be important because the voiceless with disabilities  
14 will finally be heard. The tears that no one knows  
15 about won't be in vein and the trauma from being  
16 dismissed, overlooked, and muted can slowly start to  
17 heal.

18 This is for people who came before me. The one's  
19 that stand with me in the present and the ones who  
20 will come after. With that being said, I have been  
21 in this system now for about three years, going on  
22 three years and one of the main things I always told  
23 myself was, I was not going to leave this system  
24 without my voice being heard about some of the things  
25 that go on that shouldn't go on especially when you

3 have disabilities. And I just, I want this bill to  
4 be passed because I see people that could be my mom  
5 and my grandmother that are here, that they don't  
6 even have the right help. They're not getting the  
7 proper medical attention and they're just stuck. And  
8 I don't like seeing that, especially as a minority  
9 because unfortunately my skin tone is the tone that I  
10 see more than anything else in the system. And I  
11 told myself even before I leave, I want my voice to  
12 be heard and it's happening. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sorry, thank you so much for  
14 that and uhm, and I believe that it is important that  
15 people like you and I and others with shared  
16 experiences are vocal because you're right, if we  
17 don't speak up, no one will and change will not you  
18 know won't happen, so thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I will now call  
20 up our next panel, which will consist of Sara Newman,  
21 Jonathan Gaffney and I apologize if I mispronounce  
22 your name Mimbeu Oshagara(SP?). We will begin with  
23 Sara Newman.

24 SARA NEWMAN: Sure, uhm, thank you to Chair Ayala  
25 and to the General Welfare Committee for the  
opportunity to testify today. My name is Sara Newman

2 and I'm the Director of Organizing for the Open  
3 Hearts Initiative. OHI supports communities across  
4 New York City who welcome homeless neighbors and  
5 advocate for housing justice in our own backyards and  
6 through this work, we've gotten to know hundreds of  
7 neighbors who are experiencing homelessness, some of  
8 whom are here testifying today.

9 And we're here today to advocate alongside them  
10 for reforms that would help address some of the key  
11 issues that they experience in the shelter system.  
12 There are two themes that come up again and again in  
13 our conversations with homeless neighbors. First,  
14 that it's far too difficult to exit shelter and get  
15 into permanent housing and second, that in their time  
16 of shelter, they often feel dehumanized rather than  
17 supported.

18 Right now, as many folks today have testified, so  
19 many people are staying in shelter for years, not  
20 because they want to, not because they don't have a  
21 voucher but because it's so hard to get into housing.  
22 And if we want shelters to be a brief stop on the way  
23 to housing, we need to make it easier for people to  
24 exit shelter and get housed. And we should be  
25 staffing shelters with that goal in mind.

3 Having dedicated housing specialists is an  
4 important step to do that and we strongly support  
5 Intro. 124 for that reason. I also want to echo what  
6 folks have said, that despite what DHS said today,  
7 what we hear from folks is that there are not  
8 dedicated housing specialists in every shelter. That  
9 case workers are often playing that role and no  
10 matter how great a case worker is, when they have a  
11 large caseload and are managing a wide range of  
12 responsibilities, it's really hard to be proactive in  
13 a way that you need to to help someone navigate a  
14 really challenging housing search.

15 So, we hope that this will be a full time you  
16 know position rather than something loaded onto case  
17 workers already full plates and hope that will be  
18 made explicit in the legislation.

19 Another immediate step that the Council could  
20 take to help folks exist shelter more easily is  
21 passing Intro. 229 to remove the utility deduction.  
22 As folks have said, this currently acts as yet  
23 another barrier to finding housing by decreasing the  
24 value of the voucher when utilities aren't included  
25 in the rent and so that's very important as well.

3 And finally, you know, it's also important to  
4 make sure that for whatever amount of time folks are  
5 in shelter, they're being treated with respect and  
6 dignity and that's unfortunately something that our  
7 homeless neighbors tell us sometimes is not happening  
8 in the shelters that they're in.

