

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY,
JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY
JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY
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MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023

Start: 10:11 A.M.

Recess: 12:00 P.M.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Committee On Women and Gender Equity
Hon. Tiffany Cabán, Chair and
Committee On Technology
Hon. Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

James F. Gennaro
Jennifer Gutiérrez
Kristin Richardson Jordan
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Inna Vernikov
Shaun Abreu
Robert F. Holden
Ari Kagan
Vickie Paladino
Julie Won

Other Council Members Attending:
Gale Brewer

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

Saloni Sethi
First Deputy Commissioner, Mayor's Office to End
Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

Jennifer DeCarli
End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Deputy
Commissioner for Family, Justice Centers and
Survivor Support

Annie Seifullah.
Civil Attorney; Co-chair of the New York Cyber
Abuse Task Force

Anne Glatz
Civil Attorney at Sanctuary for Families

Dhanaraj Thakur
Researcher at Center for Democracy & Technology

Tajh Sutton
Community Activist representing self

Gabriela Mejia
Movement Building and Communications Manager at
Right To Be, formerly known as Hollaback!

Subha Wijesiriwardena,
Feminist Researcher and Activist

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SERGEANT WONG: This is a sound check for the
Committee on Technology jointly with the Committee on
Women and Gender Equity. Today's date is December 4,
2023. This is being recorded by Danny Huang in
Council Chambers.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
the New York City Council hearing of the Committee on
Women and Gender Equity jointly with the Committee
on Technology. At this time please place all
electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. If you
wish to testify, please approach the Sergeant At Arms
desk to fill out a testimony slip.

At this time, and going forward, no one is to
approach the dais, I repeat, no one is to approach
the dais.

Thank you for your cooperation. Chairs, we are
ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Good morning, and welcome,
everyone. My name is Council Member Tiffany Cabán,
my pronouns are she/her, and I am the Chair of the
Committee on Women and Gender Equity.

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague,
Chair Jennifer Gutiérrez of the Committee on

Technology, for holding this important hearing with me today.

Today's oversight hearing topic is: *Online Harassment Against Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive People.*

Since the creation of the internet, online usage across the globe has become more and more mainstream, and in recent years, online life has become a fundamental aspect of everyday life with connectivity being rooted in online spaces.

Although the internet has aided people all over the world in connecting to others as well as accessing vital resources, it has also become an increasingly used medium for amplification of discrimination and violence.

According to Pew Research Center, as of 2021, over 41 percent of adults in the United States (US) had experienced some form of online harassment, including physical threats, stalking, sustained harassment, sexual harassment, offensive name-calling and purposeful embarrassment.

Further, over 46 percent of teens in the US have reported experiencing forms of cyberbullying, including name calling, spreading of false rumors,

receiving explicit unsolicited images or having their explicit images shared without their consent, or physical threats. Overwhelmingly, social media is cited as the most common venue cited for harassment, with over 75 percent of targets of online abuse stating that their experience took place over social media.

Online harassment affects all demographics, but not all equally. Women, girls, femmes, queer, and gender expansive people are subjected to a disproportionate amount of online harassment; and the harassment they receive is disproportionately sexual in nature. For example, three times as many women under the age of 35 as men under 35 have reported facing sexual harassment online.

Beyond the statistics, today's hearing is very personal to me. As a public figure and proud queer Latina, an abolitionist, a democratic socialist, I have gotten more than my fair share of rape and death threats and queer phobic hatred from anonymous individuals online. Last year, when the New York Post published seven lie-ridden hit pieces against me in one week, the resulting wave of racist, sexist, violent, threatening voicemails and emails was so bad

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that The City Council Security Office advised us to
close our district office for weeks on end and
forward all of our voicemails straight to them.

Here is just one example of many unacceptable
emails my staff received:

"Dear Lesbo Cunt, Here is what me and millions of
New Yorkers would cheer for, that one day soon you
are surrounded by a gang of subway *n-words, who rape
and beat you to death, then throws your rotting lesbo
carcass in front of a train. Good riddance to one
more freak."

As revolting as this sort of thing is, it is even
more disturbing that media figures, leading
politicians, and other powerful individuals see
whipping up this kind of hatred as the key to their
own wealth, fame, and ambition.

At today's hearing, the Committees look forward
to hearing from ENDGBV about the ways in which the
office has addressed gendered online harassment in
its work, and the support service structures in the
City to survivors of this violence.

The Committees also look forward to hearing from
advocates and survivors about the prevalence of

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online harassment and recommendations for how the
Council can address such harms.

I would like to thank members of the
Administration from ENDGBV (The Mayor's Office to End
Domestic and Gender-Based Violence) and CGE
(Commission on Gender Equity) - although, I know CGE
was unfortunately unable to make it today - along
with other interested stakeholders, members of the
public including advocates, and any individuals lived
experience who have taken the time to join us today.
We look forward to hearing from you. Finally, I
would like to thank my own staff Celia Castellan-
Chief of Staff; Madhuri Shukla, Legislative and
Budget Director; Jesse Myerson, Director of
Communications; as well as our committee staff, Sahar
Moazami Legislative and Committee Counsel; and Cristy
Dwyer, Senior Legislative Policy Analyst for their
work in this hearing.

And, now, I would like to turn it over to my
colleague, Chair Gutiérrez, for her opening remarks.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Chair Cabán.
And before I start, I just want to commend you and
your entire staff for having to receive all of that
and still continuing to serve your community, and

continuing to center community safety around everything that you do. I think you are doing an incredible job, and I am so sorry about all of that.

I am Chair Gutiérrez, Chair of the Committee on Technology. I am pleased to join colleague, Council Member Cabán, for this important hearing regarding *Online Harassment Against Women, Girls, And Gender Expansive People*.

In the digital age, online connectivity has created unprecedented opportunities for communication and collaboration. However, it is deeply troubling to witness the simultaneous eruption of online hate and harassment, a pervasive issue that transcends virtual boundaries. The impact of such behavior extends far beyond the digital realm, affecting individuals on a personal and professional level, and, in many cases, resulting in real world violence and harm.

Many forms of social interactions are shifting to the digital world through social media, online gambling, and virtual reality. Cyber bullying, cyber stalking, trolling, doxing, revenge porn, and AI generated deep fakes are but some of the increasingly common forms of online harassment. The rise of smart

homes and meta verses also carry new risks stemming from online connectivity. As technology evolves, we are confronted with new and complex issues in forms of harassment. And, as a society, we are lagging behind on addressing these harms.

Anyone can become a victim of online harassment from high school students, to small businesses, to elected officials. Research shows that women are often the most frequent targets of online harassment, with members of the LGBTQ+ community also reportedly far more likely to face online harassment. With the new reality of significant online connectivity and future promises of increasing technological sophistication, we need to be even more prepared to protect against online harassment.

Today, we are eager to learn from the Administration about the measures and initiatives they are employing to combat online harassment as well as the resources available to support victims. The Committees are also looking forward to hearing testimony from the public to better understand the present challenges and future implications around online harassment, as well as what we, as the Council, can do to mitigate and prevent those harms

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from occurring. We have a responsibility to promote digital ethics and responsible online behavior, to collectively create an environment in which diverse voices are heard, ideas are exchanged, and meaningful dialogue flourishes.

I want to express my sincere gratitude once again to Chair Cabán, for uplifting this important issue through this hearing, and including the Technology Committee. Thank you to Committee Counsel, Irene Byhovsky; Charles Kim, Legislative Policy Analyst; and my staff Anna Lehrer (sp?), and Anna Bessendorf for their efforts in putting this hearing together. I would also like to recognize Technology committee members, Council Member Riley, and Council Member Riley, and Council Member Brewer is here as well.

And I will now turn it over to committee counsel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chairs. Good morning, as a reminder, today is an in person hearing with the option of virtual testimony for the public. The Committees will be accepting registrations for testimony throughout the hearing. For those wishing to testify in person, please see the Sergeant At Arms, in the back of the hearing room, to fill out a

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testimony card, even if you have registered in
advance online.

For those testifying via Zoom, your name will be
called, and you will be prompted to unmute.

All those who wish to submit testimony, you may
do so via email testimony@council.nyc.gov.

We will now hear testimony from members of the
Administration. Will you please raise your right
hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
truth, and nothing but the truth, before this
committee, and to respond honestly to council member
questions?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I do.

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

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Good morning,
Chair Cabán, Chair Gutierrez, and members of the
Committees on Women and Gender Equity and Technology.
I am Saloni Sethi, First Deputy Commissioner of The
Mayor's Office To End Domestic and Gender-Based
Violence or ENDGBV. I am joined by Jennifer DeCarli,
ENDGBV's Deputy Commissioner for Family Justice
Centers and Survivor Support.

ENDGBV operates the City's five family justice centers and directly manages a contract portfolio of prevention and intervention programming.

Our office builds capacity for agency staff and community members to identify and respond to domestic and gender-based violence through outreach and training, and we are develop policies and best practices to strengthen the City's approaches to these issues.

We collaborate with city agencies, over 109 profit providers, community stakeholders, and people with lived experience to reduce barriers and ensure access to inclusive services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about online harassment against women, girls, and gender expense people.

Online harassment is troubling from form of gender of based violence that can include threats to personal safety, stalking, doxing, cyber exploitation, deep fakes, and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images. Online harassment can be perpetrated by strangers, friends, family, or intimate partners. As our world has shifted to more

online engagement, we have seen technology increasingly used as a tool to facilitate and perpetuate harmful and abusive behaviors.

Research studies indicate that women and gender expensive individuals are more likely to be targeted online and more likely to experience more severe forms of online harassment than cisgender men. A Plan International survey of over 14,000 young women and girls found that 58 percent of respondents have experienced online harassment, including abusive language and cyber bullying. Research by the Web Foundation and The World Association Of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts found that 84 percent of young women think the problem of online abuse is getting worse. For LGBTQ2+ youth, Black youth, and young women of color worldwide, the impact of gender-based harassment is compounded when they also experience harassment based on the other marginalized identities they hold.

Online harassment can create significant obstacles for women, girls, and gender expensive individuals who use online spaces for education, employment, entertainment, and community and civic engagement. The fear of harassment may lead

individuals to limit or avoid digital spaces altogether which can negatively impact their educational, professional, and social opportunities, and deter them from public life that occurs online.

