

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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April 26, 2023

Start: 1:28 p.m.

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishan, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Eric Dinowitz
Robert F. Holden
Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Julie Menin
Francisco P. Moya
Mercedes Narcisse
Lincoln Restler
Sandra Ung
Marjorie Velazquez

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers

A P P E A R A N C E S

Shawn Slevin, Swim Strong Foundation

Tara Eisenberg, student at CUNY Law School

Sue Donoghue, Commissioner at Department of Parks and Recreation

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, First Deputy Commissioner at Department of Parks and Recreation

Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations at Department of Parks and Recreation

Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner of Public Programs at Department of Parks and Recreation

Kara Meyer, Managing Director of Friends of +Pool

Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks

Clare Hilger, Secretary of Rockaway Beach Civic Association

Ritta Ikonen

Scott Carney

Jeremy Jones

Bridget Klapinski, President of the Rockaway Beach Civic Association

Shanna Blanchard, Water Safety Coalition

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

Sirio Guerino

Galit Sadik, Diversity Initiative

Ebony Beaty, Executive Director of Ocean Bay
Community Development Corporation

Aydon Gabourel, Executive Director and Founder of
the Laru Beya Collective

Katelyn Krause, Founder and Executive Director of
Rising Tide Effect

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a test. This is
3 being recorded by Sakeem Bradley. Hearing is on Parks
4 and Recreation. Today's date is April 26, 2023.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Hello, everyone. Just
6 to inform you. Please, nobody approach the dais from
7 this point on.

8 Welcome to today's hybrid hearing of the
9 Committee on Parks and Recreation.

10 Place all electronic devices to vibrate
11 or silent mode.

12 If you wish to submit testimony, you may
13 send it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
15 cooperation.

16 Chair, we are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
18 Sergeant. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Shekar
19 Krishnan, Chair of the City Council's Committee on
20 Parks and Recreation.

21 Today, the Parks Committee will consider
22 three pieces of legislation as part of our hearing
23 that aim to make the City's swimming pools more
24 accessible and safer for all New Yorkers.

2 The City's public pools and beaches are
3 run by the Parks Department and are no less a
4 valuable recreational resource than the thousands of
5 parks and playgrounds that fall under their
6 jurisdiction. Millions of people make use of them
7 each year, and the number of visitors continue to
8 rise since the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the
9 extent to which and how crucial our parks, pools, and
10 beaches are for New Yorkers. For the first time since
11 2019, outdoor pool attendance passed 1 million people
12 in 2022, which was an increase of nearly 20 percent
13 over 2021. I am sure this upcoming season will see an
14 additional increase as well. Therefore, we have to be
15 prepared to meet this increased usage with enough
16 lifeguards and resources and target the long-term
17 future by building more pools, especially in
18 neighborhoods that have been denied easy access to
19 quality open recreational space.

20 These recreational facilities have played
21 a historically important role in the City's history.
22 Pools first started out as public baths in the late
23 19th and early 20th centuries and soon evolved into
24 actual swimming pools as recreation centers were
25 constructed. During the Great Depression and

2 continuing through the 1940s, the New Deal Era Works
3 Progress Administration worked with the Parks
4 Department to develop a series of outdoor pools for
5 public enjoyment. This resulted in 11 pools being
6 opened within weeks of each other during the summer
7 of 1936. In the 1960s, DPR even experimented with
8 portable pools which prefabricated above ground pools
9 with attached wooden decks were designed for children
10 14 and under. The Portable Pool Program provided pool
11 facilities to underserved neighborhoods throughout
12 the five boroughs and were expanded to over 72 at one
13 point. As more permanent facilities were built, these
14 pools were phased out. As the decades progressed,
15 more pools were constructed with the most recent
16 being the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Pool and Rink
17 which opened in 2008 and we were just recently at
18 when it reopened. Currently, there are 53 outdoor
19 swimming pools, 17 mini-pools, and 12 indoor swimming
20 pools, which are located in recreation centers.

21 Outdoor pools are free and open to the public
22 typically from late June through early September.

23 In the 1930s, when the City began to
24 reclaim its waterfront, Parks Department was also
25 given jurisdiction over the City's beaches in 1938.

2 The Parks Department now maintains 14 miles of free
3 public beaches on the City's 578-mile coastline,
4 which can be found in every borough except Manhattan.

5 The City's pools and beaches represent
6 some of the best examples of how municipal resources
7 can be used to serve residents from all walks of
8 life, particularly low-income and working-class New
9 Yorkers who have not had the means to vacation or
10 seek recreation outside of the city during the
11 stifling summer months. But that doesn't mean these
12 services have reached their full potential to
13 adequately meet the needs of the entire city in an
14 equitable way. The key is all of us New Yorkers, all
15 our communities, especially those that have
16 historically had the least amount of access to pools
17 and swimming resources deserve the same resources as
18 well and, if not so, more attention at this point too
19 from our City Government.

20 For example, using a similar metric that
21 is typically used to determine access to public open
22 space, 65 percent of Manhattan residents are able to
23 walk to a pool in 15 minutes or less followed by the
24 Bronx with 34 percent, Brooklyn with 31 percent,
25 Staten Island 19 percent, and my borough of Queens

2 with only 12 percent of residents able to walk to a
3 pool in 15 minutes or less. Further, although there
4 are 64 Parks locations that contain pools, there are
5 18 Council Districts that currently have no pools.
6 This includes areas like Lower Manhattan, South
7 Brooklyn, most of Queens including my District.
8 Clearly, we can do better with focusing our resources
9 on where we can build more pools.

10 The sufficient number of lifeguards or
11 lack thereof has been particularly problematic
12 recently. DPR has historically assigned around 1,400
13 lifeguards to beaches and pools throughout the city
14 by July 4th. However, during the 2022 beach and pool
15 season, DPR only hired 778 lifeguards by July. Pools
16 and beaches remained open. However, due to the
17 lifeguard shortage, the Parks Department altered
18 opening hours and suspended swim programs, including
19 Lap Swim, Senior Swim, and Learn to Swim at outdoor
20 pools. The Parks Department has recognized this
21 problem, and the Department this year in planning
22 ahead has reacted by raising pay rates for new and
23 second-year-season lifeguards to \$21.26 per hour and
24 by offering a 1,000 dollar bonus for those who work
25 through mid-August. The department has also engaged

2 in numerous efforts to start the recruitment process
3 earlier and improve outreach efforts and increase the
4 number of applicants who are applying for lifeguard
5 positions.

6 I think the bills we will consider today
7 will help the City to take a big step forward towards
8 addressing these issues. Intro. 962 sponsored by
9 Majority Leader Brooks-Powers would require the Parks
10 Department to conduct a survey of sites owned by the
11 City to identify suitable locations where additional
12 public swimming pools could be built with a focus on
13 environmental justice communities and determine
14 whether sites can accommodate more than one pool or
15 other athletic equipment. It would also require the
16 DPR consult with the Department of Education on
17 creating a plan to open pools under DOE jurisdiction
18 for use by the public and would require the Parks
19 Department offer free swimming lessons at swimming
20 pools under its jurisdiction. Just as we've done with
21 school playgrounds and schoolyards and making them
22 community playgrounds, here is an opportunity to look
23 at our public pools in our school facilities the same
24 way as well.

2 Intro. 760 sponsored by Council Member
3 Menin would require the Parks Department to provide
4 swimming lessons for free to children age 13 and
5 younger.

6 Finally, a Preconsidered Bill sponsored
7 by myself would require the Parks Department to
8 submit an annual report on staffing levels and
9 training for the City's pools and beaches programs
10 including information on the seasonal recruitment of
11 lifeguards, the number of emergencies that occurred
12 at each beach and pool, and the current number of
13 pools that are closed for public use due to
14 maintenance or other issues. This information and
15 this transparency about lifeguard staffing, hiring,
16 and the proportion of lifeguards versus the pools
17 that we have in our city is vital to making sure that
18 ultimately as a city we can get to a place as soon as
19 possible where all our pools and beaches are
20 adequately and appropriately staffed by lifeguards.
21 The more data we have, the more transparent that
22 data, the more we can plan ahead and make sure that
23 we are proactively finding ways to address any
24 potential issues.

2 I look forward to hearing comments and
3 testimony on these bills by the Administration, the
4 members of the public who have come to testify today
5 and exploring other ways by which we can equitably
6 expand pool access to more New Yorkers.

7 Now, a couple of my Colleagues also have
8 opening statements. Before turning to them, I'll just
9 review which Members of the Committee are present
10 today. We have Council Member Menin, Council Member
11 Dinowitz, Council Member Restler, Council Member
12 Carr, Council Member Ung, Council Member Holden,
13 Council Member Moya, Council Member Brooks-Powers,
14 and Council Member Lee.

15 Now, I'll turn it over to Majority Whip
16 Brooks-Powers for her opening statement regarding her
17 bill.

18 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,
19 Chair.

20 I'm so excited to be here today to hear a
21 bill that is of crucial importance to my community
22 and to communities all across the city, public pools.
23 In the Speaker's State of the City, she said that
24 access to public pools is a matter of justice. She's
25 right. Too many communities are deprived of the

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2 recreational and health benefits a pool provides. 18
3 Council Districts, most of which are in historically
4 underserved outer borough communities lack a Parks
5 Department pool. Members of these communities are
6 deprived of the opportunity to learn to swim and to
7 swim safely. One out of every three black students
8 cannot swim while only about one out of 10 students
9 cannot. The absence of swimming programming is
10 particularly problematic in my District in the
11 Rockaways. We are surrounded by water, the Atlantic
12 Ocean and Jamaica Bay. Each year, we lose community
13 members off the shores of the peninsula. In 2019, for
14 example, at least seven people drowned, all young
15 people of color. Kids cannot learn to swim without
16 access to pools and programming. Reassuringly, the
17 Mayor and the Speaker are both committed to fixing
18 this problem. Last month, the Mayor announced a 55
19 million dollar investment in pools at Roy Wilkins
20 Park which will expand swimming opportunity in
21 Southeast Queens, and the Council's recent budget
22 response makes clear that we will prioritize this
23 issue in the coming budget.

24 I hope that the bill we'll hear today,
25 Introduction 962, will help further commit the City

2 to resolving swimming inequity. This bill would
3 require the Parks Department to conduct a survey of
4 sites owned by the City to identify suitable
5 locations where additional public swimming pools
6 could be built with a focus on environmental justice
7 communities and determine whether sites can
8 accommodate more than one pool or other athletic
9 equipment, to consult with the Department of
10 Education on creating a plan to open pools under the
11 Department of Education jurisdiction for use by the
12 public, and to offer free swimming lessons for
13 children and adults at swimming pools.

14 I look forward to today's conversation
15 about how we build more pools and bolster swimming
16 programming. We must do better by communities across
17 New York and work towards providing pool access to
18 every New Yorker no matter where they live. Thank
19 you.

20 I apologize. I'll be ping-ponging between
21 two hearings, but thank you, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
23 Majority Whip Brooks-Powers, and now I'll turn it
24 over to Council Member Menin for her statement.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,
3 Chair Krishnan, for holding today's important hearing
4 on several bills related to swimming for New Yorkers.

5 Learning how to swim should be as common
6 as learning how to ride a bike, yet since 2008 at
7 least 58 people have died at beaches or pools in New
8 York City. Water safety is absolutely critical to
9 make sure that all New Yorkers are not at risk. That
10 is why my bill, Intro. 760, would require the
11 Department of Parks and Recreation to provide free
12 swimming lessons for children aged 13 and younger. In
13 addition, no child would be denied free lessons
14 because their parents or guardians have unpaid
15 recreation membership fees.

16 In the United States, drowning is the
17 second leading cause of unintentional death in
18 children from ages 1 to 14. No parent should ever
19 have to endure the pain of losing a child to such a
20 preventable tragedy. Formal swimming lessons have
21 been proven to reduce the risk of drowning in
22 toddlers and in preschoolers by 88 percent, yet just
23 a fraction of New York City's children are currently
24 served by the City's free swimming program. The City
25 must do more to expand access and lessons for New

2 Yorkers who wish to swim. According to our Department
3 of Health and Mental Hygiene, one in four children,
4 or 27 percent, do not know how to swim. It is clear
5 more can be done on the City's part to increase the
6 number of swimming programs and allocate more
7 resources to create a better inventory of lifeguards
8 to keep all New Yorkers safe. Every child should have
9 equal access to these life-saving lessons, which is
10 why it is vital that we examine today how the City
11 can go a step further and provide free swimming
12 lessons to all children 13 and younger at no cost to
13 parents.

14 I want to thank the bill drafter,
15 Christopher Sartori, and from my team I want to thank
16 my Chief-of-Staff Jonathan Szott, Legislative and
17 Budget Director Brandon Jordan and Daniel Kronan
18 (phonetic).

19 I thank the Chair for allowing me to
20 speak, and I'm really looking forward to today's
21 hearing. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
23 Council Member Menin. We've also been joined by
24 Council Member Marte.

2 Today is not only a big day for our pools
3 and beaches, but it's also a big day for Council
4 Member Marte as it's his birthday as well so happy
5 birthday.

6 At this point, before we turn it over to
7 the Administration to testify, we're going to have
8 our first panel from the public testify so I'd like
9 to call up Shawn Slevin from Swim Strong and also
10 Tara Eisenberg who is virtual.

11 TARA EISENBERG: Would you like me to go
12 first or is Shawn here?

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Shawn's here. I
14 think we'll have Shawn go first and then we'll go to
15 virtual after.

16 Go ahead, Shawn.

17 SHAWN SLEVIN: Greetings, Commissioner
18 Krishnan, Council Members, concerned citizens,
19 friends. I'm Shawn Slevin with Swim Strong
20 Foundation.

