

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Start: 10:15 A.M.

Recess: 12:04 P.M.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Lynn C. Schulman, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Oswald Feliz
James F. Gennaro
Kristy Marmorato
Julie Menin
Mercedes Narcisse
Susan Zhuang

Other Council Members Attending: Powers

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
A P P E A R A N C E S

Christina Farrell,
First Deputy Commissioner at New York City
Emergency Management (NYCEM)

Carolyn Olson
Assistant Commissioner, Environmental
Surveillance and Policy New York City Department
of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)

Shravanthi Kanekal,
Senior Resiliency Planner at the New York City
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China Copperstone,
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Stay Nos Quedamos

Shelby Luster,
Resiliency Planner at UPROSE

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Environmental Justice Manager at El Puente

Aryanna Osorio
Resiliency Coordinator at The POINT CDC

Anita Kwok,
Policy Analyst United Neighborhood Houses

Deaunte Johnson,
Policy Fellow at the New York League of
Conservation Voters (NYLCV)

Caleb Smith,
Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT for
Environmental Justice

Elizabeth McMillan,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice

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

Sophia Milazzo,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice;
Pediatric Environmental Health Research at Mount
Sinai

Dr. Rex Tai,
Member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice;
Physician at New York City Health + Hospitals

Isabel Friedman,
Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural
Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check for the Committee on Health. Today's date is April 8, 2025. Recorded by Tisha Sherman. Located in the Committee Room.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to today's New York City Council Hearing for the Committee on Health. At this time, we ask that you silence all electronic devices. And at no time are you to approach the dais.

If you would like to sign up for in person testimony or have any other questions throughout the hearing, please see one of the Sergeant at Arms.

Chair Schulman, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

Good morning, I am Council Member Lynn Schulman, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Health. Thank you all for joining us at today's hearing on Introduction Number 998, sponsored by Council Member Keith Powers, which would codify the Cooling center program.

We will also be hearing Resolution 822, sponsored by myself, calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, the Fair Pricing

Act, which would cap the cost of routine medical procedures at 150 percent of the cost paid by Medicare for the same services.

Before we begin, I would like to recognize the following council members, Council Member Keith Powers, and remotely, we've been joined by Council Member Marmorato, Council Member Menin.

As climate change accelerates, New York City will continue to face longer, more frequent, and more intense heat waves. The science is clear, extreme heat is the deadliest weather related event we face, surpassing hurricanes and winter storms.

According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, urban areas like New York City are more susceptible to extreme heat because of the heat island effect (UHI), where heat absorbing surfaces like roads and buildings elevate temperatures to deadly levels.

The heat island effect increases the risk of heat related illnesses and deaths, especially among vulnerable populations, including older adults and people with disabilities. In fact, the city's built environment is making temperatures almost 10 degrees hotter for the average resident than they would be

otherwise, according to a study by the nonprofit Climate Central.

According to DOHMH's most recent Heat Mortality Report, extreme heat events led to 570 premature deaths in New York City in 2024 from heat preventable illnesses, a significant increase from the number initially reported, which was 340.

The impact of extreme heat is not felt equally. Certain neighborhoods in our city, many of them historically underserved communities, are at the highest risk and experience disproportionate heat exposure due to limited tree cover, dense infrastructure, and higher poverty rates. Residents in these areas are more likely to suffer severe health consequences from extreme heat.

Unfortunately, some of the boroughs with the greatest need also have the lowest number of cooling centers. My borough of Queens had the lowest number of cooling centers per 100,000 residents according to a 2022 report from the New York City Comptroller. Per that same report, East Flatbush in Brooklyn was significantly underserved by cooling centers as well with only two available for over 162,000 residents. That is completely unacceptable.

Cooling centers are a lifeline, especially for our most vulnerable populations, older adults, low-income residents, and those with underlying health conditions. Yet gaps in cooling center accessibility mean that many New Yorkers remain at risk during dangerous heat waves. That is why Introduction Number 998 is so important. The bill has been around for numerous Council sessions and has failed across the finish line as of yet, but that is going to change. Because of its longevity, there are aspects of the bill that need updating, but we will work to ensure that the final version includes everything necessary to codify a program that is such a vital lifeline for New Yorkers and their health.

In closing, as extreme weather events become more frequent and deadlier to our health, it is more important than ever to ensure that every New Yorker can access affordable and quality health care. That is why I am proud to sponsor Resolution 822, which calls on the State to pass, and the Governor to sign the Fair Pricing Act, which would enact a neutral payment policy for routine medical services to ensure that New Yorkers are not charged arbitrarily high prices because of hospital market power.