Online harassment can also affect individuals' mental health and overall well-being. Continuous threats, humiliation, and invasion of privacy online can result in anxiety, depression, and other psychological distress.

Many of the prevention and the intervention tools we for have gender-based violence, more broadly, can be adapted to address online harassment. For example, early intervention programs like the City's ABC's of Healthy Relationships For Elementary Students and Early Relationship Abuse Prevention Program for middle school age students, teach young people about positive and consent driven interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and gender equity. The middle school program in particular includes conversations about how harmful gender dynamics play out online. Our Family Justice Centers partner with community based organizations that have a wealth of experience in addressing gender-based violence, including online harassment. Our partners

offer training and technology safety, and can assist individuals to safety plan around technology, identify spyware and other harmful tools that compromise digital safety, and explore civil and criminal remedies that may be available to address online harassment if the survivor wishes to pursue such legal actions.

These remedies include relief under New York City in New York State law, which includes the disclosure or threats to disclose intimate images as civil and criminal offenses.

Under New York State law, judges can order offenders and websites that host or disseminate nonconsensual intimate images to remove the offensive content.

When online harassment or not consensual, intimate image disclosure is committed by an intimate partner or family member, survivors can file for orders or protection in New York State Family Court and/or file a police report.

Survivors of nonconsensual intimate images disclosure may also be eligible for victim compensation from the state.

ENDGBV and our partners have supported the implementation of these laws with training and service coordination. We look forward to continued collaboration with the council, our sister city agencies, and our community based partners to support a safe online environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today, we welcome any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you very much. Okay, I would like to just start with asking some questions around programming. I know that you talked very broadly about some of the services that are available, and that they apply or are relevant for folks who are experiencing online or gender-based harassment. So, research shows that 41 percent of adults and 46 percent of teens in the US have experienced some form of online harassment. And women and gender expansive folks often report that they are specially targeted for online harassment due to their gender and other intersecting identities. And research shows that they are more likely to face more severe forms of online harassment, as was mentioned by you in your testimony.

Can tell us what your office is doing to work with New York City residents to address this distressing form of violence? And more specifically, does the Office have an specific programming around online harassment and the gendered impacts of such harassment?

And I have other questions, but I am talking about something that isn't just, Oh, this covers it, it applies to this," but is there a concentrated, specific programming that is available?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Go ahead and take that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Sure, so I can address that through some of the kinds of broad strokes that Saloni touched on in her testimony.

So, at our Family Justice Centers, if you come into the centers, and you are talking about online harassment, we, of course, do [INAUDIBLE] planning, as we do with every survivor who comes in. And we do training of our advocates to understand what technology abuse looks like. And we are actually able to safety plan around. Like, how do you know if you are sharing locations on your Google phone with folks? Right? Those kinds of really specific safety

planning questions. We explore whether or not someone wants to file a police report. Many survivors do not want to explore that. So, we also explore things like, what is a protection in Family Court, uh, the kind of penalties and legal remedies out there for harassment, and stalking, and aggravated harassment, uh, the laws specially directed at revenge porn, that are newer laws. So, we explore whether or not they want to kind of file orders of protections or police reports about that. And, then, we do have a unique partnership with Cornell Tech, we are really grateful to have that partnership. We have had it for a number of years, where they have volunteered students who are experts on technology, who do digital privacy safety checkups with clients who want to sit with somebody. And we do most of them remotely, post COVID, but they do have the ability to offer in person appointments for high risk cases - where they actually talk to somebody about what their phone looks like, how to protect themselves from sharing accounts, as I said. And they really just give them that kind of overall digital privacy overview as to how to protect their phones and themselves online. And, then, like I

1 said, they come in person and actually scan someone's
2 phone if it is a high risk case. So, we have been
3 really lucky to have that partnership. And they also
4 do regular ongoing trainings on what we call Tech
5 Safety 101, where they really make sure the
6 advocates... Because, being honest, I am not an
7 expert in technology, so we need someone to come in
8 who is an expert in technology, and who can really
9 sit and work with our advocates to be able to work
10 with survivors around this issue.

11
12 CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. I want to follow
13 up on that.

14 The Cornell Tech partnership, is that only
15 available if somebody goes through the Family Justice
16 Center? Can folks access it? Is it possible to
17 share that information with counsel offices, so that
18 folks who choose not to go to a Family Justice Center
19 still have access to that kind of support?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: That is a great
21 question. One of our biggest challenges with the
22 partnership is that it is volunteer. So, they have
23 capacity issues. They have worked to expand it, and
24 we can get back to you to confirm this. But, my
25 understanding is that in addition to taking referrals

through the FJC, they also take referrals from The Anti Violence Project (AVP). And I believe they have explored whether or not they can take direct referrals from a few other entities. But, very transparently, it is a capacity issue, because it is a volunteer program. So, we are aware that is a challenge, and we are working to try to help them offer it to be on the Family Justice Center...

[CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Well, have you thought about making it part of the City's infrastructure, and saying, hey, we are relying on these volunteers, but actually this should be part of the portfolio of

ENDGBV?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: So, we haven't considered that at this time. And right now, it is at Cornell Tech. The way they are doing it, is focused on their student learning as well. So, I think we are open to more conversations always, but it is not something that we have explored at this time.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And just to kind of give a little more background on the partnership, it really arose from research. So, these are two

1 amazing professors who do research on this specific
2 issue around digital privacy and online harassment.
3 And, so, they initially started as a research project
4 through the FJC, and then they saw that there is such
5 a need, and they grew that to these direct digital
6 privacy safety checkups. So, I think that is a great
7 point, and we can definitely follow back up with the
8 Council about that.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I think it would be really
11 important to incorporate into the infrastructure,
12 especially with how prevalent it is. And I just also
13 wanted to... The way that you have been framing or
14 referencing some of the programming that is
15 available, it seems to be geared directly towards
16 people who have some sort of a relationship with the
17 person who is causing the harm. But, we know that so
18 much of what people experience is often times
19 anonymous by different groups, by bots, by all of
20 these different things. In our research we found
21 that among those report being the target of online
22 violence, politics is cited as the top reason,
23 followed by race, ethnicity, and gender. So, when
24 that is the case, again, overwhelmingly you are
25 finding folks that you don't know are the source of

1 the harassment that you are experiencing. So, what
2 is available to those folks? Because it sounds like
3 what you talked about was pretty targeted to when the
4 person is known. And, in addition that, if it is
5 sort of this anonymous kind of hate that a person is
6 receiving - and you all cited some of the really,
7 really very real mental health, physical health
8 impacts of this - what does not knowing who this
9 person is do in terms of eligibility and access for
10 some of the things that you just talked about - or
11 the relevancy of some of the things that you have
12 just talked about?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think, a
15 couple of things: I think that you have identified
16 one of the biggest challenges of doing this work.
17 The people that are perpetrating this harm are often
18 anonymous. And think that also goes to why it ends up
19 being increasingly more violent, like online versus
20 in person, because people can remain anonymous.

21 I think in terms of supports, I think... Oh, I
22 think first when we talk about this broadly, and I
23 think so much of our office is that [INAUDIBLE]
24 awareness and education about issues of gender-based
25 violence. So, I think when we talk about it, it is

really important that we continue to drive home the fact that the root causes of this behavior exist everywhere, and this is just a new space where these behaviors are playing out. So, it is a form of gender-based violence no matter if it is somebody you know or somebody you don't know, it is just a new space, because we are living our lives online increasingly.

And in terms of the services, the services would be the same. So, if somebody came in, and especially when it comes to dealing with some of the emotion, mental health impacts of it, it wouldn't matter whether it is somebody you know or whether it is somebody you don't know. You can walk in, and if you are looking for counseling, if you are looking for that kind of support, if you want somebody to talk through your options, if you want to look at safety planning, even if you don't know who somebody is online, there might be steps you can take to maintain your own safety online.

So, I think in terms of that, that is really open to anybody and to everybody who would want to access those supports.

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DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I agree, I mean,
our office would consider that part of our gender-
based violence definition. And if somebody walked
into a FJC, they should be offered the same supports
and services. I think as Saloni mentioned, where it
gets challenging is when it is someone that you don't
know, that adds an added complication and challenge,
when you are advocating for certain civil, criminal,
and legal remedies. So, I think that is where the
challenge becomes (sic). But the services would
still be available.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And I think, I guess also my
point or question is, because of the challenges posed
by this happening in an online environment where
technology is changing very quickly, we can't
regulate the internet at the speed to which things
are changing, it seems like there is way too much of
a reliance or concentration on, Well, we'll do what
we can do explore what the civil and criminal legal
remedies are, which are primarily reactive. And I
think maybe our resources are perhaps better spent,
again, building out infrastructure that helps people
heal, that helps people protect themselves online,

and all of these other sort of preventive measures -
the education campaigns.

So, what is the staff's experience with the
dealing and comfortability with dealing with people
who are facing more anonymous, but serious online
harassment?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I think post-COVID
that the staff has comfortability has definitely
increased, and we have done a lot more to enhance the
trainings. I think you are exactly right, I think a
few years back, pre-COVID, we were not living as much
online - I mean we were, but not to the extent that
we are now. So, I know that we have recognized a
real need to do more in this space, and offer
rigorous, regular training on this so that folks can
actually do adequate technology abuse safety planning
beyond things like, let's change your phone number,
let's look at a new phone, but really try to dig
deeper on that. And that is why we offer the ongoing
trainings with Cornell Tech and try to accompany
technology facilitated abuse in our DV 101s. We are
always looking to enhance and do more. But, I think
that you raised good points. We have to prepare our
advocates to be able to have those conversations in

order to help somebody with that safety planning proactively, and not just as a reactive measure.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And what is the scope of the training? I know you mentioned the Cornell Tech Safety and the DV 101, is there any other trainings that you can share with us that are specifically around online gender-based violence?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, we have offered sporadic kind of trainings when we have had a real need from community. Saloni can talk a bit about those trainings that we have offered with youth through E [INAUDIBLE] to kind of do more training parents on understanding technology, so that they know what apps their teens are using, and how to help work with them. So, we have offered some trainings in that way as well.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: And will say the Cornell Tech is a specific tech abuse training. And then our ENDGBV 101, we talk about how technology can be used as a tool of abuse, and some of our other trainings, especially on sexual violence and stalking where we see a lot of online overlap, where whether it is online stalking behaviors or online sexualized violence, we go a little bit more in depth into the

online piece. And, as Jen mentioned, we have a lot of trainings for young people and parents. Right? So around things like tech abuse and digital safety with one of our partner organizations. We have using technology such as texting, social networking to bully, harass, stalk, or intimidate, that one of our providers organizations do. And we work very closely with another provider organization, Day One, that created online resources for young people and adults to safety plan around online engagement. So, we are really always pushing that, because I think the earlier we can get at prevent learning these behaviors in the first place, the better.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I want to ask you a little bit about the research that you all have available to you. Has there been any research accumulated through the Office to show the gendered impact of online harassment? I know you cited a couple of different things - quite broad - in the City, either as standalone research or integrated in wider research on gender-based violence?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: There has not been any research on online harassment in the City.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: So, do you think it would be helpful for the City to conduct this type of research to better quantify how prevalent online harassment is for people who reside in the City and what types of support they would like to see established on the City level?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think it is one of those things where we can always know more about all of these things in terms of what people's experiences are in the City. Yes, and I think, you know, and I think, again, like thinking about other places, like, potentially some of the work that The Department of Health already does around looking specifically at young people and their experiences, and maybe thinking about how this plays into that as well would be helpful.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. I mean, I think it would be worthwhile to conduct specific research on this and specifically get feedback from folks who are experiencing it on what it is that they need.