21 As you know, New York City is a city of
22 water, but for decades we've been an aquatic desert.
23 We're under a triple threat of rising water levels,
24 increase in storm strength and frequency, and
25 developing waterfront areas. The New York City Panel

2 on Climate Change anticipates by the end of this
3 century that New York will experience 25 percent more
4 annual rainfall than it does today. The intensity of
5 that rainfall is increasing, and more water is
6 falling in shorter periods of time. These cloudburst
7 events can and do exceed the sewer's capability to
8 avoid them, and, frankly bottom line, we can no
9 longer avoid the water.

10 Therefore, at this time, we must take
11 advantage of this opportunity to create and realize
12 the vision of climate resiliency and adaptation that
13 centers on climate justice, the principle that all
14 people should live, learn, work, and play in a safe,
15 healthy, resilient, sustainable environment even as
16 our climate changes. Standards for determining if a
17 community has adequate swimming pool facilities are
18 difficult to come by. The National Park and
19 Recreation Association has published a recommendation
20 for communities to have one pool per 20,000 people.
21 We look at our Parks Department, which has 58
22 facilities of which only 12 are actual swimming pools
23 and only six are potentially available year-round,
24 and in no way, of course, does this come anywhere
25 near the recommendation of a pool for every 20,000

2 people. The recent map drawn up by Council Member
3 Selvena Brooks-Powers is a very strong visual of the
4 lack of infrastructure in this regard in the Council
5 Districts across the city with 18 of 32 Districts not
6 having a public facility at all. This is
7 unconscionable when you consider that teaching water
8 safety and swimming skills are a public safety
9 imperative in a city surrounded by water and now
10 increasingly threatened by more severe water
11 situations brought by climate change.

12 Swim Strong Foundation is grateful to
13 finally see some acknowledge of this gap in
14 addressing our public safety. Building multi-use
15 aquatic facilities is not only important for the
16 teaching of water competency but for the development
17 of skills for use for first responder professions
18 such as lifeguards, EMT, specialized services in NYPD
19 and FDNY as well as careers in the Coast Guard,
20 Marine, Navy, and maritime industry. Developing
21 swimming skills is not only important for safety but
22 for our physical and mental health. There is no
23 better total body workout than swimming. It is the
24 only activity that we can do from womb to tomb, and
25 it should be embraced as part of everybody's exercise

2 regime. From a mental health point-of-view, there
3 have been studies which show the calming effects of
4 water, even just to be near it, not necessarily in
5 it.

6 I not only ask support for this current
7 legislation, the three bills, but ask that you
8 broaden it to include situational knowledge of water
9 education to be taught in our schools. Water safety
10 training is not a conversation we have only in the
11 summer or around recreational events. In the fall,
12 we've got hurricane season making our rip currents
13 much more lethal, even from storms happening hundreds
14 of miles away. Every winter, we rescue people who
15 have fallen through the ice. In the spring, we've got
16 flooding and the need to understand when it's not
17 safe to cross water on our roads and streets. We even
18 have this new phenomenon, sunny day flooding, which
19 has nothing to do with rainfall but everything to do
20 with super moons creating super tides that far exceed
21 our normal high tide levels and those waters have
22 nowhere to go but up onto our roadways and streets
23 causing flooding in areas that have always been bone
24 dry before. We need to learn new skills to prepare
25 ourselves for the way water impacts our lives. Our

2 families need to understand that water safety and
3 swimming skills are as important as buckling up your
4 seat belts when you get into an automobile or
5 understanding what to do during a fire.

6 I'd like to thank the following for
7 providing funding for our educational program,
8 Speaker Adams, Council Members Ariola, Brooks-Powers,
9 Krishnan, Lee, Osse, and Paladino. I ask that all of
10 you follow their leadership in the next budget
11 session to ensure that your schools receive this
12 training as well.

13 In closing, no one goes to the water and
14 expects a bad outcome. In conjunction with building
15 infrastructure that protects our lands and buildings
16 from higher water levels, let us also build the
17 aquatics infrastructure and IQ, water education, and
18 swimming skills for every New Yorker. To my
19 knowledge, this is a unique moment in time where New
20 York City and State Legislators are beginning to
21 understand the criticality of creating a pathway of
22 accessibility and equity for all New Yorkers to gain
23 the knowledge and skills needed to be safe in, on,
24 and around the water. Now is the time to seize the
25 moment, to seize the day, to build a life-saving

2 aquatic culture for all of New Yorkers. Thank you
3 very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
5 and thank you for Swim Strong's great testimony as
6 always and great work too.

7 Now, I'll turn it over to Tara Eisenberg
8 for CUNY Law School.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

10 TARA EISENBERG: Thank you. Good
11 afternoon. I'm Tara Eisenberg, a student at CUNY Law
12 School, and I've been studying our policies around
13 pools. I am a lifelong New Yorker so this is very
14 important and personal to me.

15 I'm grateful to see the Council
16 prioritizing this issue, and the proposed legislation
17 is a step in the right direction, but I urge us to
18 think more broadly about how to fix our broken system
19 of pools.

20 Two suggestions I'm offering today. One,
21 we undertake a full evaluation of our existing
22 aquatic infrastructure to inform a comprehensive
23 citywide aquatic master plan that acknowledges and
24 leverages our existing strengths and weaknesses in
25 addition to identifying new sites and facilities.

2 Suggestion number two, which I'm actually
3 borrowing from Shawn, I hope that's okay, is that we
4 hire an aquatic czar to get this done. That person
5 can coordinate the multiple agencies behind these
6 resources to marshal our collective energy towards
7 designing and enacting the plan that will balance
8 safety and equity concerns with usability and visitor
9 experience.

10 The lack of swimming education is a huge
11 issue in our city of islands as we've already heard.
12 However, as the Committee Report suggests, this is
13 not the sole reason that pools demand more attention
14 and resources. Properly maintained and well-
15 programmed pools provide athletic opportunities, they
16 serve as cooling centers, they act as childcare
17 spaces, and they can be fun, essential to building
18 community bonds. They can provide year-round civic
19 gathering and educational spaces such as outdoor
20 classrooms, and this is especially important in
21 communities that are sorely lacking. The Report that
22 the Committee put out leaves out that many of our
23 pools were originally sited in parks where
24 discriminatory housing practices led to slum
25 clearance projects, and so uplifting them as

2 community resources also offers opportunities to
3 repair historic and ongoing racial harms.

4 As already noted, it has been over half a
5 century since any administration addressed the need
6 for new or better pools, and reviewing our pools as a
7 network will uncover where future change is
8 warranted. The COVID pandemic reminded us how our
9 essential outdoor community spaces are so critical. I
10 was pleased to see our City respond with creative
11 solutions including Open Streets and Open Restaurants
12 but where were the Open Pools? This was not just due
13 to a lifeguard or a resource shortage, but pools have
14 long been seen by the Parks Department as risk
15 management headaches plagued with a myriad system of
16 confusing and unfriendly rules and designs that
17 intentionally deter lingering and enjoyment.

18 Tellingly, even in recent years, NYPD presence at the
19 pools has remained a priority despite other cost-
20 cutting measures. I know at my local pool, the
21 Kosciuszko Pool in Bed-Stuy, consistently, last
22 summer at least, it opened over a half hour late
23 twice daily citing the need to wait for NYPD. We have
24 our priorities totally inverted if we're more willing
25 to spend money on letting children suffer for 30 or

2 more minutes in the hot sun waiting for police than
3 we are to find resources to make the pool function
4 during a time when outdoor spaces are so critical.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

6 TARA EISENBERG: This is emblematic of the
7 Park's primary view of pools as a liability and
8 underscores the need for an aquatic czar to assess
9 our pools with fresh eyes.

10 I'll just leave with a note that
11 investing strategically in our pools as the essential
12 resource they are and the economic driver they could
13 be would be critical for us. The Committee Report
14 opens with the assumption that public pools help
15 provide vacations and recreation for some people who
16 do not have the ability to leave the city during the
17 summer months, and it is true that many of our
18 neighbors take our dollars elsewhere in the summer,
19 but I don't think the pools are only for those who
20 cannot afford to leave. What if the City provided
21 equitably sited worldclass swimming and cooling
22 community facilities right here that actually
23 encouraged people to stay and what if all who visited
24 our pools felt safe and welcome? What if everyone who
25 enjoyed our beautiful beaches felt confident as

2 swimmers because they had access to lessons at
3 regulated facilities? An aquatic czar working from a
4 pools master plan can go a long way toward realizing
5 this vision, and I thank you for considering this
6 testimony today.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
8 for your testimony, Miss Eisenberg.

9 Before we continue, I just want to note
10 that we've been also joined by Council Member
11 Narcisse for our hearing.

12 Now, I'd like to invite up our Parks
13 Commissioner Donoghue and the Parks Department to
14 testify.

15 I'll turn it over to our Counsel to swear
16 in the witnesses.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good
18 afternoon.

19 Please raise your right hand if you're
20 able.

21 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
22 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
23 testimony before this Committee and respond honestly
24 to Council Member questions?

25 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do.

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:

3 I do.

4 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You may begin.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you
8 so much.

9 Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, Members
10 of the Parks Committee, and other Members of the City
11 Council. I'm Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of New York
12 City Parks, and I'm pleased to be joined today by our
13 First Deputy Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, our
14 Director of Government Relations Matt Drury, and
15 other members of my senior team.

16 I want to start by noting our
17 appreciation for the Council's support for our City
18 parks and open spaces including our pools and
19 beaches, ensuring that New Yorkers from all boroughs
20 can safely access these incredible amenities, both
21 indoors and outdoors, and enjoy all of the
22 programming opportunities that Parks is able to
23 offer.

24 New York City Parks has long been
25 committed to improving New Yorkers' quality of life

2 through aquatic recreation, promoting health,
3 fitness, and safety awareness at all of our pools and
4 beaches. Whether cooling off in the summer or getting
5 fit in the winter, there's nothing like a refreshing
6 swim in one of our indoor or outdoor pools, and, as
7 you all well know, our City beaches are the primary
8 getaway summer destination for millions of New
9 Yorkers when the temperatures start to rise.

10 I'd like to begin today by offering a
11 brief overview of the beaches and pools that are
12 under our jurisdiction. In addition to the 148 miles
13 of waterfront parkland, our agency maintains over 14
14 miles of public beaches which we manage as nine
15 separate beach areas located at various points along
16 New York City's shoreline, all of which are open to
17 the public for swimming and other recreational
18 activities completely for free. Our beaches are open
19 for swimming from Memorial Day weekend through the
20 week after Labor Day. New York City Parks also has a
21 total of 65 public pool facilities under our
22 jurisdiction, 45 of which, nearly 70 percent are
23 located in neighborhoods that have been declared
24 environmental justice areas or potential
25 environmental justice areas as defined by the EJ NYC

2 report which identified low-income and/or minority
3 communities based on U.S. census data. 53 of our 65
4 facilities host outdoor pools ranging in size from
5 the massive Olympic pools at Van Cortlandt Park in
6 the Bronx and McCarren Park in Brooklyn, which is 330
7 feet long and well over four feet deep, to our
8 medium-sized intermediate pools down to the wonderful
9 mini-pools located in our playgrounds where you'll
10 see some of our littlest New Yorkers splashing and
11 enjoying the cool water on a hot day. Many of our
12 larger outdoor pool facilities offer smaller wading
13 pools, primarily used by young children and their
14 families alongside the larger, deeper pools. The
15 remaining 12 of our 65 facilities host indoor pools,
16 usually located within larger New York City Parks
17 recreation centers. New York City Parks' indoor pools
18 are crucial in delivering swimming opportunities to
19 New Yorkers year-round. Our indoor pools are nearly
20 all intermediate sized, roughly 60 to 70 feet long
21 except for the larger Olympic pool at the Aquatic
22 Center at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. With a New
23 York City Recreation Center membership, which is
24 completely free for anyone 24 or younger, and
25 available to adults and seniors for a very low cost,

2 New Yorkers can enjoy our indoor pools and our robust
3 offerings of aquatic programming for no additional
4 cost whatsoever. This programming ranges from water
5 exercise classes for adults and seniors to our
6 adaptive swim program, which offers aquatic exercise
7 therapy for people with disabilities, to water polo
8 or water ballet, and, of course, our beloved Lap Swim
9 and Open Swim sessions.

10 Beyond the important benefits for health
11 and fitness, tragic drowning accidents over the years
12 have proved all too often that water safety and swim
13 instruction can save lives. Accidental drowning is
14 the second leading cause of unintentional injury-
15 related death among children under the age of 14 with
16 a disproportionate impact on black and brown youth,
17 which is why we are very proud to offer a wide
18 variety of swim instruction classes so that New
19 Yorkers of any age can learn vital water safety
20 skills, develop healthy fitness habits, and have fun
21 in the water throughout their lives. This takes place
22 primarily through our Learn to Swim program as well
23 as through Swim for Life, our targeted initiative
24 conducted in partnership with the New York City
25 Department of Education. Swim for Life focuses on

2 second grade students and provides them with a weekly
3 class schedule, provides them with top-certified swim
4 instruction at our indoor pools during the school day
5 as a regular part of their weekly class schedule,
6 reaching over 260 second grade classes so far this
7 Fiscal Year. Our young Swim for Life students are
8 eager to learn and literally jump right into their
9 classes with no fear or inhibitions. The young
10 students are a true inspiration for us all and a
11 reminder that it's never too late in life to learn
12 how to swim as we also offer swim classes tailored
13 for adults and senior citizens. Nearly 8,500 New
14 Yorkers of all ages have taken advantage of our swim
15 instruction classes so far this Fiscal Year joining
16 hundreds of thousands of others that have benefited
17 from our swim instruction swim instruction programs
18 over the past decade.

19 Additionally, we have begun to offer dry
20 land water safety instruction as part of our youth
21 public programming, encouraging kids to be water safe
22 in different environments in and around water,
23 including water parks, oceans, lakes, and rivers.