9 Staff behavior plays a really big role in  
10 creating a safe or unsafe environment in a shelter,  
11 which is why Intro. 276 is really important. Shelter  
12 staff need to be given the tools to handle the  
13 moments of conflict that will inevitably come up in a  
14 setting where people are experiencing in that stress.  
15 De-escalation training and trauma informed care are  
16 crucial, and that work should go beyond an annual  
17 training, as many folks have mentioned but that  
18 training is a good first step. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Sara. Next  
20 Jonathan Gaffney.

21 JONATHAN GAFFNEY: Yeah, hi, my name is Jonathan  
22 Gaffney, I'm the Housing Campaign Manager here with  
23 Neighbors Together. You already heard [INAUDIBLE  
24 3:16:13] speak and I'm going to read the words and  
25 testimony from one of our formerly homeless members,  
when describing this hearing and the legislation that

3 it would entail. This woman was adamant that I share  
4 some words on her behalf. She was extremely excited  
5 about the prospect of giving verbal testimony. When  
6 something came up last minute, she told me to read  
7 some words on her behalf.

8 So, thank you so much for your time and yeah, one  
9 of our members names here is Shanika O'Bryan. She  
10 was a formerly homeless member later at Neighbors  
11 Together. She's had a City FHEPS voucher for over a  
12 year and here is her statement.

13 In conjunction with raising my rent, my landlord  
14 refused both LINK and City FHEPS, has payment methods  
15 all around. After fighting to stay in my apartment  
16 and working with city agencies, like Homebase, I  
17 became homeless a couple of days before Thanksgiving  
18 with my two teenage children.

19 Thankfully, I am currently in an apartment that  
20 suits my needs, however, that is primarily due to the  
21 help of Neighbors Together. Neighbors Together  
22 worked with the Press to shine a light on my  
23 circumstance, which helped me tremendously. Working  
24 as a Teachers Aide for the City of New York, people  
25 were baffled that a person like me who was gainfully  
employed could become homeless.



3 I do not believe that I could have found an  
4 apartment that suited my needs on my own in large  
5 part due to the utilities deduction. While in the  
6 shelter system, it took me over eight months to find  
7 an apartment with my City FHEPS voucher. I believe  
8 that the utility deduction was a huge reason why it  
9 took me so long to find an apartment and limited what  
10 apartments were available to me. The utility  
11 deduction being a massive hurdle is not an isolated  
12 issue with just myself. When I was in the shelter  
13 system, I heard so many other people having the same  
14 problems with utility deduction, reducing the overall  
15 price of the voucher making it less effective.

16 I hope that the utility deduction is removed  
17 entirely from the City FHEPS voucher and a more  
18 reasonable utility allowance or something different  
19 can be implemented instead. Again, those are the  
20 words of Shanika O'Bryan, a formerly homeless member  
21 leader at Neighbors Together who could not be here,  
22 so I'm testifying on her behalf.

23 Thank you so much for your time and I would like  
24 to yield time back to the Committee.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Jonathan. Next,  
Mimbeu Oshagara (SP?).

3 MIMBEU OSHAGARA: Alright, I could be heard?

4 Uhm, I don't know if you all can hear me.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We can hear you.

6 MIMBEU OSHAGARA: Okay, great, so I would first  
7 like to start by saying, you pronounced my name  
8 pretty well. It surprised me. Uhm, let me uhm, I  
9 wrote something, so I'm trying to get to what I  
10 wrote. So, if you guys can bear with me a second.

11 Alright, hi everyone and thank you for this  
12 opportunity. I am a paraplegic who is fully  
13 paralyzed from the chest down. I tell you this just  
14 so you know where I'm coming from when I speak. I  
15 have been in a city shelter for a while and there  
16 have been many times when I felt no one cared or  
17 understood what I was going through. We need special  
18 attention, for we all do not have the same  
19 disability.

20 Intro. 92 bill would be a great step forward in  
21 my opinion. Shelters have a lot on their hands and  
22 sometimes things can be overlooked. When things are  
23 overlooked, people suffer. An extra pair of eyes you  
24 know would not be harmful to anybody. Being homeless  
25 is difficult in itself but I can tell you from  
experience being homeless and disabled can be hell.