Do survivors of online harassment have access to programs like Home+? Are they eligible for those kinds of programs?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Yes, I think any survivors of gender-based violence would include online harassment and would be eligible.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And would the Office support the expansion of Home+ to include resources specific to survivors of online harassment, including tech support to help increase online privacy?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think that is not something that we have contemplated at this time, so we can back to you.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I am going to hand it over, I have more questions, but for now I will hand it over to Chair Gutiérrez for questions.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Chair. I want to acknowledge Council Member Kagan and Council Member Abreu who have also joined us.

Thank you so much for your testimony. And I appreciate your honesty about not being an expert in tech. And neither am I but I think the importance of is, like, our experiences in real life interactions, I think should have a bigger impact on the way that we talk about technology and access. So, in many ways you are the perfect person to speak about this.

I have a couple of questions that I want to just put out there. Specifically, you mentioned, obviously we were all online before the pandemic, but COVID did hit, and now we are relying on technology obviously a lot more.

Were you all as an office aware of any specific increased responses that you needed to have with regards to online harassment? I know there is no data. There is no data we can look at, but is there anything that you can share about that... If there was a shift during the pandemic?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I mean, it is anecdotal, when COVID hit, the FJCs had to become completely remote service centers, which we had never done before. All of our services were in person until that time post-Covid. But, during COVID, we had to shift to an online model. And we did a lot of work with survivors in hearing from them about how hard it was to connect with us and make sure they were connecting with us for a safe phone. Right? And that they had access to a safe phone. So, we developed a partnership with T-MOBILE during the pandemic, for example, where we were able to give survivors phones and link them to local T-MOBILE

stores to be able to get a safe phone. So, in that way, we were able to kind of dig in more and provide more services, so that they could actually be online safely. And we did see an uptick a bit, but again, because of capacity, you can't show that in the data. But as far as Cornell Tech and the services that folks need to be able to be safe online, we have seen a continued demand for those services.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And can I ask, and I know this is kind of like an area that we are all expanding on. Do you all acknowledge that in an intimate partner relationship, when one partner purposely withholding technology devices - a laptop, a phone - uh, purposely, is that considered online harassment? Or what is the classification there?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: It would be considered a form of tech abuse. And depending on what that was, you could also see it potentially being economic abuse, if somebody needs that computer to do work...

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Mm-hmm

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Right? So, I think we could put it in a lot of different places,

but we definitely consider that as part of the larger picture of what's happening.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And, I'm sorry, I am going to be jumping around a little bit. But, uhm, on the Cornell Tech Abuse training, thank you so much for educating us on that, uhm, do you know if it is offered in multiple languages?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I don't believe it is, but I can confirm that. It is primarily offered for the advocates that work through the FJCs and in the larger domestic violence prevention community. So, it is not geared toward, at the moment, clients, because it is voluntary. So, I believe it is just offered in English, but we can confirm that.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I see. And, so, it is offered to English for... Essentially for, like, the staff to be trained on that? And, then, so I think it is important with that to have it in multiple languages. And, so, that you're not sure of?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Let me just confirm with that and whether or not they offer it in another language.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And, then, my next question is related just to data collection. I know

that's hard, right? And also takes a lot more people coming forward, which does the opposite effect of what they want? It could lead to more harassment. I mean, when I get harassed online, I kind of just turn inward. I kind of find that the less I acknowledge and talk about it - and it is probably not good for my mental health or my staff's mental health - but, I really find that it... I don't know if there is a more fruitful way of responding to it. But, how have you all thought, in the two minutes since we asked the question, [LAUGHTER] last time, about what are some of the first steps we could possibly take on collecting data? And, then, the subset of that question is, do you know if it tech agencies worked with you all to provide any data for online harassment, specifically DOE, since there is more devices. And just curious, if that has not happened, are there other agencies that have shared that information?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I will let Saloni take the second part of that question. But, for the first part of the question, we do collect, with client's permission, we collect information when you present at a Family Justice Center, just basic

screening and service category information. And one of the service categories that we collect, is whether or not you were provided with services related to tech abuse, so we do have that data. So, if somebody came in and was sharing with an advocate that they wanted help around technology abuse, we would check a box in our database around that, so that we could ensure that we were offering all of the appropriate services - such a referral to Cornell Tech, or possibly exploring a Family Court order of protection, or talking about other remedies. So we do have the data, but, again, that is someone coming into an FJC, which not everyone is wanting to do, or perhaps, in disclosing that at the front.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: And I do think ,you know, we are definitely open to partnering with our sister city agencies. I think two things, one thing, ,you know, in the two minutes since the question was first asked, I do think one thing that we really do want to say, is that even without the data, we acknowledge it is a problem.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Mm-hmm, sure.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Right? So, I think the data is helpful, but it is not that we are saying that there is not a problem because there's no data. We know this is a problem. And we know that it's a challenge. And I think, thinking about DOE in particular, and thinking about ,you know, their Respect For All curricula, and The Dignity For All Students Act, I think that that is something that are kind of aware of and do explore kind of how a lot of the behavior that plays out in school, also plays out online in terms of bullying behavior. And we can definitely follow up.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, thank you. And, so, I am just going to ask, but maybe you will let me know, because I know from the opening statement, some of the data that you pulled is from other institutions. But, do you all have a sense of how many people here in the City are affected by online harassment?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: My guess is that it would be similar to the other statistics...

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: But, we really can't say. More than should be.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And do you all have a sense if online harassment has increased specific to migration status?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: We actually don't have that information, but it is a good question.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. My last question is related to what was in your testimony... page five, I think we all have copy, so, thank you for kind of sharing state and city law and kind of like what are some of the resources available for folks. Can you speak to how the law protects folks who are victims of repeated... I mean it is so fast. It happens so fast. And so is there something specific for folks when it is kind of repeated across multiple platforms? And then, can you all share in your expertise how long it takes for a judge to make that call of calling for a website to remove content, and how long that takes for it to come down?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, the first question around the different remedies, so about whether or not there is an ability to address repeated harassment in those cases. So, our penal

law has stalking as the main way you would get at
those... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And can you... And I'm
sorry to interrupt you...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: That's okay...

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I should have asked this
at the top, can you just also expand the differences
between stalking, and doxing, and cyber bullying,
just so that... Like, kind of the different forms,
so that we are all on the same page.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Sure, so as far as
like the criminal and civil legal remedies go they
are not going to match up with the types of abuse
that we are talking about. They are much broader.
So, in the criminal and civil legal remedy realm,
you're going to explore harassment second, which is a
very low level violation offense. It doesn't even
warrant an arrest. It is like causing annoyance and
alarm. Then you are going to explore the different
degrees of stalking. Stalking is repeated behavior,
but it doesn't have to be repeated over days or
weeks, it can be literally something that happened
repeatedly in the day or hours. So, you are going to
explore those remedies, and you are going to explore

something called aggravated harassment, which is threats made online or in person. So, it is like a broad... It is like the criminal remedies are not an exact fit for some of these... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: For sure.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And you could explore getting an order of protection through Family Court for those different types of offenses. And, so, whether or not a judge is going to do that and when they will do that, is so dependent on the judge... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Does it happen often, from folks ,you know... [CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: From my anecdotal experience, I have not heard of it happening often, but I know our advocates who are going to testify after us... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: will be able to share more specifics on all of that.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think a lot of it.. Again, I think the anonymity component comes into play here as well, which is kind of separate

from the nonconsensual distribution intimate images
kind of law.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yes, and I should
have, yes, I forgot to mention the biggest change in
the law, which was that specifically getting at
nonconsensual intimate images and sharing those,
revenge porn - most of think of. But, our advocates
have done an amazing job advocating for those laws.
And to me is like a specific form of online
harassment. Right? It is not the broader kind of
online harassment. And that really is the only
specific type of relief we have right now that gets
at the types of behavior we are talking about.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, and, then, can you
just explain the definitions as best as possible, or
the differences between cyber exploitation and deep
fakes?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Sorry [INAUDIBLE]...
[LAUGHING]... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: [LAUGHING] as the non tech
expert that you have already admitted you are not...
[CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: [LAUGHING] As I
shared before, I am not a tech expert. But, I know

our advocates are there who are probably

[INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So, we'll [INAUDIBLE]...
[CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: explain this...

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah, we can let them
explain...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yeah, I mean, I
think... I think that the revenge porn laws tried to
kind of get in on this, because, as I said before,
the remedies we had are very broad and they really
were not able to be specifically used in these types
of situations. And, so, the revenge porn law was
really about trying to hone in on some of that. But
I am sure our advocates will be able to speak more to
that.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, wonderful.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I just want to acknowledge
that we have been joined by Council Member Stevens.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And then, I would
acknowledge that Council Member Brewer has a
questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I have three
questions. The first is, just to walk me through,

uh, I am getting harassed. I don't know who to call.