24 Our beaches and pools play a special role
25 in our present daily lives, but they have also had a

2 fascinating history, many dating back to the New Deal
3 Era of the 1930s. Of course, like any public amenity,
4 our pools have seen a lot of intense usage over the
5 decades and experience significant wear and tear,
6 which is why we are dedicated to investing in the
7 care and maintenance of our pools and the facilities
8 that house them. We have active capital projects at
9 four of our indoor pool facilities and five of our
10 outdoor pools. In addition, last year this
11 Administration provided the agency with an additional
12 67 million dollars in capital funding to bring over
13 20 additional pool facilities into a state of good
14 repair. We are assessing the highest priority sites
15 for these renovations and will seek to advance all of
16 these capital projects as swiftly and efficiently as
17 possible.

18 Lastly, we are pleased to be working in
19 partnership with New York City DDC to advance two new
20 recreation center projects that will include indoor
21 pools, the 144-million-dollar Shirley Chisholm
22 Recreation Center at Nostrand Playground in Brooklyn
23 and a new 131-million-dollar recreation center
24 facility at Roy Wilkins Park in Southeast Queens.
25 These will be the first new New York City Parks pools

2 in over 15 years delivering access to state-of-the-
3 art recreational and aquatic facilities to the
4 communities that need them most.

5 In addition to keeping our beaches and
6 pool facilities in the best condition possible, we
7 are constantly seeking out new opportunities to offer
8 a truly special experience for our visitors. In
9 recent years, through our Cool Pools NYC initiative,
10 we've upgraded 16 of our outdoor pools with fun
11 summer-themed wall art, lounge chairs for sunbathing
12 and relaxing poolside, cabana-style shade structures,
13 new plantings, and fun and free poolside activities
14 including games, sports, arts and crafts, and fitness
15 classes. We were very proud to reinvigorate and
16 reimagine these sites, most of which hadn't been
17 renovated or improved since they were built decades
18 ago and give New Yorkers the chance to experience an
19 old neighborhood amenity in a completely new way.

20 Keeping our beaches and pools clean,
21 enjoyable, and safe is our top priority, and to make
22 it a reality it takes an amazing team of effort from
23 our incredibly hardworking staff including our
24 Maintenance and Operations Workers, Aquatics
25 Programming Staff, Lifeguards, and our Parks

2 Enforcement Patrol. We realize we're only a month
3 away from the start of our beach season, and outdoor
4 pools will be open shortly after that so the agency
5 is gearing up, preparing our sites and facilities,
6 and bringing on thousands of seasonal employees that
7 will work alongside our year-round staff to help keep
8 beaches and pools clean and safe for the public to
9 enjoy.

10 It is no secret that many sectors of the
11 national economy have been impacted by the COVID-19
12 pandemic and many employers are still facing hiring
13 challenges, and it's been well-documented that
14 qualified lifeguards are in short supply. While many
15 U.S. cities had to make difficult choices in 2021 and
16 2022 to close their public beaches and pools or to
17 start charging attendance fees, we were proud that
18 New York City was able to keep all of our public
19 pools and beaches open for free public use, a
20 testament to the City's commitment to equitable
21 access. Many Council Members and other elected
22 officials helped us get the word out as we launched
23 our lifeguard recruitment efforts late last year, and
24 we are well underway in our training and
25

2 certification process to make the 2023 beach and pool
3 season as successful as possible.

4 I'm pleased to note that the City has
5 reached an agreement with DC37 on a pay increase for
6 new and second-year seasonal lifeguards as well as a
7 retention bonus for all lifeguards working through
8 mid-August, but the reality is is that the entire
9 nation is still facing a very challenging environment
10 for lifeguard hiring. Despite these challenges,
11 keeping our beachgoers safe will continue to be our
12 top priority, and our incredible lifeguards will
13 continue to be a core component of our beach and pool
14 operations.

15 I'll now turn to the legislation being
16 formally heard today, Intro. 760, Intro. 962, and
17 Preconsidered Legislation 3294.

18 Intro. 760 as currently drafted would
19 require New York City Parks to provide free swim
20 instruction to any child between the ages of 1.5
21 years old and 13 years old within an year of their
22 application.

23 Intro. 962 would compel the Agency to
24 conduct a survey of City property to identify
25 potential sites for new public pools, develop a plan

2 to provide public access to pools under the
3 jurisdiction of the New York City Department of
4 Education, and offer swimming lessons at a minimum of
5 three days a week at each of New York City Parks'
6 indoor pools for no additional cost to participants.

7 Preconsidered 3294 would require the
8 agency to submit an annual report including data on
9 the number of lifeguards and other agency staff hired
10 to work at beaches and pools, safety training
11 provided to those hires as well as information about
12 emergency incidents at beaches and pools and the
13 number of pools that are closed to the public for
14 maintenance or other purposes.

15 As I hope we have made clear, New York
16 City Parks is dedicated to making sure that New
17 Yorkers can safely enjoy the most access possible to
18 City beaches and pools so that they can stay cool,
19 get healthy, or just relax and have fun. Millions of
20 New Yorkers enjoy these amenities every year, and we
21 dedicate an enormous amount of time, energy, and
22 resources making these special places the best that
23 they can be.

24 In particular, it should be noted that
25 some of the mandates that would be instituted by the

2 bills as currently drafted would be very challenging
3 to implement given the existing limitations of our
4 physical infrastructure and our existing staff.
5 Having said that, we certainly share the Council's
6 goals reflected in the legislation and look forward
7 to discussing the bills further with the sponsors so
8 we can better understand the intended outcomes and
9 work together to address any operational or policy
10 concerns.

11 We'd like to thank the Council for their
12 continued interest and advocacy regarding these
13 subjects as we know how important pools and swimming
14 safety are to the constituents in your Districts. If
15 there are any questions on the legislative bills or
16 related topics, we'd be happy to answer those
17 questions at this time.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much,
19 Commissioner, for your testimony and for the Parks
20 Department's attention to this vitally important
21 issue. Thank you, First Deputy Commissioner, as well
22 for all your great work too.

23 Before starting with questions, I just
24 wanted to note for everyone too a big thank you to
25 our Council's Data Team. We have some excellent data

2 and maps online that really shows what I think is the
3 most important theme of this hearing, which is the
4 way in which access to pools historically and
5 currently is really dependent on where you live. When
6 we talk about the resources and how where you live
7 affects everything else around you, this is one of
8 those things where where you live affects whether or
9 not you have access to a pool within walking
10 distance, and, as you'll see from the excellent maps
11 and charts that we have, some of which we'll
12 reference as we go through our questions, there are a
13 number of Districts, mine included in Jackson Heights
14 and Elmhurst, that have very little to no access to
15 pools within walking distance and so it's something
16 that I think we need to figure out as a city and
17 really work to address, but I encourage you all to
18 really look at the Council's data for some really,
19 really interesting and impactful information.

20 Commissioner, you testified before about
21 the number of public pool facilities, 65, under the
22 Parks Department's jurisdiction. How many public
23 pools under the Parks Department's jurisdiction are
24 currently open to the public, how many are in rec
25 centers versus other types of pools?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. As I
3 said, we have a total of 65 public pool facilities
4 under our jurisdiction, 45 of which as I said in my
5 testimony are located in neighborhoods that have been
6 declared environmental justice areas. Of those pools,
7 53 of them are outdoor pools and 12 of them are
8 indoor pools, so the 12 indoor pools are in rec
9 centers, and 53 of them are outdoor and 12 of them
10 are in our rec centers.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Are all 65
12 currently open to the public?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No. Of our indoor
14 pools, four of our indoor pools are closed for
15 capital maintenance and upgrading. Of our outdoor
16 pools, five of those are closed also for upgrades.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Is there any sense
18 of when they'll be reopened?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We're working as
20 quickly as we can. We know the importance of having
21 these pools open. We also know the importance of
22 ongoing maintenance. A lot of these, as you
23 mentioned, Chair, in your testimony, are quite old
24 facilities. Many of them are from the '30s so they
25 take a lot of care and maintenance so we'll be doing

2 that maintenance and restoration and opening them as
3 soon as we possibly can to the public.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: What did the Parks
5 Department budget allocate for maintaining such
6 beaches and pools?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
8 question, Council Member. The way our budget is
9 structured is not by facility type or by property
10 type such as beaches and pools. Rather, it's based on
11 the need of New Yorkers, and we're looking to be able
12 to serve New Yorkers equitably so what we do is we
13 allocate to our pools and beaches a certain number of
14 staffing.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Is there some sense
16 numberwise of what the staffing is generally?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yes,
18 for sure. At indoor pool at any given time there are
19 between five and seven staff allocated, and at an
20 outdoor pool, when they're open for the season, there
21 are typically 18 to 22 staff members on site.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. How many
23 lifeguards will be employed or do you expect to
24 employ by the Parks Department this coming season?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: At this point, the
3 First Deputy has done an amazing job, as you know, in
4 our recruitment efforts, and we want to thank the
5 Council for your help with that and distributing
6 information. Right now, our lifeguards are in
7 training, and we have also begun the process of
8 recertifying returning lifeguards so we don't have a
9 number at this point in time, but we're working as
10 hard as possible to be able to bring in as many as we
11 can, and that's why it was really important and we
12 were thrilled to be able to announce this week about
13 the increase in pay rate, all designed to hopefully
14 bring in as many, especially returning, lifeguards as
15 possible.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: What is the
17 breakdown statistically of lifeguards on beaches
18 versus pools?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That's a question
20 that we can absolutely get back to you on for sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. Given where
22 recruitment efforts are, can you say a bit more about
23 what's being done to recruit lifeguards and are we on
24 track to have the same number of lifeguards as last
25 year, more, how are things looking so far?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
3 question, Council Member. As I said, our recruitment
4 efforts started in September of last year. As soon as
5 the season ended, we were working on what we needed
6 to do to bring more in, and the Council has been
7 helpful with that. We've worked with other sister
8 agencies across the board to try and do everything we
9 can to get in as many as possible, but to speak to
10 some of the specifics of the recruitment, I'm going
11 to hand it over to First Deputy Commissioner
12 Rodriguez-Rosa because she's been leading that
13 charge.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:
15 Thank you very much, Council Member Krishnan, for
16 that question. As Commissioner Donoghue mentioned, I
17 wanted to also say thank you very much to the Council
18 Members citywide that they have actually taken our
19 information and being able to distribute it to their
20 constituents to be able to (INAUDIBLE) for
21 recruitment efforts that we've tried to do so we've
22 done an exhaustive and aggressive effort that we've
23 made in terms of recruitment this year as opposed to
24 any time before. This year, what we did was we
25 actually hosted about 47 qualifying tests at nine

2 different sites throughout the city. We utilized DOE
3 schools and we utilized many of our recreation
4 centers to be able to bring these qualifying tests to
5 the communities to make it accessible for them. We
6 had the qualifying exams done earlier this year. We
7 started actually on December 2nd, and we went through
8 March to be able to do these qualifiers to try to
9 gain as many individuals to be able to come and test
10 as possible. We also increased this year, instead of
11 having the 50 yards in 35 seconds, we actually did
12 45. We increased it to 45 seconds to be able to allow
13 for more individuals to be able to qualify to go into
14 the training school. We also now make sure that the
15 individuals that actually came for the qualifiers
16 actually know what time that they made because, in
17 the past, they were not given the time. They were
18 just doing a pass or fail so we wanted to make sure
19 that they actually knew that. Because of that, some
20 of them that did not quite make it, the Public
21 Programs Division of this agency was wonderful enough
22 to provide a swimming improvement program which
23 really allowed for the very first time individuals
24 that didn't quite make the qualifier to be able to
25 improve their skills a little bit and be able to come

2 back and try to test again so I want to thank the
3 Public Programs Division for having done that as
4 well. We increased our outreach by going to the PSAL
5 when they have their swim meets, and we were able to
6 go to Lehman College and do that. We had an
7 aggressive marketing campaign that included our bus
8 shelters, news outlets, banners with DOE public
9 schools, printed material, mailings to elected
10 officials, Community Boards, Friends of groups, swim
11 coaches. You name it, we covered the gamut of
12 everything. We also had the first ever, so I wanted
13 to let you know that we had for the very first time
14 the first ever meeting with the year-round lifeguards
15 to be able to engage them and to bring them on board
16 and for them to understand the importance of being
17 able to bring some more individuals in. Again, this
18 year, the City Administration also had a
19 collaboration of being able to have DYCD, DOE,
20 Department of Health, Parks Department, all of us be
21 able to meet together to talk about helping each
22 other to be able to do additional recruitment.
23 Finally, we also had an inter-organizational grouping
24 of individuals with YMCA, Asphalt Green, and other
25 non-profit organizations that were able to be part of

2 an effort to be able to streamline the qualifiers.
3 Those individuals who may have failed our qualifiers,
4 we also shared that information with other agencies
5 to be able to afford the opportunity for young people
6 to be able to have employment. I just wanted to be
7 able to share that. Currently, we have about 231 in
8 Classes A and B in training, doing that currently
9 right now so we're hopeful that many of them will
10 pass the final test. Luckily, we have the increase in
11 salary is also helpful in being able to get the
12 message out so thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I really appreciate
14 all the extensive outreach done and the different
15 methods taken this year, but then the question
16 remains, if you look at the percentage that will
17 complete training, how many will return, do you all
18 think you're on track to meet or increase the number
19 of lifeguards that staff the pools compared to last
20 year? If not, one of our big concerns is the impact
21 that will have, again, on hours of pools and
22 operations so can you speak a bit to what you're
23 projecting relatively speaking compared to last year
24 where you'll be and what impact that will have?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
3 question, Council Member. We're absolutely hoping to
4 get to at least the same number we had last year, and
5 all of the work that the First Deputy mentioned has
6 been geared towards that effort, really leaving no
7 stone unturned in terms of doing everything we can to
8 bring in more lifeguards, but, as I said earlier and
9 in my testimony, this is not unique to lifeguards.
10 Retail, restaurants are experiencing the same
11 challenge with workers, and we're seeing it in the
12 lifeguard pool, the pool of recruits that is, and so
13 that's why it was really important to negotiate a
14 deal for higher salary, doing everything we can in
15 order to increase those numbers, but, no, our
16 projection is that we are hoping to at least have
17 what we had last year.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Which is roughly
19 about 900?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. How many
22 lifeguards in total would be needed to staff all the
23 pools and beaches across our city?