3 There is so much to accessibility than just having a  
4 ramp. This is part of the reason why I love the fact  
5 people with disabilities who are or have been  
6 homeless can bring up ideas and suggestions. Talking  
7 with other people who are disabled in the system, I  
8 can say, we feel discouraged, left out and we feel as  
9 if at times, we are on our own. Things do not just  
10 get better on their own. Questions have to be asked  
11 and answered and work has to be done. This is why I  
12 believe in Intro. 92 bill.

13 I would like to close by saying this can only do  
14 good, rather than harm. I pray and hope it's passed.  
15 Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now call  
17 our next panel, which is also a virtual panel. It  
18 will consist of Nora McCarthy, Helen Strom and  
19 Katrina Corbell. Nora McCarthy's first.

20 NORA MCCARTHY: Hi everybody. Thank you so much  
21 for the invitation to testify today members of the  
22 Committee and the public who I really enjoy hearing  
23 from. I'm the Director and Co-Founder of the New  
24 York City Family Policy Project. For 25 years, I've  
25 been working with youth and parents impacted by the

3 child welfare system here in New York City as well as  
4 families impacted by homelessness.

5 It's from this position that I'm speaking today  
6 about some of the intended effects that some of the  
7 policies introduced today may have on children and  
8 families in New York. I'm also speaking with you on  
9 behalf of Partners who joined with Family Policy  
10 Project on testimony seeking that project, the Center  
11 for Family Representation and Rise, which all work  
12 with families impacted by homelessness and child  
13 welfare involvement.

14 I wanted to share our support for Intro. 276 that  
15 would bring a trauma informed lens to DHS shelters.  
16 As many people have said, this is badly needed.  
17 Treatment of families in shelters is often deeply  
18 discouraging and ugly and training to offer a more  
19 supportive and caring environment is very much  
20 needed.

21 At the same time, we oppose Intro. 522 that would  
22 mandate mental health providers in shelters. As some  
23 other folks have mentioned, this raises real privacy  
24 concerns and is likely to increase the shelter to ACS  
25 pipeline which harms families with a function of the  
form of surveillance, that can actually discourage

3 families from seeking treatment and from getting the  
4 help that they may want and it also uhm, conflates  
5 involvement in shelter with a mental health issue in  
6 ways that is troubling.

7 I really and truly hear that the Council's intent  
8 in mandated mental health services come from a place  
9 of wanting to make sure that families can get  
10 support. That family support can be much better  
11 provided in our community providers, making sure that  
12 there is continuity of care for families who continue  
13 getting help once they leave shelter and not  
14 concentrating our mental health resources in places  
15 that are meant to be temporary and also non-  
16 stigmatizing.

17 From much of the discussion and testimony today,  
18 you would think that PTSD and mental health issues  
19 are the main driver of shelter involvement. I think  
20 every body here knows that we have a terrible housing  
21 crunch and landlords are not accepting vouchers, rent  
22 is through the roof, and I think it really needs to  
23 be directed toward housing and our shelter staff need  
24 to be primarily involved and focusing long-term,  
25 permanent housing.

3 There is also some disturbing talk in the Daily  
4 News about this bill, saying that mental health  
5 providers in community settings cannot assess from  
6 family dynamics. Families facing a housing crisis do  
7 not necessarily have family dynamics that need to be  
8 assessed. They're also in a time of emotional  
9 crisis. That's not really a prime time -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

11 NORA MCCARTHY: About kids and families. That's  
12 a time just to provide supportive care. So, again,  
13 we really support having trauma informed care. So,  
14 not inflating mental health care in the shelter state  
15 and [INAUDIBLE 3:24:50].

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Nora. Helen Strom.

17 HELEN STROM: Hi, good afternoon and thank you  
18 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Helen  
19 Strom, and I am the Benefits and Homeless Advocacy  
20 Director at the Safety Net Project at Urban Justice.  
21 Thank you Chair Ayala and members of the Committee.

22 I want to briefly speak on a few bills today.  
23 First, we offer our strong support for Intro. 229  
24 regarding City FHEPS utility allowances. While the  
25 administration mentioned a choice between helping  
tenants with utilities and reducing maximum voucher

1 rate, we believe that this is a false choice, and the  
2 city can do both. They need to increase the voucher  
3 rates.  
4

5 We also strongly support Intro. 276, which would  
6 mandate that all staff receive de-escalation and  
7 trauma informed theory and cultural sensitivity.  
8 This is badly needed.