So, if you call PD, I work a lot with seniors, seniors are getting killed on the phone and ,you know, "send money" to this event for a nonexistent something, and they are all spending their money on this. It is horrific. Neighbors go to the cops. The cops don't know what to do. Then I call FTC, I call a DA, a call [INAUDIBLE]... Lost, absolutely lost. So, can you walk me through, that is question number one, what happens. Because I assume most people call the police department.

Second question is, on young people, which is meant in middle school, I have a feeling that there is just not enough support for those programs. So, I wanted to know what we need for the middle school, if not younger.

And, then, the third question is, uh, on the Family Justice Centers, just what is the percentage of the online abuse as opposed to maybe just general?

Those are my three questions.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, with elders, I know, Council Member Brewer, that is definitely something that we are seeing coming to our Family Justice Centers. So if somebody walked into a Family

Justice Center or called our Family Justice Centers for support, we would explore what options they wanted to take. Honestly, the first thing we do is try to connect them to one of the City contracted Elder Abuse programs that we partner with... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: For the seniors, yeah, I am not talking about [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Exactly. So, they are really the experts on working with elders. And, so, we would try to get them a case manager through those programs. They do home visits, because obviously it is not always easy for an elder to walk into one of our centers [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They're not coming.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, we would try to connect them to one of those programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And then those advocates would explore the different options. And you are right, it is complicated, because, you know, NYPD will often say they need to work with the District Attorney's Office to investigate it. We do,

at each of our District Attorney's Office, have DA
that specializes in elder... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But... But... But it
this also for the same for the online?

[INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Exactly...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Same [INAUDIBLE]...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: All the same, yes.
So, that would be considered a type of elder abuse...
[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, PD call... That...
You call PD as somebody who is being abused, what
happens? That is what I am trying to understand.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, PD would explore
what criminal remedy they have to possibly make a
police report, that would then get forwarded to the
District Attorney's Office.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. All right.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And what I was
saying before, is our criminal remedies are not super
specific on this. So, it is like trying to fit that
behavior into a specific remedy. And sometimes they
would work with the District Attorney's Office

depending on that borough to consult the case and see
what remedy could possibly fit... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Because you are also a
little bit at the mercy of the person at PD being
sympathetic. I have to tell you that. Okay.

The person who is there for Safe Horizons, did
they deal with this or they don't do... They don't
do... They do?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: They do. So, Safe
Horizon has, uh, as you know The Crime Victim
Assistance Program (CVAP)... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: They have crime
victim advocates in each of the precincts... Ct

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They are not there 24/7
though.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yeah, they have
different shifts and different times. But, they are
charged with reaching out to every crime victim, uh,
after [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And this would cover...
This would cover their...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: This would cover
the...

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Portfolio?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Then... So, my
other question, young people, schools, et cetera?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Yeah, for sure.

And, I think, uhm, again I think we... We can follow
up, and we can ,you know, reach out to DOE. We are
not the only program doing this in schools. This is
sort of [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-
TALK]

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: program that's
definitely broader than us. Uh... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many school do you
cover?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: We have in...
In middle schools we are in a 128 middle schools so
far.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think that for
us is... We have trained over 55,000 students,
teachers, and staff. So, I think those strong
numbers. We can definitely follow up and see what
else is out there. Because, I... We are not the

only sort of game in town when comes to that. And,
then, you had a final question, which was... [CROSS-
TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think it was trying to
figure out, uh... [CROSS-TALK]

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: The percentage
of the FJCs. I think it... So, it is challenging,
because I think, as Jen mentioned, some our tech
abuse, especially the Cornell Tech, is limited by
capacity, so it doesn't really... It doesn't really
match kind of the other numbers at the FJCs. But, we
can sort of follow up and see what we are seeing.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do the companies help you
at all? You mentioned T-MOBILE, Verizon... I don't
know if Verizon does anything. Because these
companies, they're not participating in any
presentation from what I can tell.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, we have, as I
mentioned, have a partnership with T-MOBILE...
[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: T-MOBILE...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: They also now
recently have put Assurance Wireless Reps at our FJCs
one a week, uh, to enroll folks who need phones. And

we have had a partnership with Norton LifeLock in the past to kind of like be able to offer those to survivors. And, then we have the partnership with Cornell Tech. Uh... [CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I'm trying...
[CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: [INAUDIBLE]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: to think prevention. In other words, Verizon, everybody else, are they doing something on the preventive end, "This is what you should not be doing."? I don't get any of that in the mail. Are you working with the companies?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: We are not... We are not working on... I think that is a great idea to kind of explore other partnerships.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right. Okay.

And, then, the only other question, back to the data, what are you doing about the data? I know you said it's a challenge, but is there some long term plan for data?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, we are always looking at the data application that we use at the FJCs [TIMER CHIMES] in seeing what else we should capture that would be helpful, you know, when

advocating for future programming. So, with this hearing, we did look at the tech abuse numbers as I said. And I think we had 506 folks specifically helped with that this year. But we can get back and confirm that with you. So, I think we just need to keep looking at that and seeing what else we can explore if folks are willing to share that with us...

[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And doesn't... Should PD also be involved in the data issue?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, for our FJC application, it is just the application [INAUDIBLE]

...[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, but shouldn't they be pushed to be involved with... You are one agency. You know, like, one mayor. You know? And all that stuff...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, I think you need to... We can't speak for PD, but for our data collection efforts, we need to look at what we are collecting to see how it could be used to advocate for more programming.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But you could push PD to do that, right? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And I will pass it over to
Council Member Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Good morning. I just
have a few questions, in just thinking about... And
I feel like my colleague, Council Member Brewer
alluded to it. It is just around, what coordination
do you guys have with NYPD, and when these things are
coming in? Because some of the concerns that I have
heard is the lack of sensitivity or kind of brushing
some of the incidents off or blaming victims when
they have come in. And I know that Safe Horizon is
there and things like that, but, I have heard that
this is still continuing to happen. So, what
coordination or trainings are happening in
collaboration?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Sure, so, I can
speak with the coordination we do through the Family
Justice Center, and Saloni can talk about from our
broader coordination with NYPD.

So, at the Family Justice Centers, as I believe
most of you know, we have a specifically trained
domestic violence police officer on site. If
survivors want to make a report to them, they can.
They also can follow up with the precinct on existing

reports. [BACKGROUND NOISE] They report to the Chief of Departments Domestic Violence unit. And we do a lot of coordination with them for reports made through the centers. As well as, uh, we have then follow up a lot. Reports may be made through the precincts, where they are not sure what's going on in the case. And, then, we offer training. So, for example, we just organized a survivor panel for NYPD to have survivors go out and speak at their annual conference for domestic violence officers. So, we had two survivors speak to over 900 officers about their experience with PD, both positive and from challenging experiences. And they were really receptive to that through the Domestic Violence Unit. So, we have been looking at more and more ways to share survivor feedback with PD, which we have been... Which has been great. Like, that has been something new that we have been doing. And then our office also has a training advisory committee, which Saloni can speak about.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Yes, so, it's actually... It's a Council mandated NYPD Training Advisory Committee that we are working with them on around all issues of domestic and gender-based

1 violence. So, we have been supporting that work and
2 connecting PhD to some of our advocates and
3 organizations that are in the space, as well as
4 having survivors inform this. And we are actually
5 going to be looking at trainings across the board.
6 Because, I think part of is no matter what the scale
7 is, how you deal with the person in front of you, it
8 [INAUDIBLE] whether it is about trafficking or sexual
9 violence or gender-based violence or online
10 harassment, the response to the person is important.
11 And I think we are kind of looking at all kinds of...
12 at all our trainings see how we can improve and
13 strengthen them.

14
15 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: The next question I have
16 is just, do you know any partnerships that the City
17 might have like the social media companies regarding
18 sexual harassment and things like that online? What
19 does that partnership look like? And if we don't, is
20 there is there a path for us to start working with
21 the social media... the bigger social medial
22 platforms?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: So, actually,
24 earlier this year, The Department of Mental Health,
25 DOHMH, held its first social media convening, just

1 about the impact of social media, especially on young
2 people, as a public health issue. And, so I think
3 ,you know, a lot of that convening was thinking about
4 convening was thinking about how the City can do
5 more, just recognizing that especially for our young
6 people, their lives are taking place online, and it
7 is not really separate from their day to day lives.
8 And we cannot really think about it as an add-on. It
9 really is their day to day life. So, we happy to
10 follow up I think and kind of keep you posted on
11 where that goes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But, yeah, I think is a
14 convening is nice, but [INAUDIBLE] talking, but I am
15 saying specifically working with the social medial
16 platforms. I think ,you know, especially when we are
17 looking at, like, the City such as [INAUDIBLE] and a
18 lot of things are driven by social media and
19 different things. So, I am thinking how are we
20 looking at these partnerships in agreement? Because
21 it is a partnership, right? Like, they are making
22 money, their advertisements, and all of these things
23 that are happening. How are we working to make sure
24 that the standards are up to our liking and things
25 like that? And, so, is there any type of partnership

of conversations with the bigger social medial
platforms?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Not that we are
aware of. But, I will say, again, at that convening
they did have people from Facebook and Google talking
about things that could happen to kind of improve
positive online engagement. Right? So, there might
be more to come.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I would definitely love
for us to know of explore that route a little bit
more. But, those are all of the questions that I
have, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you, uh, I would
actually love to... Because you started asking some
of the questions that I was hoping to, and to build
on that a little bit, uh, just... And it sounds like
e there aren't but, I think I would encourage there
to be this sort of dialogue with some of the bigger
social media apps around employment practices.
Right? Like we are seeing some of these big
companies call a bunch of workers that are
specifically charged with being able to scree posts,
take things down, uh, take disciplinary action
against accounts that are being abusive. And is

there a point of leverage that the City has in negotiating some of those things with this larger apps - to the council member's point that they are obviously making a good amount of money.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: None that we are aware of and ENDGBV, but we can follow up.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Uhm, and, then there was something that Chair Gutiérrez said that really resonated, and I am wondering how you all are thinking about this. But ,you know, I think specially when it comes to harassment that is primarily being lodged online, sometimes, especially, in the political sense, it is very coordinated. Right? We have seen around the country there has been a really stark increase in political violence against women of color, particularly. And that doesn't just include... I mean, they were tracking the numbers against women color elected officials, but that does not include just those folks. We have advocacy organizations, and organizers, and leaders in movements, women rights movement spaces that are the subject of this harm. And the point of the attack is to be like a deluge where it's a waterfall. You can't see anything beyond the attack. I know...