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The optimal number
25 is about 1,400 to be able to be fully staffed and be

2 able to run more than one shift. Not having that
3 number means we can just do one shift, which is 11
4 a.m. to 7 p.m., and we do that and try to place
5 priority on just the greatest number of individual
6 citizens, having as much of the public be able to
7 access our pools and beaches as possible.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So 1,500 needed to
9 staff all of them for more than one shift, one shift
10 being 11 to 7, on track to probably hit about 900,
11 the same as last time, so what impact do you think
12 that would have on the hours and operations of the
13 pools?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just to be clear,
15 if we had 1,400 to 1,500, we'd actually be able to
16 have more than one shift.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I mean that
19 enables us to do more. A lower number than that, like
20 we had last year, reduced number means that we can
21 only have one shift, which is 11 to 7, and that does
22 impact our ability to provide ancillary swim
23 programming outside of those hours.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So other programs
25 like Senior Swim..

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Laps, and all
4 other, the Swim for Life, all those programs would be
5 impacted again this year.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Do you get a sense
8 of what that impact would be? Would there be programs
9 offered at all or they would not be offered?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's really hard
11 for us to say at this time because we don't know what
12 those final numbers look like. Until we do have a
13 clear sense, I really can't say.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Can you just give
15 some background, you testified to it before as well,
16 but what will the starting pay be for, actually I'll
17 come back to that one.

18 One more question was part of what we had
19 alluded to and Parks had alluded to last year and
20 this year was this is a national problem, that it
21 affects lifeguards so given that, has Parks reached
22 out to other cities as well to collaborate on
23 strategies to find ways to increase (INAUDIBLE)
24 because the way I see it is that if it happened last
25

2 year it's going to happen again this year. This is a
3 larger systemic problem...

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No doubt.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: With no real end in
6 sight so what are the shared strategies that you all
7 are doing and employing with other cities to find
8 ways to increase our lifeguard capacity?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely and
10 thank you. It's such a good question. As the First
11 Deputy Commissioner mentioned, we were so pleased,
12 there was a large task force that was formed back in
13 November of all the different entities, partner
14 agencies, organizations, sister agencies that are
15 struggling with this same challenge, the YWCA,
16 Asphalt Green, Swim Strong was part of that task
17 force, DOE, DOHMH for us all to share best practices,
18 to look at how we could jointly recruit, what are
19 some of the methods, and through that task force
20 we're also looking at what's happening in other
21 cities, looking at news reports, other information,
22 and we're looking at really two things. We know it's
23 about increasing the pipeline, how could we have more
24 swim programming to get more kids to be swimming and
25 then also what are the availability in terms of pool

2 access so having all of those folks, that's the first
3 time that has happened, having all those folks around
4 the table has been extremely beneficial not just for
5 us on the City side but for all of the different
6 entities that are struggling with this same
7 challenge, having enough lifeguards to man their
8 programs as well.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm glad to hear
10 that the collaboration is happening. As I said, I
11 think this is clearly a larger issue..

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No doubt.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That we need to
14 keep finding ways to more innovatively address given
15 the magnitude of the problem that we face because the
16 numbers, there's a huge gap there as you all
17 recognize..

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We agree,
19 absolutely, and it's not, as I said, not unique to
20 the City. These other entities, the YMCA, Asphalt
21 Green, everybody is feeling it. That's why it's
22 really important that we did come together, and we're
23 all recruiting, we all have the same mission, the
24 same goals to provide as much swim opportunities as
25 possible so it's great to have everybody at the table

2 and talking about the same struggles and challenges
3 that we're facing.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Before I turn it
5 over to my Colleagues for questions, I do have one
6 more question. You testified to it before, as I
7 mentioned, but obviously one of the biggest issues
8 has been lifeguard pay. There are a number of factors
9 as to why it's been difficult to hire or retain. New
10 York City has not kept pace historically if you look
11 at New York State and otherwise with what lifeguard
12 pay is and obviously that affects the ability to hire
13 or to retain so what will the starting pay be for
14 first-time lifeguards, how does it differ from the
15 pay scale for more experienced lifeguards, and do
16 lifeguards at beaches receive the same pay or
17 different pay than lifeguards at pools?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
19 Member, for the question. As I said, we're really
20 pleased to be able to announce this week that the
21 starting salary for first- and second-year lifeguards
22 is going up to \$21.26 so a significant jump from last
23 year where it was at 16 dollars. In addition to that
24 pay rate of 21 dollars an hour, all lifeguards this
25 year will receive a 1,000-dollar bonus if they stay

2 through mid-August so that really brings the pay rate
3 up to 22 dollars an hour, making us very competitive
4 with State, with other entities around the city so
5 really pleased to be able to make that announcement
6 and put that in place.

7 To your other question, beach and pool
8 lifeguards all make the same rate. There is increased
9 pay with seniority and as you're staying with the
10 lifeguard position longer, but we're really pleased
11 with the increase in the starting rate.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for the
13 information and glad to hear the pay increase for
14 this year. It was very important for us as a Council
15 too to make sure that that has been addressed.

16 If it's still the case that the City pays
17 less than the State pays at this point, what does the
18 State pay for lifeguards or is it the same now?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I believe that
20 it's the same.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It's the same?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We can doublecheck
23 and get back to you.

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:
25 The last I heard it was the same from the State Park

2 that I spoke to, indicated that we were now

3 (INAUDIBLE)

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Exactly the same?

5 Okay, so there wouldn't be a concern then of, as you
6 mentioned before, Commissioner, losing..

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There should not,
8 no.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Lifeguards to State
10 pools. Okay, that's helpful to hear.

11 I do have another round of questions to
12 ask on a different topic, but I'm going to pause here
13 and turn it over to my Colleagues who have questions
14 as well. We'll start with Council Member Menin.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,
16 Chair, and thank you, Commissioner, for your
17 testimony today.

18 A couple questions on swimming lessons. I
19 wanted to get a sense of how many parents or
20 guardians couldn't pay the recreation fee and were
21 denied swim lessons in the past few years.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
23 Member, for your question. Luckily, none because our
24 swimming lessons are free.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So none were
3 denied?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No. If you're a
5 member of our recreation centers, and our recreation
6 centers are free for anyone 24 years old and under,
7 all our programming then is free and so swim lessons
8 are free so no one is denied.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: How many free
10 swimming lessons were provided, and can you do a
11 breakdown by borough?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know if we
13 can do a breakdown by borough, but I am going to call
14 up our Public Programs expert to really give you
15 that. Margaret, do you want to come up? Our Deputy
16 Commissioner for Public Programs, Margaret Nelson, to
17 really go through those specific numbers.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Hello. Yes,
19 we were so excited that after the pandemic when our
20 recreation centers were closed for a period of time
21 that when they reopened we were able to restart all
22 of our swim programming. For FY23, we have served
23 about almost 4,000 through our Learn to Swim Program,
24 4,600 children through our Swim for Life Program
25 which is the second graders that we serve, and then

2 another 1,739 with swim team, water aerobics,
3 adaptive aquatics, things like that.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: In terms of
5 advertising for these free programs, what is the
6 advertising budget and in how many languages are you
7 disseminating that advertising?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think we
9 primarily do the advertising at our centers and on
10 our website. I don't think we have a specific
11 advertising budget to go out in part because we have
12 to a lottery, right, we do a lottery for people who
13 want to participate and we can't necessarily take all
14 the kids at one time so we run lotteries to
15 participate in our swim lessons.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: I guess that was
17 really my question. Would the lotteries then, if
18 you're running the lottery, then how is that every
19 single parent that wants their child to get the
20 swimming lessons is able to if there is a lottery?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Sorry. I
22 think she was talking about no one was turned away
23 for lack of being able to pay.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Your question was
25 what are parents paying, are they..

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: My main question is
3 are parents being turned away, and, if so, how many
4 parents, like where is the shortage, that's what I'm
5 interested in.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think we do
7 have some statistics on our lottery programs. Let me
8 just see if I can pull that up. In general, we cannot
9 accommodate everybody who wants to learn to swim. In
10 each of our recreation centers, we're trying to find
11 a balance of our programming so we have Lap Swim in
12 the mornings, we run different programs, we run our
13 Swim for Life for second graders in the middle of the
14 day, we have swim team programming, we have
15 additional Lap Swim programming, we work in our Learn
16 to Swim programming at least three days a week in all
17 of our recreation centers, we're providing free swim
18 classes to children, but, again, we recognize that
19 there is a greater need in the city. Your legislation
20 talks about every child under 13, which is probably
21 over a million children. We don't have the capacity
22 to serve that, but we do I think a great job with the
23 aquatic folks that we have providing really quality
24 swim instruction, and we serve, again, thousands of

2 children a year in our programming, and DOE also does
3 their programming in their schools with their pools.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Understood. May I
5 ask one more question, Chair? Is that okay?

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Of course.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Just on the
8 legislation, I just hope that we can think outside of
9 the box, partner with not-for-profits, partner with
10 universities, colleges that have pools, there are so
11 many pools that we could be utilizing as a City so
12 look forward to having that. I know you're partnering
13 with Asphalt Greens and others..

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I would love
15 to use this opportunity to plug this year, working
16 with DOE, we have provided our Swim for Life
17 programming for the first time in a while, usually we
18 do it in our recreation centers, because we have no
19 indoor pool in Staten Island, we're partnering with a
20 Staten Island school to provide Swim for Life there,
21 and, because our only pool in the Bronx is closed for
22 renovations, we're partnering with DOE for a school
23 there to provide Swim for Life.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay. My last
25 question, I just want to build upon what our Chair

2 asked about other cities, because I know that there
3 are other cities that are incentivizing lifeguards
4 so, for example, in Phoenix, Arizona, they are
5 offering a 3,000 dollar bonus for lifeguards,
6 Atlanta, Georgia, the YMCA Atlanta is offering free
7 lifeguard training, is there anything we can learn
8 from these other cities as the Chair was asking that
9 we can build upon here in New York City?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely,
11 Council Member, and thank you for the question. That
12 is why we were so pleased, as I said, to announce the
13 increase in pay rate with a retention bonus, a 1,000-
14 dollar retention bonus as well. Our lifeguard
15 training is free. There is no pay for that. We
16 welcome everyone and try and get as many people into
17 that training as possible. We are absolutely looking
18 for and open to best practices across the board and
19 from across the country.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks so much,
22 Council Member Menin.

23 I do want to return to those questions
24 about, it's my second topic when we come back for a
25 second round of questions, but I'll turn it over now

2 to Majority Whip Brooks-Powers who has questions as
3 well.

4 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,
5 again, Chair. I was excited to see the major
6 investment in pool infrastructure in Southeast Queens
7 at Roy Wilkins Park, and I wanted to talk about the
8 process for selecting pool investments, just
9 generally speaking, so as we're having the
10 conversation that we know.

11 In your testimony, you talked about a
12 current list of investments in pool infrastructure
13 Parks would like to make or is considering making.
14 How is it prioritized in these investments? How is
15 Parks making determinations about which investments
16 are most urgent? Then, what other agencies does Parks
17 currently work with on Parks programming? Does Parks
18 have a relationship with the DOE with respect to
19 school pools?

20 I also wanted to talk really quickly
21 about modernizing the pool infrastructure and
22 programming. How does Parks set rules and schedules
23 at each pool? Has it conducted a systemwide review to
24 ensure these rules are efficient and easy to
25 understand?

2 Lastly, what does Parks identify as major
3 barriers to extending free swimming programming to
4 all New Yorkers?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
6 Member, for the question, and we also were thrilled
7 about the investment for Roy Wilkins, for the new rec
8 center, 144 million dollars. It's a major investment
9 for Roy Wilkins and then a similar investment for the
10 Shirley Chisolm rec center in Brooklyn. In terms of,
11 we have across the board where we make investments is
12 data driven. It's where there is the greatest need,
13 where there hasn't been investment, whether it be our
14 playground spaces through our Community Parks
15 Initiative, we're looking at where we can provide the
16 best and greatest access in areas of highest need.

17 The funding that I spoke about, we were
18 really pleased that the Administration put the 67
19 million dollars in for State of Good Repair funding
20 for our pools and our recreation centers. That State
21 of Good Repair funding is based on, we have, and
22 Margaret and the team, have a running a list of where
23 there are needs in our rec centers. It's everything
24 from pool roofs to boilers to just making sure that
25 our facilities are accessible and safe as possible.

2 Then your question, non-profit
3 partnerships. Absolutely. We work very closely, I
4 think first you asked about partnership with DOE. We
5 have a very long history of partnership with the DOE
6 on a number of different initiatives. As Deputy
7 Commissioner Nelson mentioned, our Swim for Life
8 program is active and has been very active in DOE
9 schools across the five boroughs. As I said in my
10 testimony, we have 230 second grade classes that have
11 participated in our Swim for Life programming in this
12 last year, and we have been able to work with DOE to
13 expand that Swim for Life programming so that kids
14 during the school day are actually having swim
15 instruction happening. We also partner with the
16 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on their
17 Making Waves program so we look across the board at
18 where any opportunity we can to partner with City
19 agencies to provide more and better access to swim
20 programming, absolutely. Did I answer everything?

21 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Yeah, you
22 have another one. Do you need me to repeat it?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.
24
25

2 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. What
3 does Parks identify as major barriers to extending
4 free swimming programming to all New Yorkers?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As Deputy
6 Commissioner Nelson stated, we look to provide as
7 much access as widespread as we can. It is a matter
8 of having the facilities available and the aquatic
9 staffing available to be able to provide that
10 instruction.

11 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Chair, can I
12 just ask one followup question?

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Of course.