9 Finally, we want to speak about Intro. 522. We  
10 know there's a real shortage of access to mental  
11 health care across the city, including for families.  
12 However, we have a lot of serious concerns about some  
13 of the possible consequences of placing mental health  
14 professionals on site at all families with children  
15 shelters. We think a better option for the city is  
16 to find dedicated lines for additional mental health  
17 support offsite, within city healthcare systems and  
18 prioritize homeless New Yorkers for these  
19 appointments.

20 We believe that this would provide access that's  
21 needed while eliminating the rest we'll go through  
22 below.

23 First, we're very concerned about privacy.  
24 Generally, treatment and therapy relationships  
25 intentionally happen in the space outside of the home

3 to emphasize consent and control for people who seek  
4 treatment. We've discussed with our members who are  
5 in shelter or formerly in shelter, they're very  
6 concerned of the idea of having their providers  
7 within the place where they're living.

8 Additionally, we're concerned about the potential  
9 for this in a punitive way. The state regulations  
10 provide broad discretion for DHS and for family  
11 providers to place things like mental health care  
12 within people's independent living plans or ILP's.  
13 And to even discharge families for failure to comply.  
14 Unfortunately, this is something we see with many  
15 providers and within the DHS system and we believe  
16 that this provides other opportunities for that as  
17 well.

18 Finally, we think this could set up more  
19 fragmented care than we could get if we connect  
20 people to care within the communities. For people to  
21 start a treatment and then lose that treatment  
22 relationship as soon as they access shelter is not  
23 good for the long-term mental health or treatment of  
24 that person. We think connecting people within  
25 healthcare systems in community with dedicated access



3 is a much better solution to have continuous long-  
4 term care.

5 And additionally, we're concerned that future  
6 administrations and some providers could use this in  
7 a way to surveille homeless families. Unfortunately,  
8 there's already a strong shelter to ACS pipeline,  
9 which we know about and which we're concerned this  
10 bill could worsen and we've seen with many providers  
11 a tendency to pathologize and say that the cause of  
12 families issues is mental illness, when we know that  
13 the primary drivers of family homelessness are  
14 eviction, unsafe housing conditions, overcrowding,  
15 domestic violence, not mental health.

16 We firmly believe families need access to  
17 voluntary care; however, we believe that the option  
18 that gives them the autonomy, the choice, the privacy  
19 that they deserve can be achieved by funding  
20 additional dedicated care in the community where  
21 they're not subject to potential punishment or  
22 policing by shelter staff or providers.

23 I really welcome any questions or an opportunity  
24 to discuss any of these concerns because we  
25 definitely agree that access to care and mental  
health care is a big need in this city and that,

2 where it's one where people are facing enormous waits  
3 and really difficult - a lot of difficulties and  
4 access but we just think there's a lot of risks with  
5 this model in particular and would really love to  
6 discuss with any members of the Committee or Staff.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Helen. Katrina  
8 Corbell.

9 KATRINA CORBELL: Uhm, hello, my name is Katrina  
10 Corbell, although I am with numerous organizations,  
11 today I am testifying the person with lived  
12 experience. As somebody who has been in a single  
13 adult shelter and also with some friends who are at -  
14 uhm, who have had experience with the past shelters.  
15 Uhm, I - I mean, as we know from the testimony that  
16 was provided by the Department of Homeless Services,  
17 uhm, and DSS, uhm, it's not as clean cut as they seem  
18 to present.

19 One of my friends is currently at a PATH or at a  
20 yeah, at a PATH shelter, a family shelter and still  
21 has to go to PATH every ten days to check in. It's  
22 not something they can do by phone or by you know  
23 telecommunication. So, I just wanted to point that  
24 out.

3 Uhm, in regards to Intro. 92, I do hope that this  
4 remains like independent. That it does not end up  
5 becoming you know bias towards the shelter, but the  
6 shelter residents or shelter clients are able to be  
7 represented. That it's not going to just be like  
8 cherrypicked, ideal clients that are nominated to you  
9 know submit testimony or submit beyond, like beyond  
10 roles in that proposed council.