And I am speaking from personal experience, you can't see anything beyond the attacks. You're just like drowning in it. And, so, you feel completely separated from your community. Like, I know that in my community, I have a ton of support. But, when there are these cycles of really, really vicious violent attacks, you literally cannot see any of it, you can't breathe, you are just drowning in it. And you feel very alone to the point where you don't think that there is anything to access. And, so, the gap that I am hearing here, also is that, like, even somebody with the kind of access I have, I would have never thought to a gender-based violence organization or to an area in our governmental infrastructure to get some support. And, so, I think is what is needed is really on the most basic level, like a PSA campaign to tell people that this is a thing, help people get isolated around it, and encourage them to seek different spaces where they can get support. And, so my question is, if that is something that you all could commit to starting to think about and build out? Because, quite frankly, I think your numbers would be a lot different if people even in the moment made the connection that they could go somewhere.

Because, you feel utterly helpless. You feel like there is nothing and nowhere to go.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I think this is something... Again, I think that we and our partner orgs have done a lot of work on in the past few years, is really how to we integrate this conversation into our larger picture? And we talk about gender-based violence and domestic violence right? Because, when I hear you speaking, the first I think I go to is, isolation has always been a tactic of abuse. Right? And that is the same thing, just in a different space. So, I think ,you know, we are really grateful to all of our partners to kind of continuing sort of to increase this, the awareness of this form of abuse in part of our larger outreach efforts and our work.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I want to ask you a little bit about gender expansive folks. Because I know that they are experiencing online harassment due to their gender. Are there specific programs aimed at assisting specifically gender expansive folks?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, we partner with community based organizations that would say that they specialize in working with gender expansive

survivors, primarily AVP through the FJCs. But as far as specific programming, the programming I mentioned before that we offer is offered to all survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you.

For the... And I am going to go back a little bit, I'm sorry that I am jumping around. But, uhm, going back to some of the online... The programming and the training, is there... Are you all accounting for and putting out different programming for those... And these are just quick yes or no questions, but online harassment that is targeting youth facing gender-based violence? And, then, you know other programming for focusing on specifically sexual harassment in an online environment? Or a specific program focused on stalking as an online experience? Like, are there... Do have those kinds of specific - hyper specific programming available?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: In terms of the training, yes. We do... We look at different segments of the population with different lived experience to see how they are different.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And with the services it really depends on ,you know, as we

mentioned before, if you are saying you are a victim of stalking or this has happened ,you know, where it has been revenge porn, and sexual violence, then we are going to explore those remedies that we have available to address those types of specific types of violence.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And in terms of outreach programs historically, and I am talking about like largescale sort of public service announcements and that kind of outreach, have there in the past been public campaigns that provide information, risks, and ways to seek redress, specifically around online forums?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: Not that ENDGBV has said.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And, again, is that something that you would consider?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I mean, yeah I definitely think we can have further conversations about that.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And, then, I guess, just to wrap up before passing it over to our colleagues again, I think it is clear that there are gaps. And we are learning a lot of... When you think about

those gaps, what are the limitations that the Office faces addressing gender-based online harassment, and what types of resources would be needed to ensure that your office moving forward could adequately address online harassment?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: I mean, I think we have addressed some of the limitations and challenges. The anonymity is a huge one, right? It is kind of like when we are addressing, who are we talking about where? And I think a lot of the other issues kind of in terms of even getting engagement, I think you all mentioned from the major players on the tech side, right? Even getting people to take things off websites and all of that, all of those will continue to be challenges for us.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I think on the FJC side, it is continuing to be rigorous about the training we are providing, so that maybe somebody I can sit in front of you and be a tech expert. Right? I think we need to keep looking at our trainings and our partnerships. I think we need to keep looking at the data we are collecting. You know making sure that when we are doing outreach that we are talking about technology facilitated abuse, so that someone

would know. And, I'm so sorry for what you and your colleagues have experienced. I wouldn't want someone to know that they could come into a center or call us for that kind of support. So, I think what we can commit to is looking at what we are doing and seeing if we can kind of address some of those awareness kind of like... raise more awareness about this, and the specific types of abuse.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And being able to have multiple places to go, because... And we have brought this up in other hearings where we have been together, but there are lots of reasons why somebody wouldn't want to walk into a precinct or a Family Justice Center, because it is co-located in a precinct. And, so , there certainly seems like there is a gap in kind of the options of infrastructure available. And I think the chair had another question.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I just have one question, thank you all.

I think piggybacking off of what Chair Cabán said which is how do people even know that this exists? That this support exists? And I think based on the data that we do have, unfortunately, gender expansive

folks, women, women of color are constantly dealing with multiple forms of harassment. And, so it really becomes... I'm preaching to the choir here, but you become very conditioned to kind of going about your day in this really dangerous way. But, do you all know if there is a specific way that someone calling in 311 needs to report this as a form of tech abuse? Like is it something that they need to say specifically? Or what is the... How is 311 working with the agency to better support folks to need to know that you exist?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: We can definitely follow up on that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yes, we work with 311, and we have trained them before. If there are certain key words mentioned, they refer them to the hotline, to the Family Justice Centers, to our online portal NYCHope, so as far as those buzz words around technology facilitated abuse, we can follow up with them, because we work with them regularly on those types of referrals.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, thank you, that was it.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: And I believe Council Member Holden had questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chairs. Just a follow up on the PSA, because I think that is a very good idea. I have suggested that in a number of areas. But, my biggest hurdle, when I get somebody, a constituent calls me and says they are being harassed - various forms. It is always on the local level and the precinct level that I have the biggest hurdles with - to try to convince them to get involved. Then I have to call the DA. So, it is going know that I can go to you and call your office. And certainly... How do I get around this? When does the person who is harassing cross the line into criminal? Is it when they have threatened violence? Or they just keep harassing? Now, more often than not, from the precinct level I got, "well, they didn't threaten to hurt the person" "they didn't threaten violence, so we can't get involved." Is that really true?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, what we could do, and I can make sure, Council Member, that you have my information, we can explore with the officers that we have on site whether or not it meets the

1 statutory definitions. So, repeatedly threatening
2 violence is part of the aggravated harassment
3 definition. But stalking is repeated behavior
4 causing annoyance and alarm, and I am not quoting it
5 correctly, right, but it is still those kinds of
6 elements. And, so, we could look to see if the
7 behavior the constituent is reporting would actually
8 fit into other types of civil or criminal statutes.
9 And if the harassment is actually from an intimate
10 partner or family member, they could actually go into
11 Family Court, which does not require making a police
12 report or an arrest to try and get an order of
13 protection that way. So, I would be happy to share
14 my information... [CROSS-TALK]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's good to know,
17 though, I have your office to go to, both offices.
18 But on the... I just want to follow up on the 311 h
19 and harassments, because that is happening a lot to
20 my seniors especially. And as a senior, I have been,
21 even before I got on the Council, I felt that there
22 is a lot of harassment for seniors online especially,
23 because they are not that savvy. Some don't even
24 have a computer or don't even have a smart phone.
25 But they are still being harassed by people calling

1 them - wanting to buy their homes, scams. There is
2 not a day that goes by that I don't get a complaint
3 from a senior saying, what do I do? What I do in
4 this case? So, we can really refer seniors to your
5 agency?
6

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: Yes, you can refer
8 them to us, and we will partner with our contracted
9 elder abuse programs. Because I think what you are
10 speaking to, right, is the loneliness and social
11 isolation, right? And so some of these seniors, they
12 are happy to be talking to somebody online, not
13 recognizing that that could be abusive behavior. And
14 then they are giving out personal information. So we
15 can definitely work with our elder abuse partners to
16 specifically what kind of programming they are
17 offering that could address some of this. So, I will
18 share my card with you afterwards, and we can work on
19 [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right, and just one
21 other... I think I have a few minutes. One other q
22 about training on the precinct level, because we were
23 told that the NCOs (Neighborhood Coordination
24 Officers) were trained in this kind of situation.
25 Then we are finding that it's not true. And the

second part of it, we have two detectives in my precinct, my main precinct, that are domestic violence officers or detectives. Are they trained even to know about the online or domestic harassment online or technology?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So, I can't speak to the specific training that NYPD is offering. But, I know that we work with domestic violence officers. That is who is on site at our Family Justice Centers - a specific FJC officer, and they do meet with survivors at our centers that have a report in online harassment.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But, what about... Because, there are a lot of officers in the NCO program, are they trained?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: We cannot speak to NYPD's trainings.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But is it offered to them? Does your office say we need to train, come in and train the NCOs? Because that is what they are supposed... They told me, when this program first started, that they were told, they know how to solve these situations where a neighbor is harassing a neighbor, somebody is being harassed online, they

were trained. And I just want to know if that was really true.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: NYPD has its own internal training academy that [INAUDIBLE]...
[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: They don't answer to you? They don't even consult with you?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: As part of our training advisory work, I think this is what we are trying to do, is really get a sense of where we can plug into some of their trainings to make them more robust.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: And, then who we work with closely are the domestic violence officers through the DV unit. And my understanding is that the NCOs are not part of that unit. So, that is why we are saying we cannot speak to the type of training they have. But we know that that all get training...
[CROSS-TALK]

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, we will try to get to the bottom of it. Thank you so much for that.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I think I am going to take a little bit of advantage as the chair to editorialize just a little bit. But speaking from my experience

as a public defender practicing in court, the criminal legal system in the penal code was not made to cover these things. It is one thing to charge somebody, it is *exponentially*... And I am not... Listen, as somebody who has maybe a different view of the utility of a criminal system to begin with, but in the practicality of how it works in court, *almost* impossible to prove these cases in court, because of being able to prove certain elements beyond a reasonable doubt. The origin, right? Especially if it is specifically online, being able to tie it back to a specific person. People being savvy enough that if they say something like, "I will kill you" versus "I hope you get killed" being the difference in being able to fulfill an element of the penal law. And, so, you know, I caution against throwing so much weight, time, energy, and resources into that avenue, when I think perhaps resources could be better spent on supporting survivors, on people knowing how to be able to protect themselves, on changing culture and healing prior trauma, so that people who are harming to do not harm. I think it is much better use of our time, energy, and resources to be proactive in that manner. Because, these cases are almost *impossible*

1 to prove in court, especially when you are talking
2 about your run of the mill county DA's office with
3 millions of cases. And I will tell you right now,
4 nobody is putting a ton of resources into these
5 cases. And a lot of times if there is a lot if tech
6 involved, they are like, (CLAPPING HANDS) how do we
7 get rid of this case real quick - because we don't
8 want to put real time into it. It is the same for
9 forged documents, and anything that is like deep web,
10 tech, uh, those kinds of things, we get rid of those
11 cases real quick, because nobody wants to work them
12 up.
13

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: I totally hear you,
15 and those are the challenges we encounter every
16 single day at the Family Justice Centers. My only
17 point to say back, Chair, is that we struggle,
18 because so many of these survivors come into our
19 centers, and they want us to explore all of those
20 options. And we are transparent with them, that it
21 is challenging for all of the reasons that you
22 mentioned. But, from practicing a client-centered
23 way of services, we do need to explore them. Right?
24 And, so, that is why I mentioned them as something we
25 explore, because survivors are asking us for those.