14 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Has Parks
15 ever undertaken any planning around opening pools or
16 pool grounds outside of the swim season. For example,
17 I understand Lasker Pool reopening as Meer Center
18 will continue to be a skating rink and heard that
19 McCarren Park Pool had once tried skating in the off-
20 season. How is Parks thinking about maximizing use of
21 these facilities off-season?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
23 question, and it is a good one. We do look where and
24 when we can. McCarren Pool underwent an extensive
25 restoration. It was a really exciting project. That

2 pool had been closed for many years throughout the
3 '80s and into the '90s, and so as part of that
4 restoration, because it was actually such a huge pool
5 that we were able to rethink the design of it to
6 create some space that could be utilized in the
7 winter for skating, for other activities so we do
8 look where and when we can. The Harlem Meer project
9 that you mentioned is another example of, through the
10 restoration process when we have a brand new
11 opportunity to rethink and look at the design of a
12 pool, we are absolutely working with the community,
13 asking questions about how we can make that available
14 year-round.

15 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,
16 and I would love to work with Parks to follow up on
17 the long-term plan aspect and the master plan because
18 I'm not really clear that Parks is doing a long-term
19 holistic citywide strategic planning on pools, but
20 working with the Chair and Parks Department I would
21 love to have further conversations. Thank you, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely, and
23 thank you for your great questions and vital
24 legislation for when it comes pool access and equity
25 across our city.

2 I'll now turn it over to Council Member
3 Dinowitz.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thanks, Chair.
5 Appreciate it. I never know if it's the afternoon or
6 morning. Good afternoon. I love talking about pools
7 because I'm always brought back to a great memory
8 from two years ago at the Van Cortlandt Park Pool,
9 you seem embarrassed, Deputy Commissioner, when the
10 Deputy Commissioner was there, we celebrated the
11 opening by jumping in the pool. I didn't jump in, she
12 did, but it was a great moment, but I'm always
13 brought back to that, and that's the pool in my
14 District. The Chair said there's good data. I would
15 redefine it as robust data because it's not great to
16 see the data and see it right in front of you if
17 there is only one public pool in your District and
18 that only 7 percent of the population can reach that
19 pool within walking distance within 15 minutes. I do
20 want to refer back to our October hearing where we
21 were asking about swimming and lifeguards and I asked
22 about the collaboration with the Department of
23 Education, and I will say from the programming
24 perspective it is encouraging to hear that there is a
25 lot of collaboration going on, that you are looking

2 at other cities and other agencies, but one of the
3 questions that I asked at the time was about
4 infrastructure, and, Commissioner, you indicated that
5 it was part of your conversation was about physical
6 infrastructure. We have Dewitt Clinton High School in
7 my District, which has the infrastructure for a pool
8 but needs updates. It's not currently usable. So I'm
9 asking what updates can you provide regarding your
10 collaboration with the DOE to fix the pool at Clinton
11 High School to provide more access to our youth for
12 pools and to do exactly what you're talking about in
13 this hearing which is to increase the pipeline and
14 pool access?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
16 Member, and we appreciate the question. We will make
17 sure we let you know when we're opening the pools
18 this year because we love when we have people jump in
19 with us. We welcome everyone to do that.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: We're going to
21 throw him in next time.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I don't think
23 you can lift me, Chair.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Fun day, and the
3 First Deputy and I would love company in jumping in,
4 right, wouldn't we?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:
6 Yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You got it.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: In terms of
9 investment in pools and, in particular, opening up
10 access, as Deputy Commissioner Nelson stated, we were
11 really thrilled this year that we were able to expand
12 access for our Swim for Life program into a number of
13 DOE pools so we're able to do more by having more DOE
14 pools available.

15 In terms of that particular high school
16 and that pool, I couldn't speak to that. It's DOE
17 property. It would be a question for DOE. We are in
18 regular conversations, they're part of this task
19 force, and have worked really so closely with us to
20 expand opportunities not only for swim programming
21 and swimming lessons but for our certification
22 process this year, for bringing in our lifeguards
23 when we were recruiting. It's been a great
24 collaboration. In terms of that particular pool, I

2 couldn't speak to its availability or not. That would
3 be a question for DOE.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I hear you
5 saying that there's a lot of collaboration, and I
6 guess the other part of my question is why isn't
7 infrastructure part of the conversation?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It is. That's how
9 come we were able to utilize these pools for our swim
10 programs. The pools that we're using in order to
11 expand our reach are DOE pools as well.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Maybe I'm a
13 little confused. I'm kind of hearing both things,
14 right, which is we have this great collaboration with
15 the DOE for this programming, which is great and
16 we're using their facilities, but we can't talk to
17 them about the facilities, and in this particular
18 case there's a real opportunity to fix a pool so you
19 can continue to have that collaboration but really
20 provide opportunities for the youth in our District
21 and for the broader community.

22 DIRECTOR DRURY: If I can briefly
23 interject. I think the Commissioner is just trying to
24 clarify it. For example, it's my understanding that
25 the School Construction Authority, for example, would

2 have oversight over the actual capital reconstruction
3 of DOE facilities and access. So by all means, it's
4 absolutely part of the conversation and the state of
5 a given facility obviously informs the partnership
6 for potential programming, we hear you 100 percent on
7 that and agree, but, in terms of providing an update
8 as to the feasibility of an upgrade or the timing of
9 an upgrade, we would just need to consult with our
10 partners there at DOE and SCA, and, of course, we'll
11 certainly be letting them know about your interest on
12 this front. I hope that's helpful.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I guess sort of
14 is the answer, just because I did ask in October
15 about this, and it was indicated to me that it would
16 be part of the conversation, and it sounds like you
17 talked to them, and the truth is if a school wants a
18 physical facility for sports or whatever the physical
19 facility is, then that is the DOE and they do talk
20 about that and, yes, then they reach out to the SCA,
21 but I guess the request is have the conversation with
22 them about upgrading the facilities and then whenever
23 SCA needs to get involved, they can get involved, but
24 that be part of your conversation, not just going in

2 and providing the programs but also really be part of
3 that robust conversation about infrastructure.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, so those
5 conversations are going on, absolutely, and they're
6 at the table for this task force and talking about
7 what's available in terms of pools, and part of our
8 conversations, the reason why we're able to expand
9 into different areas outside of Parks' purview, was
10 because of those conversations about infrastructure
11 and what was available at DOE so those conversations
12 are very much happening, but, in terms of what
13 happens at an individual school site, I do not have
14 purview over and I can't designate, obviously. That's
15 between the school and the School Construction
16 Authority.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Can you put it
18 on your agenda, please? This is very important.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You can look at
21 the map, you can look at the hearing, the Bronx,
22 especially this northern part where I represent, pool
23 access and, again for you, the pool of lifeguards
24 that you are able to hire would be greatly expanded

2 if more of our high school kids had this opportunity,
3 which they don't currently have.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Couldn't agree
5 more, absolutely, and we'd love your help with those
6 conversations as well with the individual school and
7 with DOE.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Thank
9 you, Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council
11 Member Dinowitz.

12 I want to stick both on that theme and
13 then also a theme that Council Member Menin had
14 raised before too, which was, just taking a step back
15 for a second, it seems to me, and I'm a strong
16 proponent of this and done an op-ed earlier with
17 Carter Strickland from Trust for Public Land that a
18 lot of our school assets, whether it's playgrounds,
19 pools, tracks, all of these things should be open to
20 the public because they're really important, they're
21 a readily available source for our community,
22 especially those that don't otherwise have access to
23 these facilities. As you know well, (INAUDIBLE)
24 spearhead of the program in the schoolyard community
25 playground context, that's possible, but it seems

2 here that's been slower with pools, and so I'm just
3 curious to know just as a starting point how many
4 swimming pools are located on DOE property, are any
5 of these pools open to the general public or to
6 groups other than DOE students at any time?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
8 Member, for the question, and, as I was saying to
9 Council Member Dinowitz, we have worked closely with
10 DOE, and they've been really helpful in terms of
11 providing access to pools where and when they can. In
12 terms of number of pools on DOE property, that is
13 information that I know DOE would be happy to provide
14 and could provide to you in response.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, I think it
16 would be very helpful to see that information, to
17 know what potential is there.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Has Parks and DOE
20 ever discussed opening these pools for use by the
21 public at times when schools are not in session, so
22 not just the ones that are currently open but even
23 other ones as well, recognizing these are DOE
24 facilities but has there been real consideration by
25

2 both agencies to see what's possible during non-
3 school hours?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. Yes,
5 as part of our interagency task force, there have
6 been all kinds of conversations about how do we have
7 access to pools, how do we expand access to pools not
8 only in Park spaces but on DOE property. That has
9 absolutely been on the table for sure.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Is there some sort
11 of timeline or plan to actually make that happen,
12 because it seems to me, of course there are issues
13 with staffing to consider, the same way with the
14 schoolyard community playgrounds, but it seems like a
15 really worthy investment so I'm just curious if there
16 have been set concrete proposals or plans that make
17 that happen on some sort of expedited timeline.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The conversations
19 that we have had have been fruitful, we feel like,
20 and productive in that we have expanded access and we
21 do have this programming, our Swim for Life
22 programming, at more schools this year than we have
23 had in the past so that is happening.

24 In terms of specific timeline, it is
25 contingent on if you have a pool, the thing that

2 we're most concerned about, certainly that DOE is
3 most concerned about is safety, so in order to have a
4 pool open and available to the public you'd need the
5 requisite staffing for that so you need lifeguards,
6 you need personnel so it is a matter of having that
7 staffing available.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That leads me to my
9 next question. You'd mentioned, Commissioner, the
10 Learn to Swim, Swim for Life programs, and Council
11 Member Menin had alluded to this before as well,
12 understanding that no students are turned away as a
13 result of cost, I think one of the biggest issues is
14 given the need for swim classes, given the
15 disparities in pool access, it's not so much anyone
16 being turned away and recognize these are free
17 classes, but can we expand the partnerships working
18 with non-profit organizations that specialize in this
19 so you can serve even more people than would be
20 possible otherwise, right, so even if you have a
21 small percentage that are being served through the
22 Parks' programs, even more could be served if we
23 expand the network and collaboration so my question
24 is what is the Parks Department's view in
25 consideration of working with qualified non-profit

2 organizations on swim instruction lessons and how can
3 we expand the partnerships that the Parks has
4 available working with these non-profits?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
6 question, and it's one we appreciate and, absolutely,
7 as we have discussed here, we have a huge emphasis on
8 making safe swimming available for as many New
9 Yorkers as possible. We have a long history of
10 partnering with non-profit organizations. We
11 mentioned Asphalt Green, the variety of organizations
12 that we've worked with. That's why we were so pleased
13 to have this task force come together that had all
14 those different non-profits around the table so that
15 we could look at different opportunities for sharing
16 best practices, sharing resources, sharing
17 recruitment, all of those things.

18 In terms of specifically non-profit in
19 our facilities, the challenge has been that our
20 programs are all free so if a non-profit can come in
21 and use our facilities and provide that programming
22 for free, we'd absolutely welcome that.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You kind of alluded
24 to it too, but during this task force meeting as
25 well, is that one of the conversations being had, is

2 about how to expand those partnerships and to bring
3 in non-profits because, not just with Parks but in
4 city government generally, sometimes the best and
5 most effective to reach the most number of people is
6 by partnering with the organizations on the ground,
7 that know the communities, that are doing the work.
8 It seems that this is right for that kind of
9 collaboration so is that something that's being
10 actively explored by this coalition?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. That's
12 what this task force is all about. It has the Legal
13 Aid Society, it has DOE, it has Parks, it has the
14 YMCA and Swim Strong and all the agencies at the
15 table to think about where are the facilities, how
16 could we make the best use of them, absolutely, it's
17 all part of the conversation for sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I look forward to
19 hearing more about it too because I do think it's a
20 readily available solution, recognizing, of course,
21 the free nature of the classes and how we set it up,
22 but these partnerships I think could be very
23 effective so look forward to hearing more about
24 what's possible here and what the next steps could
25 be.

2 On that note as well, what is the cost to
3 the Parks Department, I know the classes are free to
4 the public, but to the Parks Department to actually
5 hold these classes in the first place?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: In terms of
7 staffing, is that the question?

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, and any other
9 costs associated with hosting these programs.

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Sure. Margaret, do
11 you want to take that in terms of those programs?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think we're
13 very fortunate we have a great aquatic staff so we
14 have around 80 full-time and part-time aquatics
15 instructors that work for Public Programs, and
16 they're the ones that provide the free instruction.
17 In addition to other programs, they help with our
18 swim teams, our water aerobics, they run a variety of
19 programs, not just swim classes, and then we hire
20 additionally seasonally to provide even more capacity
21 over the summer so I think that's why we feel we
22 offer a great set of programs in the pools that we
23 have and we're really excited to have more pools come
24 online. It's primarily staffing costs. The pools are
25 already open so it's really a question of what we're

2 programming at what hour so it's kind of a fixed
3 cost. There's no particular additional cost related
4 to the programming.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Thank you.
6 Finally, this is a question that Council Member
7 Brooks-Powers had asked before, but just following
8 up. How does Parks set the rules and schedules at
9 each pool and decide the programming, when it
10 happens, how it happens? Has Parks conducted a
11 systemwide review to ensure these rules are efficient
12 and easy to understand to the general public?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
14 question, and we are very focused across the board,
15 not only at pools and beaches but at our playgrounds,
16 at our rec centers, making certain that our
17 facilities are as welcoming as we possibly can to the
18 public. It's hugely important to us.

19 In terms of the rules that we set for
20 access to our recreation centers or pools, we have
21 gone through an extensive effort with signage and
22 making sure that our signs are clear, rules are
23 clearly posted, and it's on our website, just making
24 sure that New Yorkers when they come to access our
25 facilities they know what the rules are, yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. My last
3 question, following up on legislation about pools and
4 where they can be sited, does the Parks Department
5 engage in its own process for determining or planning
6 where more pools can be developed and for
7 understanding the maintenance and capital needs of
8 pools so how are we looking at siting decisions
9 already? Granted, our legislation would address that
10 as well, but how is Parks currently looking at siting
11 decisions and then figuring out where maintenance
12 should happen?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
14 question. The Parks Department has been for a number
15 of years engaged in a capital needs assessment to
16 determine where and how we need to spend money. We
17 are very focused on the ongoing maintenance of our
18 facilities. As I discussed earlier, a lot of our
19 facilities are aging and they are very well utilized,
20 and so that's why we were really pleased with, we had
21 advocated for, we were really pleased with the
22 funding for State of Good Repair funding so that we
23 could get to an existing list of where we had capital
24 infrastructure needs and where we had repair needs,
25 whether it be new boilers, new roofs, so designating

2 that State of Good Repair money to the highest need
3 across the different boroughs.