11 In regards to Intro. 108, I wanted to just make  
12 sure that it's going to be all of the providers and  
13 not just the two or three DHS locations. A few years  
14 ago, DHS tried to provide answers in regard - letting  
15 Council think that they were answering for all of the  
16 shelters, when they were really only answering for  
17 their own personal shelters.

18 Uhm, in regards to the housing specialists and  
19 Intro. 124, I would hopefully encourage people to  
20 just hire people that are you know passionate about  
21 their job and actually want to do this, want to go  
22 into social work and not hire the people that have no  
23 interest and are just looking for a job. Like hire  
24 people that are actually dedicated to their job and  
25 want to stay in that, stay in that role, stay in that  
position, stay in that industry.

2 And that way people that are in shelters, trying  
3 to get into housing, don't have to keep waiting three  
4 months or six months for another housing specialist  
5 to be hired and be trained while they're trying to  
6 get into housing appointments or housing interviews.

7 For 276, I totally support. I am hoping that you  
8 know all shelters are included, not just the DHS you  
9 know two or three shelters.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

11 KATRINA CORBELL: Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Our next panel  
13 will be in person, and it will consist of Towaki  
14 Komatsu, Kimberly Blair and Scott Hutchins.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin whenever you're  
16 ready.

17 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Hi, I'm Towaki Komatsu. Ms.  
18 Ayala, I've testified to you in previous public  
19 hearings. Before she left City Hall today, I talked  
20 to Molly Park as she left the room. She basically  
21 lied to your team today. She basically talked about  
22 training. Also, there was a representative from  
23 Urban Pathways at the end of the desk over here.  
24 Uhm, that representative from Urban Pathways didn't  
25 tell you about the fact that if you look at

3 ProPublica's website, it shows that Urban Pathways  
4 spends 45 percent of its operating expenses on  
5 compensation for its personnel.

6 So, meaning, if you give them ten bucks, they  
7 pocket \$4.50 but the question is, is that \$5.50  
8 sufficient to the clients or whatever?

9 The point is, uhm, HRA just issued Urban Pathways  
10 like a \$38 million contract. I currently have  
11 litigation against Urban Pathways. It's committing  
12 fraud in that litigation. I talked to you previously  
13 about Urban Pathways. So, in terms of oversight,  
14 this Committee and General Welfare Committee, you as  
15 a Chairwoman, you're supposed to provide oversight  
16 with how HRA operates. I previously visited DOI  
17 after that Julia Savo thing broke and basically DOI  
18 what they had stated to me was, you know what? We're  
19 going to refer your complaint back to HRA. So, the  
20 point is if you take the case like a rape victim. If  
21 you report a rape to a police officer, just imagine  
22 if the police officer told you, you know what? You  
23 have to work that out with your rapist. Do you  
24 understand my point here? If you have a complaint  
25 against some person, some entity, why is DOI telling  
me, you know what? We're just going to shove that

3 complaint back to the entity that you're complaint is  
4 against.

5 So, with regards to training to, when Ms. Park  
6 was I guess sitting around here, uhm, I had  
7 litigation against HRA since 2017 and attorney for  
8 HRA Jeffrey Mosczyc, he put my Social Security number  
9 in a public court filing. So, with the regards to  
10 the issue of privacy, the woman from HRA was here  
11 today talking about privacy. Do you know what could  
12 be done if your Social Security number is publicly  
13 disclosed if you're date of birth is publicly  
14 disclosed?

15 I apprised HRA's like general counsel of the  
16 fact, you know what? I saw this information in the  
17 public legal filing, court procedures mean it has to  
18 be redacted. I told HRA's senior attorney's, you  
19 know what? You screwed up, you need to fix this.  
20 Guess what? They ignored me. So, with regards to  
21 Ms. Park's point about training, also, there's an  
22 upcoming public hearing on September 22<sup>nd</sup> about  
23 another proposed contract with Urban Pathways. Do  
24 you want to come with me to HRA's headquarters? We  
25 can walk through the door together. I'll buy you a  
cup of coffee. Just to make sure that I can walk

3 through the doors, look at that contract and when  
4 there's a public hearing about the contract, I can  
5 testify knowledgably about the contract.