But I completely hear you that ,you know, there also needs to be a focus on prevention and training and healing.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: And I don't think that we are suggested that we [INAUDIBLE]...
[CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: No, no, no! [BACKGROUND NOISE]
and I am not saying that you are. And I think part of the issue is, too, is that when survivors go into a space, there is just... You are aware of the small universe of what is available to you. Survivors are so used to thinking that that is the only avenue that is available to them. I mean, overwhelmingly, and I think this has come up in prior hearings, but in surveys of survivors - and we all have sort of an... because we have been socialized in this way, a desire to for punishment, for discipline that is very, very real. But, there are enough studies and research to show that overwhelmingly, survivors report wanting several other things well above that. And that is to heal from their harm, to never be hurt in the same way again, and for nobody else to be hurt the same way they are. And that requires the use of different

tools and strategies to be able to create that kind of environment.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SETHI: And I think that is very much like ENDGBV's overall approach. There is no real one size fits all for survivors. And we try to have as many options as we can for as many survivors as we serve... [CROSS-TALK]

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DECARLI: So many survivors come in and don't want any of those remedies. And then we try to connect them to mental health counseling and other social service supports. We are not here to push anything on anybody. We are here to offer good, accurate information about the resources and help people with safety planning and get them connected to the resources that are there - both criminal, civil legal and non-criminal civil legal.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. I just want to say that I appreciate and would love to be able to stay in conversation about building out more of those resources in some of those other areas. And thank you for taking the time to testify. I think those are all of our questions. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATION: Thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY
2 JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chairs, and thank
4 you very much members of the administration.

5 We will now hear testimony from the public. I
6 would like to remind everyone that I will call up
7 individuals in panels, and all testimony will be
8 limited to three minutes.

9 I would like to note that written testimony can,
10 which will be reviewed in full by committee staff,
11 may be submitted to the record for up to 72 hours
12 after the close of this hearing by emailing to
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

14 For our first panel, I would like to call up
15 Annie Seifullah and Anne Glatz.

16 You may begin when ready.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Is anybody for ENDGBV staying?
18 I just want to acknowledge that there are no members
19 of the administration left in the room.

20 ANNE GLATZ: Good morning my name is Anne Glatz,
21 and I am a civil attorney with Sanctuary For
22 Families, New York State's largest nonprofit
23 organization dedicated exclusively to servicing
24 victims of gender-based violence. We are so grateful
25 for the opportunity to testify today on this critical
subject.

With an ever increasing pervasiveness of social media and other online platforms, mobile phones, and smart devices, Sanctuary staff have seen the lives of survivors of intimate partner violence destroyed when abusers have engaged in relentless technology, facilitated abuse. Abusers are increasingly using digital technologies to use abuse, exploit, harass, and threaten their victims. This type of abuse includes hacking, spyware, stalking, spoofing, identity theft, impersonation, sexual extortion, and cyber sexual abuse.

CSA is the dissemination or threat of dissemination of nude or sexually explicit images or video without the victim's consent. The images may be authentic images of the victim, but they may also include startling realistic photo shopped or deep fake images.

Cyber sexual abuse is reaching epidemic proportions, and its victims are overwhelmingly women and girls. CSA also disproportionately impacts LGBTQIA+ individuals who are roughly four times more likely to be victims of CSA than heterosexual individuals.

Technology facilitated abuse is highly psychologically injurious to its victims, who experience heightened levels of PTSD and suicidal ideations. In one study, over half the victims contemplated suicide as a result of CSA. It is also a serious threat to their safety offline - studies have found that over 30 percent of CSA victims were harassed or stalked outside of the internet by users who saw the material online.

It is critical that judicial and law enforcement systems are given the tool and resources that they need to effectively respond to cyber sexual abuse to protect survivors, and to empower them to move into lives of safety and security. As such, Sanctuary urges The City Council to join in several proposals to support survivors of CSA.

First, it is vital to implement mandatory trainings on tech abuse for professionals who interact with abuse survivors, including law enforcement, Supreme, Criminal, and Family court judges and staff in DA's offices.

Second, we urge the Council to earmark funding to support tech facilitated abuse victims. Other than Sanctuary, unfortunately, there are virtually no

victim services agencies providing comprehensive, ongoing services to these victims. Victims needs both specialize legal assistance and tech safety planning to minimize the dangers of stalking and harassment through mobile phones and other smart devices.

Third, we urge City Council to modify the existing New York City Code 10-180 [TIMER CHIMES]... May I have another minute? Thank you... Disclosure of an intimate image to accord with the state unlawful dissemination statute by removing the problematic element of "covered recipient", which requires that the defendant have received the intimate image directly from the victim or created the image themselves. This element has proven to be extremely difficult to prosecute.

Finally, we urge the Council to support legislative changes to strengthen statutory language on cyber sexual abuse to align with recent New York State legislation, which now includes "images created by digitization or deep fake images.

We are profoundly grateful for Chair Tiffany Cabán for her extraordinary leadership and support of survivors of domestic violence and related forms of gender-based violence, and her advocacy on this and

many other critical issues. We also thank Chair Gutiérrez and the Committee on Technology for recognizing that the miracles of 21st century technology are, unfortunately, accompanied by a host of dangerous new threats. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

ANNIE SEIFULLAH: Good morning, Chairs Cabán, Gutiérrez, and members of the committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for holding this important hearing. There is no way I can fit all of the things that I have to say in three minutes. But I will do my best, and I will provide written testimony.

My name is Annie Seifullah. I am a civil attorney in private practice, and I am here in the capacity of my volunteer job as the co-chair of the New York Cyber Abuse Task Force. The New York City Task Force includes representatives from Sanctuary for Families and many other legal services, as well as private attorneys, such as myself. Collectively we represent hundreds of individuals across New York City, as well as other areas of New York State. Many of the people we represent are women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, because they, as we have said

in many of the materials you will hear today, are disproportionately impacted by technology facilitated abuse in all of its forms.

he Cyber Abuse Task Force has four main areas of focus:

One is to advocate for comprehensive laws and policies such as expanding civil remedies, which can... There are so many loopholes in the current ability for someone to get an order of protection through Family Court, and we would like to talk more about how to expand those. And also looking at regulatory and licensing structures that are under the purview of the City Council, which could be used to pressure and leverage change in the tech companies - which is sorely needed.

We also support judges, attorneys and service providers, for example, the taskforce was responsible for the first ever two-part tech abuse training for judges, which is part of the Judicial Institute of Training that judges can watch and use as part of their CLE requirements. Those are accomplishments of the taskforce, which is a volunteer collective of people who are really in the weeds and working survivors of this type of abuse.

In the short moment that I have remaining, I do want to direct comments about changes that can be made at the New York City Department of Education.

Again, the task force has represented *hundreds* of students who have faced severe cyber harassment, largely girls, and as we have mentioned, who have come under the attack formally known as revenge porn, we refer to replace that term with image based sex abuse. We understand that it the term people are used to using, so often times we offer a bridge by saying, image based sexual abuse, formally known as revenge porn. But, imagine the devastation of having your nude and sexually explicit photos and videos leaked to your classmates.

Members of the task force, myself including, have represented countless girls who have been impacted by this type of abuse, usually enacted by a boy who they once dated.

I can tell you as an attorney, as a former DOE principal, and a survivor [TIMER CHIMES] of image based sexual abuse myself - If I could have one more minute - that all levels of the City's school system fall short when dealing with this form of gender-based violence. Officials are not equipped to

properly investigate, respond to, or preserve
evidence when dealing with image based sexual abuse.

We see three patterns on the task force:

One, victims are blamed when they become a victim
of this horrific type of abuse.

Second, when the depicted victim is under the age
of 18, the material actually constitutes child sex
abuse material, also known as child pornography.

Making it a federal crime for any adult, even a well-
intentioned educator to view, possess, or share it
during an investigation as the school based level.

As you can imagine, school based staff who do not
know how to handle this material might completely
inadvertently illegally view or possess material that
is federal crime.

And, three, when victims are not supported by the
adults in school and does not feel safe from further
harassment, the only alternative offered is for the
victim, the girl, usually, who is at the center of
this abuse, to transfer out to a new school.

Some of you may be familiar with current
legislation against Brooklyn Tech. I would encourage
you to review that case. It is an illustration of
the wider pattern.

What we are asking for is for the City Council to work with the chancellor to implement policies, immediately, that train school based staff on how to properly handle and respond to these egregious abuses that are being experienced, again, mostly, disproportionately, by girls, female identifying students, LGBTQIA+ students.

Second, the DOE needs to expand its Title IX office. In 2020, under immense pressure, the DOE added seven Title IX coordinators, which at the time was a huge feat. But, if you do the math, that is one Title IX coordinator for 80,000 female students. It just simply not enough.

And finally, like in the case of Jane Doe in Brooklyn Tech at the moment, the DOE must create more options for school based leaders to properly handle the aftermath of a substantiated instance of gender-based violence and image based sex abuse. Right now, the only option being offered victims is for *them* to transfer out of the school where they were harassed and abused.

I thank you for your time, and note that the Cypher Abuse Task Force and its members remain available for further discussion and conversation on

the recommendations that come out of today's hearing.
All of the contact information will be made available
in the written material. You can find us on
cyberabuse.nyc. And I encourage the members to make
use of our collective knowledge and advocacy power to
make change here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I know several folks have
questions. I have just one to start. What City
regulations do you think could be implemented to rein
in or strengthen protections on different online
platforms?