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. I want
5 to also recognize that we've been joined by Council
6 Member Velazquez as well.

7 That concludes the questions that I have
8 for this panel, that we have as a Committee, so I
9 want to thank you all for your testimony. This is
10 obviously a very, very important issue, looking
11 forward to hearing more from you all about the..

12 To be continued, Council Member Velazquez
13 has a question.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: My Colleague
15 here with the second best park in the Bronx hogging
16 up the mic. I'm sorry about that.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Competition, man.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: It still goes,
19 the battle of the Bronx parks goes on.

20 Very quickly, and I'm sorry, you may have
21 answered this earlier. When it comes to using Parks
22 space, is there an ability for private partnership
23 and what does that look like and that conversation,
24 especially in a District like mine where we really
25 don't have that ability for a pool inside for our

2 community so what has that conversation been like and
3 how can we help?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
5 Member. I appreciate the question. Do you mean
6 partnership specifically for access to pools?

7 Yes, absolutely, the Parks Department has
8 a long history of public/private partnership in many
9 different ways, many different types of
10 organizations, our Friends of groups, our
11 conservancies are an example of that. We're always
12 looking for ways to expand our reach and be able to
13 partner with different entities to provide more
14 access, absolutely.

15 A lot of what we've talked about here in
16 this testimony, the big thing for us in terms of
17 providing that access is that it's free. Our
18 programs, our swim lessons, our access to our pools
19 and beaches are free to New York City residents.
20 That's something that's really important to us, and
21 it's something that we take seriously and we know
22 it's vital, we want to provide as much access as
23 possible to New Yorkers and do it at a very low cost
24 or free so we are absolutely open to partnerships and
25 being able to expand our reach. It just needs to be

2 able to work within those parameters of providing the
3 greatest access as possible at a very low to no cost
4 for New Yorkers.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Any specific
6 conversations with SUNY? As I have SUNY Maritime in
7 my District, I think that that would be a perfect
8 connection.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,
10 that's a really idea, and we have talked a lot here
11 before you came about this task force that we have
12 that is made up of a lot of different organizations
13 that have pools and looking to see where we can
14 expand access so would love to have that conversation
15 with SUNY, absolutely.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: I'll leave it
17 to my Colleague here, Eric, who is the Chair of
18 Higher Ed.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I am that, thank
20 you. Commissioner, I think it's so great that you
21 attend so many of these hearings. I think that's
22 wonderful. Now that you're here and I'll remind you
23 under oath, I just have a quick question. Which park
24 is better, Van Cortlandt Park or that other one?

25 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You're under oath.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: First Deputy

3 Commissioner said east meets west.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: In which park

5 would you rather go for a job, let's say, on the

6 beautiful natural trails of Van Cortlandt Park or

7 somewhere else?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't feel at

9 liberty to answer this question.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Great answer, great

11 answer.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It would be like

13 choosing between my kids, Council Member Dinowitz. I

14 have three; I can't pick.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: One has beach.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But one has a

17 pool.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VELAZQUEZ: Exactly.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: And they're both

20 wonderful and we love them.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: There are no

22 sharks in pools.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: This is an ongoing

24 debate here on the Council so I think we're going to

25

2 have to settle it, Commissioner. Go visit and decide
3 for ourselves which has the better park.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, we look
5 forward to visiting both and spending time in both
6 this summer, absolutely, and we would invite you all,
7 we talked about our Cool Pools Initiative, we've
8 really done so much in some of our public pools. We
9 would love for you all to come and visit and check
10 them out with us.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely. If
12 there are no other questions, then I want to thank
13 you all for coming to testify today. Look forward to
14 our continued work together on this clearly very
15 important issue to many New Yorkers and the ways we
16 can expand access to our pools. Thanks very much.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. Thank
18 you for your support. We appreciate it.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now, we
20 will turn it over to members of the public for public
21 testimony.

22 We have witnesses both in-person and
23 virtual. Our first in-person witness is Kara Meyer.

24 You may begin.
25

2 KARA MEYER: Hello. I'm Kara Meyer. I'm
3 the Managing Director of Friends of +Pool, and I'm
4 here to express support of these bills.

5 Our non-profit was born out of +Pool,
6 which is an idea for a water-filtering floating
7 swimming pool that will provide free and safe access
8 to the rivers around New York City for swimming. It's
9 shaped as a plus, hence our name. After years of
10 advocacy, we are now working directly with the City
11 to create a regulatory pathway to support safe public
12 access to the rivers joining the many cities
13 worldwide that are reclaiming urban waters for
14 swimming. This is thanks to decades of work improving
15 water quality in urban waters since the Clean Water
16 Act and innovations like ours that we proposed. I
17 bring this up because, as everyone's talked about
18 today, there's 520 miles of waterfront, more than
19 Boston, Miami, San Francisco combined, and that is a
20 whole lot of public water that is controlled by the
21 City to be assessed for additional public swim
22 facilities.

23 We have the lowest number public pools
24 per capita of 25 major U.S. cities, only 0.7 pools
25 per 100,000 people compared to Chicago's 3.3,

2 Boston's 5.7. The effects of this are impacting swim
3 education, of course, as we've talked about today and
4 affect children of color the most. As many of the
5 stats have already been stated, I'm not going to
6 repeat them, but I will say 79 percent of children
7 with incomes of less than 50,000 do not know how to
8 swim, and that's why we support this effort to put
9 these facilities in environmental justice
10 communities.

11 We tackle this issue at +Pool through our
12 programs because we believe it's necessary to our
13 vision for the future, that when the people that
14 represent the full diversity of New York City are
15 swimming safely in the river they need to have the
16 skills to be able to get into the river.

17 I want to thank City Council Speaker
18 Adams and Marte, who stepped out, for supporting our
19 Learn to Swim initiatives the past Fiscal Year. Since
20 launching our programs, we have provided more than
21 500 low-income youth with a series of free swim
22 lessons. This Fiscal Year, in addition to teaching
23 150 kids to swim with Council funds, we've also
24 provided opportunities to hundreds of families
25 through our free Family Swim Days and taught 95

2 adults how to swim since just last fall. Last month,
3 we offered an all-day swim camp at John Jay College
4 that merged our STEM curriculum and our Swim
5 curriculum, teaching kids about water quality
6 alongside swim education. All of our Learn to Swim
7 programs follow the USA Swimming Standards for Learn
8 to Swim programs which requires a certain number of
9 hours in the pool and a certain student-to-teacher
10 ratio.

11 Where do we produce these programs? Since
12 we don't have our own facility currently, we lease
13 pool time across the five boroughs. Frankly, due to
14 lack of adequate swim facilities, this means anywhere
15 we can get pool time really. This does include some
16 private schools, I want to add since the testimony
17 that was just shared with the Parks Department, it
18 includes some private schools that open up to us when
19 school's not in session so I think it's totally
20 doable for DOE to do that. This fluctuates every year
21 and creates burdensome administrative tasks trying to
22 identify new pools and negotiate prices. Pool time
23 can reach rates as high as 600 dollars an hour,
24 meaning facility rates for our programs because we do
25 that series that's mandated by the USA Swimming

2 Foundation can cost us 5,000 dollars per group or
3 session. This is not factoring in instructor cost,
4 equipment cost, lifeguards, or administrative and
5 staffing costs.

6 Identifying public pool facilities that
7 can be made available to the private sector swim
8 providers and working with the City to identify
9 underutilized spaces, like the river perhaps, where
10 we can design and build more aquatic facilities is no
11 longer a desire but is, I believe, a necessity and a
12 basic need for our city.

13 Equally important is an opportunity to
14 increase opportunities for free swim lessons we
15 believe. As has been stated, a lot of data about
16 that, fatal drownings are the leading cause of death
17 between kids 1 and 4 and the second leading cause of
18 death for 5 to 14-year-olds. This is disturbing
19 because we all know that this is totally preventable
20 with education, formal swim lessons can reduce the
21 likelihood of childhood drowning by 88 percent. This
22 should be a combination of in-class water safety that
23 teaches students when to avoid the water and what to
24 do in an emergency, as Swim Strong as done, as well
25 as in-water instruction that teaches students how to

2 breathe, float, move in the water. With proper
3 facilities, we can start this in our universal pre-k
4 programs. With all our waterfront and the increased
5 water-related emergencies and extreme heat caused by
6 climate change, it is simply irresponsible not to do
7 so.

8 I want to address a bit about the demand
9 and constraints that came up just now in the Parks'
10 testimony. Our youth program is totally free, and we
11 work with NYCHA to identify children who need it most
12 in our program. This includes going door-to-door,
13 online recruitment, things like that. Last year, we
14 had 1,000 people on our waitlist, and we shut it down
15 after 12 hours. With respect, the assessment that
16 4,000 students served through the Parks lottery,
17 which is great, obviously that's many, many more than
18 our numbers, but I do think it's limited to people
19 who have access to the ability to apply for the
20 lottery, know about the lottery. A lot of the people
21 that we serve don't have access to email or speak
22 English so there's that to be considered too.

23 I think that there's also more that can
24 be done to meet the challenges that have been
25 addressed here with scaling and directly serve the

2 proposed bill for free swim lessons for all. At
3 +Pool, we've leveraged the private sector and built
4 an organization that operates with about 24 percent
5 of donated in-kind services and pro bono work so I
6 think local governments can also use this and the
7 private sector and non-profits to meet these demans.

8 In addition to providing some education
9 for youth, we must also provide opportunities for
10 adults interested in career opportunities in aquatics
11 to assess swim facilities and hone their skills and
12 prepare for lifeguard exams. As the City Council is
13 well aware and has been discussed today, we have this
14 lifeguard shortage. Since 2022, we have been working
15 with Henry Street Settlement to co-design a workforce
16 development program for our future facility that
17 includes water quality testing, maintenance of what
18 will be a unique facility, and lifeguarding. This
19 past January, we produced an information session with
20 Henry Street attracting about 70 participants to
21 discuss career opportunities in the field. We
22 gathered feedback from training needs related to
23 lifeguarding. We asked participants if they knew how
24 to swim, if they were interested in practicing their
25 skills to better prepare for the lifeguard exam, or

2 if they were ready to take the lifeguard exam and get
3 a job, and 56 percent of our survey respondents said
4 that they were interested in increased training to
5 prepare for the lifeguard exam. I think (INAUDIBLE)
6 for the private sector and increased funding for non-
7 profit groups to provide this advanced pre-training
8 will greatly support the City's needs to supply
9 lifeguards.

10 That's why we support these bills so
11 thank you for proposing them.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Great. Thank you so
13 much for your testimony and for your great work as an
14 organization.

15 Now, we will go to virtual. We have
16 Sherrise Palomino from New Yorkers for Parks.

17 SHERRISE PALOMINO: Good afternoon. My
18 name is Sherrise Palomino, and I'm the Director of
19 Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks. We
20 are a founding member of the Play Fair for Parks
21 Coalition which includes over 400 organizations from
22 across the five boroughs. We want to thank the City
23 Council Committee on Parks for inviting us to speak
24 about today's public swimming pool hearing. I also
25 want to thank Chair Krishnan for his leadership and

2 partnership in the Play Fair Coalition and for
3 raising these important issues.

4 The New York City Parks Department
5 operates and maintains 64 Parks' locations with
6 pools, excluding 18 City Council Districts, most in
7 historically underserved communities. New Yorkers for
8 Parks supports Intro. 760. Swimming is a critical
9 life skill, and providing free access to children
10 under 13 can help alleviate the racial inequity
11 associated with swimming. One out of every three
12 black children cannot swim while 1 out of every 10
13 white children can. By requiring a survey of sites
14 owned by the City to be considered for new pools can
15 address some of the limited access in racial
16 inequality that the city is currently facing. The
17 Preconsidered bill would require the Parks Department
18 to report about lifeguard staffing and other
19 important data. These bills are important steps to
20 ensuring that New York City Parks can provide
21 critical opportunities for youth development and
22 empowerment with free swimming lessons that offer
23 health and sports benefits. Creating more access to
24 pools provides older adults opportunities to
25 socialize and be active, which is essential to their

2 overall well-being. Our Parks Department has been
3 chronically understaffed and resourced. Now is the
4 time for transformative investment in our parks
5 system. 1 percent of the City budget for Parks could
6 ensure that pools are fully staffed and functioning
7 to provide programming that New Yorkers need. The New
8 York City Parks Department does a valiant job
9 maintaining these aging resources but needs more
10 funding to do. This is one of the many reasons why
11 New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair Coalition are
12 calling for an increase in the Parks budget to 1
13 percent of the City budget, a call a majority of the
14 City Council Members support along with the Mayor.
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
17 for your testimony, Sherrise.

18 Now, we'll go back to in-person. Clare
19 Hilger.

20 CLARE HILGER: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair.
21 It's kind of sad to see everyone gone, but I'm just
22 going to go ahead. I'm Clare Hilger.

23 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm here listening.

24 CLARE HILGER: I'm a resident of Rockaway
25 Beach Queens, I'm Secretary of Rockaway Beach Civic

2 Association, I'm a participating member of the Water
3 Safety Coalition, and I'm a swimmer. I am here today
4 to testify my strong support of the legislation 0760,
5 0962, and 3294.