6 I told you previously I believe, HRA will not  
7 allow me into its headquarters to see that contract,  
8 irrespective of what my first amendment -

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

10 TOWAKI KOMATSU: So, can you do something about  
11 it as the Chairwoman of the Committee?

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I would suggest that you foil  
13 the request.

14 TOWAKI KOMATSU: They ignore it. Also, last  
15 point is this. I have a subpoena that I can have  
16 issued against HRA. So, instead of me giving you -  
17 or sorry. Instead of you giving me information, is  
18 there anything that you want to know about HRA that I  
19 can provide to you through the subpoena? Any of you?

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Not at this moment. Thank  
21 you.

22 TOWAKI KOMATSU: Thanks.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

24 KIMBERLY BLAIR: Good afternoon Chair Ayala and  
25 members of the Committee who were here but it's a  
long day. Thank you for holding this space. My name

3 is Kimberly Blair and I'm the Director of Public  
4 Policy and Advocacy for the National Alliance on  
5 Mental Illness of New York City or NAMNYC. I also  
6 identify as someone who lives with mental health  
7 conditions and who have benefitted from life saving  
8 psychotherapy, such as that proposed in Intro. 522,  
9 which I urge you to support today.

10 First, it is important that I orient you as to  
11 what my organization does. For 40 years, we have  
12 been a leading service organization to the mental  
13 health community and in addition to our free support  
14 groups and classes, we also run a confidential help  
15 line, that connects peers and family members with  
16 referrals to mental health services and more.

17 Most calls are received in the aftermath of great  
18 crisis. Such as hospitalization or losing housing  
19 benefits and employment due to a mental health  
20 episode. People struggling through this crisis often  
21 come to us because they have great difficulty  
22 navigating the confusing terrain of mental health  
23 providers and insurance restrictions on their own.  
24 These hurdles delay critical care and delay family  
25 members ultimately reaching the recovery that is



3 responsible for keeping family units together and  
4 ending the cycle of trauma.

5 Now, imagine going through these hurdles, while  
6 also navigating homelessness, which in essence is a  
7 traumatic itself. This is what 12,124 families in  
8 New York City shelters have faced since 2019.

9 Because the social workers introduced by the city in  
10 2016 to the shelter system have not been able to  
11 exercise the full range of their qualifications and  
12 provide essential psychotherapy in house, due to lack  
13 of financial resources and personnel.

14 Meanwhile, the data from the Office of Community  
15 Mental Health demonstrates that 66.7 percent of  
16 families in shelters have been screened for  
17 behavioral health needs, yet only .04 percent of  
18 families have been able to attend an appointment from  
19 January to March of this year and only 2.3 percent of  
20 families from April to June of this year.

21 While we need more analysis to understand why  
22 families receiving referrals are not actually getting  
23 care, we can reduce that. There are barriers we'll  
24 all experience with mental health conditions, right?  
25 Stigma, long wait times and lack of financial  
resources.

3 To reiterate, 66.7 percent of families, i.e. the  
4 majority of families in shelter, need life saving  
5 treatment and the city's current response is to  
6 provide zero percent of that treatment. At the most  
7 critical point, in the timeline of adverse live  
8 events a family may face, homelessness.

9 Our organization sees this as unacceptable and as  
10 a moral failing on behalf of our cities to families  
11 in crisis. However, with a small investment to  
12 Intro. 522, we can remediate this failing by ensuring  
13 that family units, dealing with unaddressed mental  
14 health conditions and homelessness, receive the care  
15 that they need and get connected to long term care  
16 providers.

17 And I will submit the rest in written but I just  
18 also just want to stress that there is a gap in the  
19 continuity of care, right currently. For all of us,  
20 I've waited during the pandemic, many months to see a  
21 provider. Imagine being homelessness and your one  
22 priority really should be getting your family housed.  
23 You should not have be having to deal with juggle  
24 that

25 So, by starting in the shelter, and then making  
sure that you have that gap filled until they can

2 meet with community based providers, we could really  
3 make this work.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

5 SCOTT HUTCHINS: My name is Scott Hutchins and  
6 I'm here representing Vocal and Neighbors Together.  
7 I've been actually in an apartment with my City FHEPS  
8 voucher. I'm starting my third year and I'm going -  
9 just went through the renewal process and an  
10 increased rent.