ANNIE SEIFULLAH: It is a fantastic question, and
I have myself, actually, and members of the task
force, have dug into some of the licensing structures
that, for example, business licensing structures, and
we hope that we can find some measure, by which...
You know there are states, for example, who are
starting to regulate... State legislators who are
starting to pass laws that regulate tech platforms.
California, for example, has led on some of the
privacy initiatives. And when they do that, it creates
a cascade of other... the regulations sort of become
the new standard. And, so, I think members of our
task force would love to talk more about places in

the City Admin Code, licensing and regulatory structures that could be used, similar in ways that - this is different - but I have heard civil litigators talk about using the restaurant and licensing structure to talk about Seamless and Grubhub and those kind of totally different tech abuses that are happening to deliveristas. You know, thinking about the ways those kind structures could be used to impact tech platforms to be more cooperative. Because the New York State says that a judge order a social media platform to take down material, and in our experience as practitioners, it is oftentimes not happening. The orders are just being ignored. So, there is lots to explore there.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you both very much. I do want to follow up on the schools. Because we heard from the City, 120 middle schools, something to that effect, I have a feeling that is not very often that they are dealing with that they said was 50,000 students.

So, I am wondering, because it is so pervasive in the schools now... And I am just wondering whether it is just training, are there legislative changes

that should be taking place? I have the horrible feeling that you are adding AI to this, and I have a feeling it is going to get worse. So, I guess I am just looking for some guidance on the schools. Is it just training, or are there other things that we could be doing? Because they AI isn't even something that people understand. Go ahead?

ANNIE SEIFULLAH: Yes, there is a lot to explore there. Obviously, educators are dealing with a lot. And it is hard to continue to put more things on the plates of schools and school leaders. But there was a change to the chancellor's regulations after COVID, which did put into the disciplinary code that cyber abuse and bullying, that even was happening technically outside of school hours, was... is now under the purview of the school leader. Now there can be discipline of mediations or conversations that are happening even the tech that is happening outside of the classroom. And, so, I think in that, there is a least, at the very base level, an acknowledgment that school leaders should be addressing it when it is happening. And I think right now there is just a big gap between what is happening in the schools, what is happening in our

kids lived experiences, what teachers and school leaders are dealing with every day in school, and what is actually needed to address the gap between... the gap of safety that is happening with introducing tech to schools. And I don't think that it is a simple solution. I think it requires a really expert... And people who understand what is actually going on in school, to create training and to create understanding around it as well. Because, we can change the regulations, you can change the law, but you can't... it doesn't necessarily change people's minds around it either. Right? And, so, I think there is so much to be done. But, I think it is an important... There is no elegant solution, but I think there is a lot to be done.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. Thank you for testifying today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now move to remote testimony. If you testifying remotely, once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you, and you may begin once the Sergeant At Arms sets the clock and cues you.

For our set of Zoom panelists, I will call Dhanaraj Thakur.

DHANARAJ THAKUR: Good morning, everyone.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

DHANARAJ THAKUR: Great, thank you. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to provide some comments to this briefing today. And thank you for the Council for their work on this issue.

My name is Dhanaraj Thakur, I am the researcher at the Center of Democracy and Technology, which is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Washington D.C. Our work preliminary focuses on advocating for creating human rights in digital spaces, and that includes the issue around online harassment and abuse.

As more women have sought political representation by running for elected office, we have seen demonstrated increased in online harassment and abuse, including targeted mis and disinformation campaigns against these women. While women in general may be subject to significant mis and disinformation and abuse online, an intersectional approach, which recognizes that women of color have to contend with multiple sources of oppression at the same time and that impact is particularly unique and

in fact [INAUDIBLE] additional challenges faced by women of color in general.

With this framework in mind, last year we completed our research project and tried to look at two particular important research questions.

First, are women of color political candidates more likely to be subject to online harassment and abuse and mis and disinformation compared to other types of candidates?

And what are impacts of mis and disinformation and online abuse of women of color political candidates?

We did this by conducting a counter analysis of 100,000 posts on Twitter, and by talking to women of color candidates from 14 different campaigns that ran for congress in November of 2020.

We found a few things, and I will just highlight a few here and then talk about recommendations that we made.

First, women of color candidates were twice as likely as other candidates to be targeted with or be the subject of mis and disinformation. Although women of color candidates were not the most likely target of online abuse in general, and I can explain

what that means later on, they are most likely to be the target of particular forms of online abuse including sexist abuse as compared to white women, racist abuse as compared to men of color, and violent abuse four times more than white candidates.

Women of color candidates were also the most likely to be targeted with and be the subject of post that combined mis and disinformation and abuse.

When we spoke to the various campaigns, the women of color that ran for congress and their staffers, uh, they highlighted a couple of things.

They believe the purpose of the attacks was to get them to internalize abuse directed towards them, to accept the oppression they face as women of color and to drop out of politics.

They also noted that in many cases, if the candidates identified as women, were often intensified [INAUDIBLE] candidates other identities and attributes, such as their race, their immigrant status, their age, marital, and parental status.

And while many of the interviewees [TIMER CHIMES] that we spoke to described the attacks as being severe... [CROSS-TALK]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

DHANARAJ THAKUR: together with their campaigns... together with their campaigns, they had... They established a broader community of support and employed [INAUDIBLE] resilience and coping strategies, and in fact remained... represent politics today.

In the report we focused specially on the social media platforms, where the onus of addressing this problem lies. And, so we list out several recommendations targeted at them. But, what I want to... And we can get into that later on in my testimony in subsequent comments, but what I want to really highlight here is that it is importance for the social media platforms to recognize that not all political candidates, as in not everyone in general, can be treated the same. Society does not treat us all the same. But many of the mechanisms that the platforms have in place, treat all of the candidates and all of the people in general in the same way and this is insufficient. Based on our evidence, the disproportionate impacts for women of color, in particular, would argue that those mechanisms need to change.

Thank you, and I can stop there.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you for your testimony.

It was really informative. I am wondering if you have any information on what resources the City or any city or locality or state should provide to those who experience this kind of online harassment based on what you have learned?

DHANARAJ THAKUR: With regard to the politicalized candidates who run in these elections, and I should add that this was looking at the national level elections, but we suspect, especially targeted [INAUDIBLE] women of color candidates that the problem is more severe at the local level. And some of the council members already described this as well.

One issue is around reporting mechanisms. Another is around how these platforms are designed. And the last one is more about transparency. So, in terms of reporting, the platforms have often reported systems available for different... for when these instances occur, but they often fall short in many different ways. They fall short in particular, because they don't often recognize the unique kinds of situations or kinds of abuse or language that is targeted at specific... in the work that we looked

at, women of color. So, this is one area to be improved.

A second issue is around the mechanisms that are used internally to propagate content online, and by that I mean the use AI and other tools, human+ AI reviewers, which often fall short. What we argue is that there could be ways, particularly on the design side, to introduce more friction and slow things down in a way that could help address some of the problems, particularly on the survivor side.

And the last thing is transparency. The council members in the previous discussion raised questions around data and research. The real roadblock here are the social medial platforms. They are not transparent in providing the kinds of data that would be helpful. For example, how many reports are submitted by political candidates or by users in general - for example, in the city or even in other locations, uh, around online harassment and abuse? [INAUDIBLE] we just don't have that. I think there are ways that the Council and working together, for example, in state government could put greater pressure on the platforms to address those gaps.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panelist will be Tajh Sutton. You may begin once you are unmuted and the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time...

TAJH SUTTON: thank you, hello, can you hear me?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

TAJH SUTTON: Thank you, hi. So, my camera is off, because I am actually currently the target of my second vicious doxing, harassment, and violence campaign. As an unpaid parent volunteer who is part of something The Community Education Council, in New York City, those are essentially the school boards. And this is the second time in four years this has happened. But, this time, it is very interesting. We talked a lot today about... And I am so grateful to the chairs and to the panelists thus far, for speaking about the intersections of this and how politics, and race, and ethnicity, and gender play a part. But a power dynamic that we aren't speaking about is that of even our elected officials, and someone like myself, who is a parent with no staff, no financing, no headquarters or anything like that. So, in addition to the right-wing parents who are

currently utilizing the New York Post, and so part of me is excited to have something in common with Chair Tiffany Cabán - but I am on my third New York Post hit piece in just the last month. And, in addition to the parents, uh, the right-wing Mom's for Liberty affiliated [INAUDIBLE] members that are coming after my council for having the audacity to call for a ceasefire, because we love *all* children, uh, there are also elected officials, including some members of this body, who have disparaged me and attacked my first amendment rights. They opened me up to harassment, doxing, and assault, including death threats via social media - without so much as having a conversation with me. Assemblymember Pheffer Amato in Queens and Council Member Eric Dinowitz, are two of these individuals.

And, so, I think something that we have to look at as well, is what does it look like, and what is the response when an elected official utilizes their platform in league with some of the very individuals in politics that we are seeing slowly but surely creep their way into New York City and harm our schools, harm our families, harm our children, and create the condition for the kind of violence that we

are seeing online. It is a very specific group of folks who behave this way. There is a very targeted intention on the side of individuals who are fighting for justice and liberation not to move like that - not to engage in smear campaigns and violence - even when there is so much evidence about how awful folks are, about how racists, how classist, how elitist, how ableist, how transphobic people are.

But, you, again, I am in the New York Post three times, none of it is true, and it has been uplifted and amplified by individuals who elected officials.

So, in addition to talking about gender, about race, about class, disabilities, sexuality [TIMER CHIMES] and all of these incredibly important intersections...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

TAJH SUTTON: we are getting to a place now where we have to... Sorry, guys, and I will finish up. We are getting to a place now... [CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: No, please, please finish your statement, that's okay.

TAJH SUTTON: Thank you. Yeah, I just think... There is a right-wing movement building in our city folks. And part of that repertoire and part of their

arsenal is the very violence we are speaking of.