6 First and foremost, we need free swimming
7 lessons because currently there are multiple barriers
8 keeping all children from learning to swim and
9 learning to be safe around water in New York City. I
10 live in a community surrounded by water. There is not
11 only the factor of proximity to Jamaica Bay and the
12 Atlantic Ocean but also the effects of climate
13 change, severe storms, and flooding. We need to
14 educate our young people on water safety and learning
15 to swim so that they can thrive on a changing planet.
16 With education and training, this is possible. What
17 comes as the most shocking barrier is that there is
18 not a public pool outside of two high schools, one of
19 which is smaller than competition size, on the
20 Rockaway Peninsula. How is it that an ocean-facing
21 community has no public place where young people can
22 learn to swim? There are private pools in Rockaway,
23 but that would mean you'd have to pay, and we do not
24 just need free swimming lessons from New York City
25 Parks and Recreation, but we need a pool where these

2 lessons could be held. Free lessons in Rockaway now
3 would be extremely limited or would require traveling
4 off the Peninsula, yet another barrier. What makes a
5 community great? What makes it thrive? We need
6 quality schools, places to shop, local businesses,
7 arts, culture, safe neighborhoods, parks, parks, we
8 need parks with pools. Current Rockaway is
9 experiencing a boom in largescale residential
10 building. All we hear on the news is that New York
11 City needs affordable housing, but housing and what
12 else especially if you're surrounded by water.
13 Bringing a large, competition-sized pool to Rockaway
14 could benefit the community beyond measure. Swimming
15 lessons, education on water safety, lifeguard
16 training, we've all heard about lifeguards, the
17 shortage, athletics, we could have youth and adult
18 swim teams, competitions, events, and lastly
19 recreation and a fun and safe place to cool off on a
20 summer day. It does not seem like a huge ask. New
21 York City Parks and Recreation has neglected many
22 areas of Queens, not just Rockaway. Having a pool
23 could provide education, recreation, and employment.
24 Building a community of water people. If you are
25 knowledgeable of how to stay safe in the water, that

2 will open the doors to other activities on or in the
3 water, surfing, kayaking, sailing, fishing, so on.
4 This legislation needs to be passed because it will
5 not only usher in a culture of respect and knowledge
6 of the water, but it can save lives. Every year,
7 there are drownings in Rockaway. I have watched
8 someone drown. If I thought I could manage the
9 water's conditions, I would have gone in after him,
10 but I know my limits and the water was rough and the
11 rip current was strong. Had this person known these
12 were unsafe conditions, then he would have never
13 entered the water. When someone goes missing in the
14 ocean in Rockaway, there is a large and costly
15 response. I have seen helicopters, police, fire, EMS,
16 and other first responders come to the scene. If we
17 had pools with lessons, water safety education, and
18 experience in the water, these drownings could have
19 been prevented.

20 Lastly, there needs to be more
21 transparency and reporting of data from NYC Parks
22 lifeguards. In support of your legislation, 3294, we
23 need data from lifeguard operations. Obviously,
24 there's a problem since we have a shortage. Let's all
25 work together to solve the problem. There is such a

2 missed opportunity in that an ocean-facing community,
3 such as Rockaway, cannot have an open dialogue with
4 its own lifeguards. If we had a pool to start
5 training, we could even have a junior lifeguard
6 program. Every New Yorker should have the opportunity
7 to enjoy and exercise safely in a pool or even the
8 ocean. We need pools, we need swim lessons, and our
9 communities will thrive because of them. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much.
11 Now, we have Ritta Ikonen.

12 RITTA IKONEN: Hello. I'm here to voice
13 support for the introduction of bills 0760, 0962,
14 3294. Free no-cost swimming lessons to young people
15 under age 13 and increasing the availability of
16 public pools and public access to pools throughout
17 New York City. I often say in my visual arts practice
18 that if I can get people to know about something,
19 they have the chance to care about it too. I am a
20 Rockaway Beach resident, and our most formidable
21 neighbor is the sea. It is important for all our
22 survival to be able to coexist with the forces that
23 make the Atlantic Ocean. I feel this bill will
24 empower New Yorkers to learn about swim safety and
25 care about our oceans and waterways. Being able to

2 face climate change challenges in our peninsula means
3 being able to swim to safety. Where I live, during
4 Sandy, we had six feet of water connected the ocean
5 to the bay. This is obviously traumatizing, but
6 imagine not knowing how to swim in this kind of
7 situation and also recognizing that we can expect to
8 face more and more frequent storms leading to a
9 repeat of these events. Even a regular rain event has
10 our streets flooding. Imagine if you aren't equipped
11 with basic life skills such as swimming to help
12 yourself and your family in such crisis. In the
13 busier summer months, every single weekend
14 (INAUDIBLE) about Glastonbury Festival worth of
15 people descend to our beaches. Having trained
16 lifeguards is essential, but having the tens of
17 thousands of beachgoers know how to swim is even
18 better. When we have access to pools and teaching
19 from an early age, we can have greater understanding
20 on living at the Atlantic Ocean and what it means to
21 responsibly interact with the tides and the weather
22 in all its complexities. Last year, I ran a series of
23 swimming workshops. They were synchronized sea
24 swimming lead by a pro synchro coach with the aim to
25 sync with our most formidable neighbor. Everyone was

2 invited to attend the free workshops supported by the
3 Queens Council on the Arts, and we had a number of
4 people on the shore saying they thought what we were
5 doing looked so fun, but they didn't know how to swim
6 so they couldn't participate. I support the
7 advancement of swim education and pool access. Please
8 help more people in my community to have the means
9 for survival, access to the arts, sports, and
10 wellness too. These bills are crucial for the well-
11 being of the City. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much
13 for your testimony.

14 Now we have Junda Xu from World Journal.
15 No? Scott Carney (phonetic).

16 SCOTT CARNEY: Good afternoon.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Good afternoon.

18 SCOTT CARNEY: Over a decade ago, I gave
19 testimony in this Chamber to the Parks Committee
20 about the inefficiencies at capital projects and
21 recommended how to fix it representing DC37's
22 Technical Guild. I'm returning this year for the
23 second time. I was here previously this year. This
24 was all wrong. I shouldn't be here again. A decade
25 ago, I should've been making deadlines on budget

2 instead of being here. Now, instead of being here, I
3 should be volunteering at a climate change advocate's
4 office on this other side of retirement. Again, this
5 Committee offers the same empty words as Ritchie
6 Torres' Committee did, and yet I'm one of the lucky
7 ones that knows the futility in this Committee's
8 approach to delays. People essentially, in the most
9 children in your Districts and the entire city are
10 suffering. How dare you put on the pretenses to care
11 about capital projects delays and reforms? Years
12 before, in my 2014 testimony, the lack of
13 efficiencies at Parks capital projects were crystal
14 clear. Many newspapers, park advocacy groups,
15 community organizations were writing about it. This
16 is the third time I've given testimonies. I can't
17 count the number of emails, emails that are in your
18 office with the answers to these delays. You're
19 guilty of equivocating. Equivocating costs taxpayers
20 millions. Your arrogance is going to be paid by the
21 cheating of children of their playgrounds. I hope
22 they never forgive you unless you become reasonable
23 and stop 10-million-dollars' worth of Parks capital
24 budget delays. I come here again asking you to please
25 be reasonable. Implement the DDC's Efficiency

2 Program. I've sworn under oath that you had the
3 solutions in your office that are far beyond anything
4 the New York City Parks Department report that you've
5 asked for can do. If you doubt that, have the
6 Comptroller's Office do a preliminary audit comparing
7 the departments, and we all know the answer. Parks
8 wastes more than DDC does. It's simple. You say and
9 hear that you understand the urgency, but no matter
10 how sad and angry I am I do not want to believe that
11 because, if you really understood the situation and
12 still keep failing to act, then you would be evil,
13 and I refuse to believe that my Parks Committee is
14 truly evil. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much
16 for your testimony.

17 Now, we'll call up Jeremy Jones.

18 JEREMY JONES: Thank you very much for
19 having us and the rest of the Committee and the Parks
20 Department for coming by.

21 I almost feel like what I had to say,
22 it's sort of like we kind of worked this out already.
23 Everybody agrees that we need more pools and we want
24 to fund it and so maybe I'll try to keep it brief
25 because I think we figured it out and I think

2 everybody is in agreement so what's the issue, why
3 are we here? Anyway, I wrote this and I came down so.

4 Again, I'd like to thank you for having
5 us. My name is Jeremy Jones. I'm a resident of
6 Rockaway Beach. I'm a lifelong swimmer, bodysurfer,
7 and lover of all things aquatic. The joy that being
8 in the water brings me is so beyond my capacity to
9 express to you in words today so I'll keep it brief
10 and leave it at this. I love the water. I was very
11 fortunate to have been able to learn to swim at a
12 very young age. It started with my family and then
13 swim lessons at the Y and have continued to this day
14 swimming in the Atlantic Ocean where I live. I was
15 very lucky to have that access, and I've come to
16 understand that so many don't which is why I'm here
17 to support the bills as put forth.

18 While many have learned to swim in the
19 ocean, it's not the most comfortable environment for
20 a young person to learn in. There are currents and
21 waves, it's cold, and there are creatures in there.
22 The pool is a natural choice, of course, and through
23 my involvement with my local civic association, big
24 ups Rockaway Beach Civic, I learned about the lack of
25 public pools not only in our neighborhood but also

2 throughout New York City. How can this be in a city
3 surrounded by water? We've all heard the stats about
4 how many people drown in our waters each year, and
5 these are tragic year after year, and I can tell you
6 sitting on my porch in the evenings, particularly on
7 the weekends anytime after 6, you'll hear that
8 helicopter and you know what is coming, and we need
9 to do everything we can to stop that because it's
10 hard for everybody involved. We are aware that
11 funding in the budget is always tricky and that the
12 Parks Department always lacks the funding they
13 deserve as they play such an important role to the
14 health and well-being of our citizens so here's our
15 big chance. Let's look at the possibilities for new
16 pools in the areas that need the most, and I can tell
17 you there's plenty of available land in my home in
18 the Rockaways. Maybe we do something really weird
19 like build a nice public pool or two instead of
20 another condo development. It'd probably even cost
21 less, and it will definitely serve more people in
22 ways that will last a lifetime.

23 Thank you, again, for your time today,
24 and I'll see you in the water.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your
3 testimony.

4 Now, we have Bridget Klapinski.

5 BRIDGET KLAPINSKI: Hello. My name is
6 Bridget Klapinski. I'm here to voice support for the
7 introduction of bills 760 and 962 aimed at providing
8 no-cost swimming lessons to young people under age 13
9 and increasing the availability of public pools and
10 public access to pools throughout New York City.

11 As a Rockaway resident, I currently serve
12 as President of the Rockaway Beach Civic Association.
13 While I'm testifying today as an individual resident,
14 our Civic Association is an active member of the
15 Water Safety Coalition, a group of residents,
16 community groups, and local non-profit organizations
17 working together since 2021 to advance water safety
18 throughout New York City and beyond. Each summer in
19 Rockaway, we witness numerous water rescues and
20 throughout New York City there have been tragic
21 incidents resulting in injury or loss of life due to
22 drowning. Free swimming lessons and increased access
23 for the public to swimming pools, whether within
24 schools or New York City Parks facilities would
25 expand the opportunity for both in-water and out-of-

2 water education. This preparation could be lifesaving
3 during recreational swimming or when individuals find
4 themselves in an emergency situation such as
5 flooding, a boating accident, or a simple fall into a
6 body of water. In recent years, and anticipated more
7 frequently due to climate change, we've seen hot
8 weather and very warm days extending far beyond the
9 traditional summer season of Memorial Day to Labor
10 Day. Just a few weeks back, we experienced days
11 topping 80 degrees in the middle of April. The City's
12 beaches and waterfront areas were crowded with
13 visitors though no lifeguards or seasonal staff were
14 yet present. When the water is hot, people are more
15 inclined to enter the water, which poses an
16 additional risk when lifeguards are not on duty. In
17 cases like this, knowing how to swim might be
18 lifesaving. Related to lifeguards, especially on the
19 Rockaway Peninsula, a community surrounded by the
20 ocean and bay and geographically isolated from many
21 parts of the city, increased access to public pools
22 would create more availability for lifeguard training
23 and testing. There are good jobs available through
24 the lifeguard program, but, as I understand,
25 candidates are presently required to travel

2 significant distance for lifeguard training and
3 testing, which is a limiting factor for so many. We
4 know there is reported to be a nationwide shortage of
5 lifeguards. Increased localized training
6 opportunities through swimming pool availability and
7 access would ideally cultivate and ease the lifeguard
8 training process, resulting in enhanced employment
9 opportunity and an expanded lifeguard department
10 throughout New York City. Preparing all New Yorkers
11 for experiences in the water, whether recreation or
12 emergency situations, is a critical need. We are a
13 city surrounded by water, rivers, bays, and the
14 ocean, which brings opportunity for great enjoyment
15 through swimming, surfing, paddling, boating, and
16 other activities. As a City, we've also experienced
17 the impacts of devastating storms, whether hurricanes
18 or extreme wind and rain. With this in mind and as we
19 move into the future, I support the advancement of
20 swim education and pool access for recreation, health
21 and wellness, and as a potential lifesaving measure.
22 Bills 760 and 962 would do much to advance this goal.

23 Thank you for this opportunity to voice
24 my support today.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
3 for your testimony.

4 Now, we have Shanna Blanchard.

5 SHANNA BLANCHARD: Good afternoon, Chair.
6 Thanks for having me. My name is Shanna Blanchard.
7 I'm here on behalf of the Water Safety Coalition. As
8 you've noticed, there are many of us here today, all
9 behind me and many friends of the coalition as well.
10 We are a group of concerned citizens and non-profit
11 organizations working to make water safety education
12 an essential right for all. We offer our full support
13 to introduce bills 760, 962, and 3294, that's a
14 mouthful, and hope that these bills can turn the tide
15 in how the City prioritizes water safety and how our
16 citizens can equitably and safely interact with our
17 city and water.