11 First, I wanted to talk about Intro. 229 with  
12 utility allowance. Uhm, my utilities are actually  
13 paid through an additional voucher. I got Craig  
14 Hughes from Urban Justice Center helped me get my  
15 apartment and this whole system is not going to work  
16 if everybody needs to get help from Urban Justice  
17 Center to get an apartment.

18 Alright, first I wanted to say in regard to  
19 Intro. 229, the difference between rent plus  
20 utilities, is trivial between the difference between  
21 the total cost to put someone in an apartment and  
22 compared to putting someone in shelter. Because as  
23 we heard, it was \$4,000 a month approximately to put  
24 someone in shelter.

3 The first shelter I was put in after 30<sup>th</sup> Street  
4 was Eddie Harris in 2012 and I saw how poorly they  
5 were building their services to us in 2019. The CEO,  
6 the Bushwick Economic Development Corporation that  
7 runs Eddie Harris shelter, was busted for  
8 embezzlement. He was taking a salary of over  
9 \$600,000 and their sole funder was the city.

10 I was in the shelter system for 99 months, eight  
11 years and three months, mainly because I have  
12 physical challenges and I couldn't get disability.  
13 They kept sending me to get disability and the Social  
14 Security Administration kept saying, you can do a  
15 desk job, you're not disabled by our standards and  
16 because I wasn't able to get the desk job because I  
17 was trying to get interviewed, the shelter, the last  
18 shelter I was in and this is why Craig Hughes  
19 intervened, gave me this mental health evaluation.  
20 He sent me an email that DHS had actually cancelled.  
21 The guy threatened me. He was going to threaten me  
22 with arrest if I didn't come down there and he and my  
23 case worker listened as this person on the payroll  
24 did a mental health evaluation for me because they  
25 were trying to get me into supportive housing that  
they run, where I would be forced to be doped up and

3 that was my ninth shelter and every shelter I went  
4 to, they had me do a mental health evaluation.

5 Mostly was independently. 83<sup>rd</sup> Street had an in  
6 house registered psychiatric nurse. None of them  
7 found anything that would get me disability. It was  
8 just like stress and nothing more than that.

9 And also, these housing specialists, a lot of  
10 times they don't know what they're doing. The  
11 housing specialists at Eddie Harris in 2012, first,  
12 she took me to a place when I didn't have any income  
13 at this point. And that's one of the big challenges  
14 of not being able to get any income because I wasn't  
15 getting interviewed and acted like that was a mental  
16 health issue. Even though it wasn't like I was going  
17 to interviews and messing up, they just - I just  
18 wasn't being contacted and I was showing them the  
19 spreadsheets. I applied to 3,895 jobs but I was  
20 homeless.

21 I just want to say the housing specialist there  
22 took me to Shady Broker, that wanted money up front  
23 before they even showed me anything and she also  
24 tried to get me in a three quarter house and that the  
25 housing specialists at most of the shelters would  
26 give me threats if I didn't look for housing and I

3 didn't see a point of looking for housing if I wasn't  
4 employed because the voucher was only good for me if  
5 I was employed, which is why we need the HAVP at the  
6 state level. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We have now heard  
8 from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we  
9 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify  
10 in person, please visit the Sergeants table and  
11 complete a witness slip now. If we inadvertently  
12 missed anyone who would like to testify virtually,  
13 please use the raise hand function in Zoom and I will  
14 call on you in the order of hands raised.

15 Seeing no one else, I would like to note the  
16 written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by  
17 Committee Staff, may be submitted to the record up to  
18 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing  
19 it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

20 Deputy Speaker Ayala, we have concluded public  
21 testimony for this hearing.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I just want to say thank you  
23 to all of you who have come to testify and stayed.  
24 This is obviously a very important subject matter and  
25 happy to be able to count on so many of you as  
partners in government.

3 So, thank you all and with that, this hearing is  
4 adjourned. [GAVEL].  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 7, 2022