I want to conclude by thanking Council Member Powers on his leadership with this bill, the Administration for being here, as well as the dedicated organizations, advocates and members of the public. I also want to thank my staff as well as the committee staff for their preparation for this hearing.

I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Narcisse, and I will now pass the mic to Council Member Powers to make a statement on Introduction Number 998.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you. Let me find my remarks here.

Thank you, Council Member Schulman. I'm City Council Member Keith Powers, who oh, here we go. You know, I gotta get organized over here.

I want to thank Council Member Chair Schulman, and committee staff for holding this hearing. I want to thank 43 colleagues in the City Council who signed on to support a tremendous amount of support for this bill. I also want to recognize Council Member Kalman Yeger, who carried this bill in the past.

As we know as New Yorkers, extreme heat is a serious public health threat. It's a leading cause of

weather related deaths in the United States and the cause of approximately 580 deaths in New York City last year according to the City's Annual Heat Related Mortality Report.

As we know, climate change will not only make summertime heat waves hotter and more common – while New York City has been proactive in taking measures to reduce the impact of climate change, we also must be prepared for these worst events.

Studies have indicated by the end of the century, thousands of New Yorkers may be at risk of losing their lives each year due to extreme heat, so we must be doing more to protect our neighbors.

During the week long heat wave in July of 2022, some communities were severely underserved by cooling centers. For example, one especially heat vulnerable neighborhood in Brooklyn only had two cooling centers to serve over 160,000 residents.

Even when cooling centers are open, they're not always accessible to everyone. They can be closed on weekends or in the evenings. And senior centers which serve one portion of the population counted for almost half of the City's cooling centers in July of

2022—or at least advertised as serving one portion of the population.

My bill brings much needed improvements to the City's approach to cooling centers and codifies the program that is here to stay. Legislation makes sure there's a reasonable baseline for the number of cooling centers during heat related emergencies and prioritizes an equitable distribution of these services. It also ensures information about cooling centers, including locations and hours operations, is available to New Yorkers year round. It also mandates a public education campaign and focused data gathering efforts, two important steps in further preparing the City for future emergencies.

In the face of budget cuts or instability, it's important we enshrine this program into law so New Yorkers can rest assured that no matter how hot our summers get, there will be a permanent, reliable Cooling center program available to reduce risk and save lives. By passing this bill, we can expand access to these cooling centers and save lives in the most vulnerable communities. It's just that simple.

So thanks again to Chair Schulman for holding this hearing and to my fellow sponsors, committee

staff, and advocates for their support. I look forward to hearing the testimony today and moving this legislation forward.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Council Member Powers. I will now pass the mic to the committee counsel to administer the oath to members of the Administration.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, if you could please both raise your right hand? In accordance with the rules of the Council, I will now administer the oath to the representatives from the Administration.

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

PANEL AFFIRMS

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may proceed.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Good morning, Chairperson Schulman, and members of the Committee on Health. I am Christina Farrell, First Deputy Commissioner at New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). I am joined today by my colleague, Carolyn Olsen, from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. And as stated, we are here today to discuss

Introduction 998, a bill to codify the City's Cooling center program.

Emergency Management, with Department of Health and other agencies, maintains plans and protocols to guide New York City's response to heat emergencies including plans for cooling the public, messaging, and providing guidance to individuals, agencies, and the private sector actions for the public to remain safe during periods of extreme heat.

When the City's Heat Emergency Plan is activated, extensive messaging is disseminated through citywide channels, including press releases, City agency websites, Notify NYC, the New York City Advanced Warning System, 311, elected officials, community partners, and social media channels.

Cooling center facilities are not operated by our agency but are managed by public and private sector agency partners, each with their own hours of operation and differing levels of accessibility.

Cooling centers are air conditioned spaces such as older adult centers, community centers, public libraries, and other facilities that typically operate during daytime hours and are free and open to the public.

Cooling centers that are available for public use are listed on the City's Cool Options Finder, a 24/7, 365, online tool where New Yorkers can see open options during a heat emergency. New Yorkers may also call 311 for this information.

The cooling center program is only one of the ways Emergency Management addresses extreme heat. In 2024, our agency revised our Heat Emergency Plan to emphasize additional cool options and updated the Cool Options Finder to ensure year round accessibility.