18 Much of our work has focused on the
19 Rockaway Peninsula as I'm sure you've noticed. It's a
20 bay and ocean-facing community. While this seemingly
21 offers a great opportunity for waterfront access and
22 water-based recreation, there are many gaps in the
23 City's infrastructure and education system that make
24 for a deadly and dangerous summer year after year. In
25 Rockaway, residents dread the site of helicopters

2 hovering over open water as that usually means that a
3 near death or drowning has occurred. While a coastal
4 community, Rockaway has no City-operated pilot
5 program with swim and water safety programs where
6 residents can learn to swim and/or be trained to be a
7 lifeguard. The unfortunate reality is that someone
8 will likely drown off the coast of Rockaway in the
9 coming months. It's a really sobering thought, and
10 it's very, very possible, and very much a reality. As
11 our climate continues to warm and beach season
12 extends far past the historically accepted dates of
13 Memorial Day to Labor Day, it is critical that the
14 City take preventative measures to deliver the
15 lifesaving skills, education, and infrastructure New
16 York City residents need to positively and safely
17 benefit from their waterfronts. We believe these
18 bills are important steps in that direction. As you
19 know, many young people do not have access to water
20 safety education tools and programs. This inequity
21 costs lives. According to the CDC, one in five people
22 who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. We
23 believe that Bill 760 can save lives and better
24 connect young people to their local environment and
25 introduce them to a range of opportunities including

2 jobs, hobbies, and social and community connections.

3 We know, of course, that New York City needs more

4 pools to most equitably deliver swimming skills and

5 access, which is why Bill 962 is so critical in

6 building the swim and water safety infrastructure New

7 York City needs. We also know that we need

8 appropriate staffing and facilities to deliver water-

9 based programming and access to New Yorkers, and we

10 strongly support Bill 3294. We acknowledge the

11 complexity in hiring of seasonal staff to best

12 safeguard our beaches and pools and believe this

13 legislation is one step in building out a broader

14 network of lifeguards and the resources needed to

15 maintain facilities and open spaces that can allow

16 for equitable and safe access to water-based

17 recreation.

18 We further acknowledge that there is

19 substantial funding needed to make this collective

20 legislation a reality. We support the Play Fair

21 Campaign and believe that 1 percent of the City

22 budget for New York City Parks can help address these

23 inequities, but we need far more funding for that as

24 well to really make all of this a reality.

25

2 We hope that this collective legislation
3 is the beginning of further City investment in water
4 safety and equitable waterfront access and water-
5 based recreation. We strongly support the City
6 Council in passing this legislation and hope that the
7 City will also consider additional lifesaving
8 measures such as incorporating water safety education
9 in the classroom and assessing and extending the
10 traditional beach season and lifeguard hours. That's
11 really important. We're also working at the State
12 level to advance legislation that would allow for
13 water safety education in all public schools across
14 the state. This is a really special time for
15 highlighting a lot of these issues so we're really
16 excited about this legislation. We want to help.

17 Thank you for your time and please let us
18 know how we can help.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
20 for your testimony.

21 Now, we'll move to our last witnesses on
22 virtual. We have Sirio Guerino.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will start
24 now.

2 SIRIO GUERINO: Hi. Good afternoon,
3 everyone. How are you?

4 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Good.

5 SIRIO GUERINO: This is (INAUDIBLE)
6 Guerino. Can everyone hear me?

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, we can hear
8 you. You can start with your testimony.

9 SIRIO GUERINO: Okay, great. Thank you all
10 for being here. I am so happy that Council Member
11 Eric Dinowitz had brought a very important issue to
12 our community in reference to Dewitt Clinton, our
13 pool. Our pool has not been utilized for several
14 years so therefore our children are unable to swim in
15 that gorgeous pool so that was what I really wanted
16 to testify about, but I am so honored that our
17 Council Member, Eric Dinowitz, brought it to
18 everyone's attention, and I'm hoping that his
19 testimony does not fall on deaf ears. Thank you,
20 everyone, for participating in this very important
21 hearing, and I hope that within the next couple of
22 months our students can actually start taking
23 swimming lessons. Thank you, everyone, and stay safe.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
25 for your testimony.

2 Now, we'll move to Galit Sadik.

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will start
4 now.

5 GALIT SADIK: Hi, everyone. My name is
6 Galit Sadik. I am from Rockaway Beach, New York, and
7 I want to speak to you all as well as Council Member
8 Brooks-Powers regarding getting a pool in Rockaway.
9 I'm also here on behalf of a non-profit organization
10 called the Diversity Initiative, and it is our
11 mission to create safe underwater spaces for
12 everyone, and I think that this is a very big part of
13 that. We currently run something called Community
14 Pool where we actually rent a pool and every Friday
15 we have dive masters, dive instructors, and people
16 can come and it's by donation, they can come and
17 practice safe swimming, they can practice scuba
18 diving, they can practice mermaiding, and they can
19 practice all different things in the pool, and I
20 think that this and creating another pool and giving
21 swimming lessons to people would create those kinds
22 of safe spaces and allow everyone to have access to
23 the water. One of our goals is Underwater for All by
24 2030, and that is so important. Having a way to teach
25 people how to swim, a place to teach people how to

2 swim, free access to underwater areas, free access to
3 swimming lessons is so important. It's lifesaving.
4 You teach a person how to swim, and you can save
5 their life. Besides the fact that there are tons of
6 other benefits that come with swimming, whether it be
7 cardiovascular, getting exercise, there are just so
8 many benefits. We work with a lot of veterans and
9 people that are disabled and the underwater is so
10 therapeutic to people so giving them an underwater
11 space that is free and accessible is something that
12 could benefit them in more ways than we could count.
13 I'm going to keep it short and end it there. Thank
14 you very much for taking your time and listening.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your
16 testimony.

17 Now, we have Ebony Beaty.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time starts now.

19 EBONY BEATY: Good afternoon. My name is
20 Ebony Beaty. I'm a Rockaway resident and Executive
21 Director of Ocean Bay Community Development
22 Corporation, which is a non-profit social service
23 organization that has served the Rockaway community
24 for over 20 years. I'm pleased to be here to support
25 the Bill 962 to address public swimming pool location

2 and swimming lessons offered by the Department of
3 Parks and Recreation. Swimming is an essential skill
4 in the Rockaways given the proximity to the bay and
5 ocean. I also want to take this opportunity to thank
6 Councilwoman Selvena Brooks-Powers for introducing
7 the bill. The Rockaways, which is in Community
8 District 14 is an 11-mile long peninsula and at most
9 1-mile wide surrounded by water on three sides, which
10 includes Jamaica Bay and Atlantic Ocean. It is a
11 majority minority community and has endured the brunt
12 of decade-long disenfranchisement. We want to thank
13 you for recognizing that change is needed in how
14 decisions are made and the time is now.

15 Today, our focus is on the youth of the
16 Rockaway Peninsula and the urgent need to plan today
17 for our children's future and incorporating into the
18 Arverne Phase 3 plan if possible to provide a youth-
19 led economic engine that includes an aquatic center
20 with an Olympic-sized pool, medical academy, and
21 theater for the arts. The Urban Renewal Plan
22 clearance had began in the 1960s under Robert Moses.
23 Since his departure, the Department of Housing
24 Preservation and Development, DHPD, has led the
25 efforts to rebuild those (INAUDIBLE) acres. Phase 1

2 in 2003 was approval of the first over 4,000 units of
3 housing. When completed, over 10,000 residents were
4 added to the Community District in the 2020 census.
5 Phase 2 recently completed focused on important
6 sustainable elements along the waterfront that has
7 improved drainage and public access to the streets,
8 the boardwalk along other elements that are vital to
9 the sustainability of the community. During this
10 phase, the YMCA was built with a pool. This was a
11 welcomed addition to the community. Unfortunately,
12 the cost is not affordable to most families. Phase 3,
13 the last phase of the Averno Urban Renewal Area is
14 116 acres. Phase 3 will begin this year, which seems
15 to be the planning stages (INAUDIBLE) requested a
16 site plan with details including a street layout and
17 have yet to receive it. Although the recent ULURP
18 report of the approval of the (INAUDIBLE) zone did
19 specify 1,650 additional housing units which is..

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

21 EBONY BEATY: I'll wrap it. My final
22 point, recently Howard University in Atlanta was
23 (INAUDIBLE) cover of Sports Illustrated (INAUDIBLE)
24 swim team pursuing a Northeast Conference
25 Championship. It's estimated that 1.5 (INAUDIBLE)

2 competitive swimmers are black, which in the
3 Rockaways, is a minority of black residents. The lack
4 of access to this sport has failed the BIPOC
5 population, and we want to make that in New York,
6 particularly in the Rockaways. Thank you for your
7 time.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
9 for your testimony.

10 We now have Aydon Gabourel.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will start
12 now.

13 AYDON GABOUREL: Good afternoon. My name
14 is Aydon Gabourel. I am the Executive Director and
15 Founder of the Laru Beya Collective out in Far
16 Rockaway. I'm also part of the Water Safety Coalition
17 that's been speaking here today. I am lifelong
18 resident of Far Rockaway. This is very person to me,
19 and I'll try and be brief. I know everybody wants to
20 go to lunch, but this is super important.

21 I started this non-profit back in 2018 to
22 diversify the (INAUDIBLE). We provide free surf
23 lessons to youth out here in Far Rockaway,
24 particularly black and brown youth. I noticed when my
25 daughter wanted to learn how to surf that there were

2 not a lot of people who look like her, and, when I
3 started the non-profit, I thought the biggest thing
4 was going to be the cost. Surfing is super expensive.
5 That wasn't the biggest thing. I soon learned that
6 the majority of the kids that we were getting, over
7 75 percent, did not know how to swim. They had no
8 experience in the water which meant that I couldn't
9 bring them into the program safely. I had to scramble
10 my first year and run all over New York City to find
11 pools to get these children swimming lessons. 38
12 years ago, when I entered high school in Far Rockaway
13 High School, we had swimming. It was a requirement.
14 You took swimming classes. It was part of graduating.
15 Years later, that was gone. What changed? I know the
16 demographics of the area changed, people didn't have
17 access to the pool anymore, and it wasn't a
18 requirement anymore. A lot of people spoke about all
19 the development in Rockaway. Lots of development
20 coming in, wonderful housing for everyone, I'm all
21 for it, but along with that the population is
22 increasing. People are coming out with more children,
23 the weather's warming up, Memorial weekend is coming
24 up, and it's probably going to be warm enough before
25 Memorial weekend when the lifeguards are out for the

2 kids to get into the water. You're not going to stop
3 kids from getting into the water. Oh, don't they know
4 better? I was one of those kids. I didn't know how to
5 swim when I was 11 years old, and I almost drowned
6 right here on Beach 25th Street. I say all that to
7 say the biggest impediment to me getting these kids
8 in the water was just having access to a pool. I had
9 the funds, I had the volunteers, I had everything
10 else. I couldn't find a pool to get these kids into
11 the water. We had to use some of the organizers'
12 pools who lived in Manhattan, who lived in Brooklyn.
13 We would have to load these kids up in a minivan and
14 drive all over the city to find a pool to teach these
15 kids how to swim. I'm glad this is being discussed
16 now. I hope something happens. I hope something
17 happens really, really soon. Thank you so much for
18 your time.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
20 for your testimony. Our final witness in-person is
21 Katelyn (phonetic) Krause.

22 KATELYN KRAUSE: Thank you, Chair. My name
23 is Katelyn Krause, and I am the Founder and Executive
24 Director of Rising Tide Effect, a 501(c)3 non-profit
25 organization that seeks to empower positive change in

2 underserved communities through the aquatic
3 experience. I also sit on the task force the
4 Commissioner mentioned before along with Swim Strong.

5 Swimming is a critical skill, and it's
6 essential to being a human on earth. We have a
7 serious problem with childhood drownings in the
8 country, and we have an especially critical issue
9 with youth drowning in New York City beaches such as
10 the Rockaways. Drowning is 95 percent preventable.
11 Water safety education can save lives, which is why
12 the sister bills and local laws proposed are just as
13 important. Creating pools in underserved communities
14 would work towards fixing the disparity in
15 underserved populations because swim lessons and
16 water safety knowledge have been largely something
17 that only affluent families can afford for their
18 children. This knowledge should not be a matter of
19 money, especially when we have the resources already
20 available. All human beings should have the right to
21 access this lifesaving skill. The Department of
22 Education and the New York City Parks' collaboration
23 on this topic would produce opportunities for more
24 New Yorkers to receive water safety and swim
25 education. The pools in public schools and parks in

2 New York City should be activated so that New Yorkers
3 can access them, and we must do everything we can to
4 support the Parks and the DOE in this collaboration.
5 With me today are my colleagues from the Water Safety
6 Coalition. We have suggested solutions to share with
7 those who are interested in hearing some options for
8 a way forward on these issues.

9 On behalf of the Rising Tide Effect and
10 the Water Safety Coalition, we support the three
11 pieces of local laws and legislation. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much
13 for your testimony.

14 That concludes our hearing for today. I
15 want to thank all of our Water Safety and so many
16 advocates who came out to testify very powerfully
17 about the need to expand our pool access, the
18 importance of water safety, and the importance of
19 having a true picture of the lifeguard crisis that we
20 face right now and the importance of proper staffing.
21 Couldn't agree more about how this is an urgent issue
22 for our City and our Parks Department to address.
23 Thank you all for testifying on our pieces of
24 legislation too. Look forward to all of our continued
25 work with the Parks Department together to make sure

2 that we really can achieve a city that, as surrounded
3 by water, is one where water safety is prioritized,
4 where everyone knows how to swim, and every community
5 has access to a pool.

6 I want to thank, in particular, our
7 Committee Staff on Parks and Recreation, Chris
8 Sartori, Patrick Mulvihill, Michael Sherman, Julie
9 Fredenburg, and Anne Driscoll, in particular to our
10 Data Scientists for just the phenomenal job with all
11 of the data and demographic information they posted.
12 I encourage everyone to go visit and see it. Of
13 course, to my office staff as well, my Legislative
14 Director Greg Clark, Chief-of-Staff Chuck Park.

15 Thank you all so much, and that concludes
16 our hearing for today. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 5, 2023