And, so, to not make that a part of the conversation, to not look to our left and our right, and to not connect that violence that we are seeing targeted at elected officials, to the unpaid parents that help our schools run - as much as we can, despite the defunding and the criminalization of our kids and communities, including by some of the members of this very Council, we are having an dishonest conversation if we are not adding that to it as well. And there is no recourse for me as a queer, Black women, parent volunteer in this system. This has been going on for years. I have told every chancellor. I have told every DOE cabinet, every iteration that I can engage with, and I get nothing, absolutely nothing. The only reason I was able to secure a meeting with the DOE, that has already been pushed back once, is because I had to go to the press in person, despite the threats on my life, and see the chancellor in person and beg him to meet with me. So, that is what parents are dealing with within this arena of targeted online violence. And that is why I wanted to show up today, and bring that intersection to the forefront for everyone. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: I just want to say thank you for sharing your experiences. And I am... I am really sorry that this is what you are going through, but I am grateful for your leadership and your courage in sharing those experiences. And, also, yeah, the New York Post is a rag of publication. So, again, I am really sorry that you have been targeted in that way. And those power dynamics exists on all different levels. And you're right, I think we should be talking about the difference in power and how that is being leveraged between folks, including myself, who are part of the political class, and citizens who are in their communities trying to do what's right. And I thank you for doing and saying the hard things at a moment when, uh, the consequences of doing that are very, very real. And, so, thank you for that. And, I would encourage you to also reach out to myself and my office if you would like to speak and discuss more, we are always here to be of support. I will tell you... Or even just to be able to have a place to vent about your experiences with the New York Post. I will tell you, I have some colleagues who have literally never spoken a word to me, to my face, but are always ready

and willing to give a quote about me to the New York Post of Fox News. So, I just... I am happy to be in good company. And I just want to thank you again for your bravery. And please don't hesitate to reach out to our office.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next panelist will be Gabriela Mejia. Gabriela, you may begin once you are unmuted and the sergeant cues you.

GABRIELA MEJIA: Hi there, can you hear me?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can.

GABRIELA MEJIA: Good morning, my name is Gabriela Mejia, I'm the Movement Building and Communications Manager at Right To Be, formerly known to many as Hollaback! Part of my work at the organization includes regularly working with leading organizations doing the work to end harassment, and reaching out to elected officials here in New York where I am a native, to discuss upticks of hate. Emily May, who is Right To Be's President and Co-Founder, sends her regrets for not attending today. But, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Right To Be is a people-powered movement working to build a world free of harassment and filled with humanity. We started as a blog to collect stories of street harassment in New York City in 2005. Our work has expanded globally to empower people to respond to, intervene in, and heal from harassment. We have trained over 2.6 million people on how to intervene when they see harassment happening.

We continue to collect stories of harassment on Right To Be's Storytelling platform, where people can share their experiences and get support from a community of vetted bystanders.

In 2020, Right To Be partnered with the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) to expand the platform to support women and gender-expansive journalists experiencing online threats. According to an International Women's Media Foundation report, 70% of women journalists have experienced more than one type of harassment, threat, or attack in the past. Many reporters are forced to practice self-censorship, retreat from the public sphere, or even quit their jobs.

Online harassment has emotional and psychological effects, including depression, stress, and anxiety.

It is very difficult to have to deal with the burden of responding to harassment alone, which is why equipping others to become allies is very important.

A program evaluation of our platform, one participant shared, quote, I was getting exhausted from this harassment. My harassers were like insects; they followed me like bees. This community helped me to alleviate that."

We also partnered with PEN America to create a Bystander Intervention: How to be an Ally When You Witness Online Abuse Training. And that uses our 5Ds methodology: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct.

Bystander intervention is a proven way to stop harassment that can also help chip away at the culture of harassment and reinforce that hate shouldn't be tolerated.

Our recommendations are the following:

One, The Council should sponsor a study across middle and high schools in New York City on the prevalence of online harassment and the strategies in place that students would like to see to address it. The study should be followed up with a series of focus groups with students. [TIMER CHIMES]

We recommend digital safety training...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

GABRIELA MEJIA: in all middle in high schools...

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: You can wrap up, go ahead.

GABRIELA MEJIA: in NYC... I'll wrap up... that teaches students about the risks of online harassment, the importance of privacy, and walks them through the necessary steps to protect themselves and their families online.

We recommend bystander intervention training in all middle in high schools in NYC, that includes how to intervene in situations of in-person and online harassment. Councilmember Crystal Hudson put forward this bill last year, but it never made it to the floor. The bill should be brought forward again.

And to the extent possible, the Council should require social media companies to be transparent in content moderation, reporting, complaint mechanisms, and anti-harassment and anti-hate policies. Greater control is needed against harmful practices that prioritize violent and hostile content designed to generate more engagement. Nonprofits should also be involved in the creation and updating of all these policies. Thank you so much for your time.

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CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. Just a quick
followup, what is the bill carried Council Member
Hudson?

GABRIELA MEJIA: I don't have that answer for you.
I think Resolution 0554 in 2023. Uh, the [INAUDIBLE]
[CROSS-TALK]

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. Thanks so much.

GABRIELA MEJIA: Yes, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
The next panelist will be Paulette Healey (phonetic).
Paulette Healey, you may begin [BACKGROUND NOISE]
once you are... [BACKGROUND NOISE] Paulette Healey
you may begin once you are unmuted and the sergeant
cues you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will come back to Paulette
Healey.

The next panelist will be Subha Wijesiriwardena.
Subha, you may begin once you are unmuted and the
sergeant cues you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SUBHA WIJESIRIWARDENA: Good morning, thank you to
the Committee Chairs, and their staff.

My name is Subha Wijesiriwardena, I am a Sri Lankan feminist researcher and activist, and I live in Hells' Kitchen. I have worked for about a decade towards gender justice and human rights at varying levels, from the national to the international. I gather evidence from across diverse global contexts, work closely with other movement-actors, provide contextual and policy analysis and advocate with United Nations member states, UN special representatives, working groups and agencies. For over five years I have worked at the intersection of technology, sexuality and gender.

I would like to focus my testimony today on gendered disinformation. You may already be familiar with semantic distinctions between the terms "misinformation" and "disinformation" - typically, it is understood that the former is unintentional and the latter carries intent to harm.

Misinformation can be easily debunked and delegitimized through source verification, fact-checking, human experience, and so on.

In contrast, disinformation cannot be easily fact-checked or identified - it must be understood as an act of manipulation where the authority and

authorship of the information is not under suspicion.

Disinformation cycles are often state or otherwise powerful machinery and contribute to systemic manipulation of information and information systems.

Disinformation campaigns rely on the exploitation of existing narratives that stem from historical discrimination. The UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression points out in her new report that it is a strategy used to silence women and gender-diverse people. For example, deep-fake pornography targets women in the public eye. In a 2019 study, it was observed that deep-fake porn targets women 100% of the time, from the US to India.

In New Zealand, researchers observed earlier this year that following the "Let Women Speak" anti-trans event, anti-trans disinformation exploded across New Zealand social media circles, quickly becoming genocidal in intent. This same speaking tour visited us here in New York City, leaving in its wake a wave of anti-trans disinformation and hate.

As you will know well, we are currently seeing a marked increase of disinformation targeting women and gender-diverse people who are calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Meta and other corporations are silencing

information about the genocide while continuing to be passive when it comes to disinformation.

Tech corporations and their political allies avoid accountability and shield the privately-owned black-box technologies from independent review. This perpetuates the notion that we "don't understand" the tech. We urgently need greater transparency - and in exposing the human actors behind disinformation systems.

Technology corporations continue to gain credibility by promoting numerous policies and measures they employ to combat [TIMER CHIMES] misinformation, but deny their role in knowingly... [CROSS-TALK]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

SUBHA WIJESIRIWARDENA: creating and continuing to deploy algorithms which, for example, evidence shows increase body-image issues for girls and young women, and drive more people to join extremist groups.

I'll wrap up.

State actors ignore the evidence and tend towards punitive laws and policies, exacerbating the criminalization of sexual and gender diverse persons,

young persons and others, and curtailing freedom of expression.

I urge you to hold accountable these corporations and powerful state and non-state actors who benefit from gendered disinformation campaigns. We need to demand that technologies are developed, maintained and governed through greater public ownership and participation.

I urge you to also consider a rights-based approach, with protections for freedom of expression, including sexual expression, and protections for the necessary strategies employed by women and gender-diverse activists and rights defenders, and marginalized people, such as anonymity.

The powerful actors derive more power from this idea that they are the experts and we are not. The decisions they make on a daily basis affect every single one of us and billions more people outside this hearing. We are the experts, and we need to continue saying that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

I will call Paulette Healey again. Paulette when you are [BACKGROUND NOISE] unmuted and the

sergeant... You may speak when the sergeant cues
you.

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: That will be the end of the
online testimony. I just want to note that we had
online registrations from an Irene Segal and Francois
[INAUDIBLE]. I do not see them on the Zoom.

If there is anyone present in the room or on the
Zoom that has not had the opportunity to testify,
please raise your hand now. Seeing no one else, I
would like to note that written testimony, which will
be reviewed in full by committee staff, may be
submitted to the record for up to 72 hours after the
close of this hearing by emailing it to
testimony@council.nyc.gov .

Chair we have concluded public testimony for this
hearing.

CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you. I just want to
thank everybody who testified and to all of the staff
that contributed to this hearing. I know learned
quite a bit. It is really clear that, one, this is a
prevalent issue, it's an important topic, and that

there are a lot of gaps to be filled to support folks who are experiencing this. I think ,you know, the nature of online harassment, allows for just, uh, a really large deluge of harm and trauma, and there is a lot of work to be done to minimize that harm, and also provide spaces and opportunities for folks to heal from it.

So, we will be following up with folks on their different suggestions and ideas, following up with the Administration on ways that we can work together to strengthen the supports that are available for online harassment that is being faced by women, girls and gender expansive folks. And I want to thank my co-chair, and give her an opportunity to close.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for both committee counsels and for all of the folks that came to testify. We are looking forward to continuing to work to strengthen policies, make them reflective of what is going on, and real life experiences of those who are being impacted. And I just want to uplift Tajh Sutton, who testified. I missed your testimony, but thank you so much for speaking truth to power, and for elevating not just the harassment that you are dealing with, but

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3 protecting all people. Thank you, guys. Thank you,
4 Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON CABÁN: Thank you, and that concludes
6 our hearing.

7 [GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING OUT]

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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 December 15, 2023