New York City Emergency Management has expanded its partnership to offer more cooling centers including cultural sites and elected officials' offices. We are also focused on our approach on where to tell New Yorkers to go on hot days, which can include many options throughout the city, including friends and family, museums, commercial facilities and pools. On heat emergency days, the City ensures that our partner sites are available as cooling centers, a type of cool option. We are grateful to the four city council members who have agreed to have their offices identified as a cooling center added to

the Finder, and we hope that other elected officials will do so this year.

This legislation, as relates to cooling centers for heat emergencies, is largely already in action. There are a few details as noted that we would like to discuss further with the Council, such as updating definitions to be consistent with those used in our plans, and discussing the survey component, which comes with a significant cost, yet we believe would not yield actionable results. Further, in 2020, the New York City Council passed Local Law 85, which codified the Cooling center program under Emergency Management's administrative code, with the requirement that the Agency submit an annual report to council detailing various components as well as publishing it on our website. This report, which we are in compliance with each year, is largely duplicative to the reporting requirements detailed in this legislation.

However, we have significant concerns about the tying of air quality indices into the cooling center program. As my colleague at the New York City Health Department will testify, pushing people to leave their homes to go to "clean air centers" poses health

challenges that may outweigh any potential benefits, as the impact and effectiveness of clean air centers has not been tested.

To provide some further context here, and as we testified in the two 2023 Air Quality Hearings, forecasting air quality indices, especially for smoke, is incredibly difficult and complex, because forecasts are issued by the State Department of Environmental Conservation on the day of.

Air quality can change rapidly. Predicting if air quality will improve or worsen can be difficult, because of the unpredictable behavior of wildfires and factors such as wind, weather, and terrain.

The City does not get an official notification on air quality. Instead, the New York City Health Department monitors the air quality index daily and will issue a health advisory if there is a potential for New Yorkers to be affected by poor air quality. Emergency Management then pushes that messaging out through Notify NYC and other channels.

As noted above, the City does not operate cooling centers, but rather we rely on our partners. These partners commit to provide air conditioning spaces with seating and water. Asking them to verify that

the air is "clean" within their facilities is scientifically fraught and comes at significant cost.

The estimated cost for the legislation at hand starts at least \$260 million for initial retrofit and increases each year in perpetuity to maintain the "clean air" standard. This cost reflects the science that most air quality alerts that New York City Emergency Management amplifies are due to high ozone rather than smoke. Traditional air conditioners and HVAC systems do not filter ozone, nor fit the standard and facilities would have to be retrofitted. Even LEED certified buildings, such as New York City Emergency Management Headquarters, do not fit the standards being asked. We have had conversations with our West Coast partners including LA, Seattle, and San Francisco, who have been candid about the different models they have tried to address their air quality issues. They generally work with nonprofit and community centers and have received funding through grants and state boards, yet have not seen high demand for these centers. We will continue to speak with them and learn from their best practices.

However, as the Council also knows, there is a growing and concerning unreliability of federal

1 funding. For example, recently the Federal
2 Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to
3 cut hundreds of grants of more than \$1.7 billion. We
4 rely on the EPA for air quality monitoring and
5 guidance, and as a base level, are now unsure about
6 the future of air quality monitoring in general.

7
8 Requiring partner organizations to open for high
9 air quality indices would entail significant changes
10 to how the cooling center program currently operates
11 as an effective and successful program to provide
12 cool options to those vulnerable to heat emergencies,
13 thereby diluting the effectiveness of our extreme
14 heat messaging and potentially causing our critical
15 partners to balk at continuing their partnership. Add
16 to that the fact that cooling centers open for a very
17 real and scientifically backed health reason related
18 to heat exposure, but there is no scientific backing
19 that the same measures for air quality exposure
20 further dilutes the effectiveness of our messaging.
21 We ask the Council not to tie clean air centers to
22 cooling centers as they do not provide relief from
23 air quality changes.

24 Air quality is something that we have long
25 monitored and built into our response procedures.

We've worked with our agency partners and City Hall to develop the *New York City Air Quality Emergency Guide* in late 2023 and have socialized this with training and seminars for our partners. We have masks available at police precincts, libraries, and for elected officials who request them, as Council Member Schulman is aware, having taken us up on this offer and provided masks to hand out to her vulnerable constituents. Having a menu of options that can be used for a wide range of incidents and hazards is essential, especially during air quality alert emergencies because of the challenges in predicting smoke concentrations. Cooling centers are a response to extreme heat. They are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Opening them during times of poor air quality provides a cool space, but not necessarily one with better air. We urge the Council to let scientific findings guide the programming that our communities require.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I will now pass it along to my colleague from the Health Department.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Great, thank you.

Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Health Committee. I am Carolyn Olson, Assistant Commissioner for Environmental Surveillance and Policy at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. On behalf of Acting Commissioner Morse, thank you for the opportunity to join my colleague from New York City Emergency Management to testify today on this legislation concerning cooling centers.

Extreme heat events are, on average, the most dangerous type of extreme weather, killing hundreds of New Yorkers every year. As described by First Deputy Commissioner Farrell, the City activates the heat emergency plan by relying on the National Weather Service's science-based advisories, issued based on their highly specialized forecasted heat index. Advisories recommend that people most vulnerable to heat impacts use their home air conditioner if they have one, or if not, that they go to an air-conditioned place, such as a cooling center, shopping center, or the home of a friend. These advisories also urge the public and service providers to check on people who are vulnerable to heat-related health impacts, especially those without

residential air conditioning, who have a chronic physical or mental health problem, or are elderly.

There are several reasons that cooling centers are an important component of the City's multi-pronged response to heat emergencies. First, health risks from extreme heat are significant. While seasonal hot weather contributes to heat stress, when the heat index reaches about 95 degrees and above, the risk of serious illness or death increases rapidly. Second, heat stress is cumulative.

Consecutive days of extreme heat compound the risk as the body's temperature rises and dehydration worsens.

Third, our epidemiologic research has shown that lack of air conditioning at home during extreme heat is the strongest risk factor for heat stroke death.

About 90 percent of adult New Yorkers have home air conditioning and about 75 percent of vulnerable adults report using home air conditioning often during extreme heat. But about 80 percent of the victims of lethal heat stroke die at home, almost always without working residential cooling. For all these reasons, cooling centers are a key part of an extreme heat public health protection strategy.

I will turn now to the legislation's proposal to open cooling centers on days with air quality health advisories, regardless of the forecasted heat index. The Health Department concurs with NYCEM in our appreciation for the intent behind this proposal, as well as in our concerns with its implementation and potential impacts. While well-intentioned, this proposal is unlikely to reduce pollution exposure and could have the opposite effect—increasing it in some cases — while placing a heavy financial burden on the City. When there is extreme heat, cooling centers definitely lower people's heat exposure because of air conditioning, which allows for recovery from heat stress. As little as a few hours in a cool environment can decrease a person's risk of poor health outcomes due to heat. In contrast, any indoor location during an air quality event will reduce a person's exposure to air pollution, so we tell New Yorkers to limit their time outdoors as much as possible. When the air quality is poor, a person's short-term exposure to pollution could be increased by any time spent traveling outdoors—including to visit a cooling center. In addition, it is much harder to ensure that a cooling center's air quality

1
2 is any better than in a person's home. The center
3 they visit may have poorly designed ventilation or be
4 in a more polluted location than their home or
5 workplace, like near a high-traffic road.

6 After the air quality event from wildfire smoke
7 in 2023, the City developed a detailed emergency
8 response protocol for any similar events. An
9 important component of this preparation was the
10 development of clear, evidence-based health messaging
11 for New Yorkers based on the EPA's Air Quality Index
12 – or AQI. The Health Department provides guidance for
13 the general public and for child care and school
14 settings on our website for air quality events. The
15 primary message we want to deliver is that short-term
16 ambient air pollution exposure is driven by two main
17 factors – the amount of time spent outside and
18 people's level of activity when they are outdoors.
19 During lower-level advisories for people who are
20 sensitive to air pollution, we do not advise changes
21 in behavior for the general public. Once the AQI
22 reaches 150 it can be unhealthy for anyone and our
23 messaging focuses on staying indoors and limiting any
24 strenuous activity outside. Opening public cooling
25

centers as "clean air" centers would conflict with the clear, evidence-based messaging to stay home.

Lastly, the health effects from short-term air pollution exposure increase gradually, in contrast to the rapid rise in illness and death associated with extreme heat. The best way to protect vulnerable New Yorkers from air pollution will be to continue to implement programs to reduce levels of air pollution in the city and, thereby, decrease the chronic exposures that have the greatest impact on health.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. First Deputy Commissioner Farrell and I would be happy to take questions.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, I am going to actually ask Council Member Powers to ask his questions first, because he needs to leave. Council Member Powers?

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you, thanks for the testimony. A lot of time, I understand the air quality in the part of it, like, an inordinate amount of time spent on that. So I want to just talk about the cooling center piece of it, and then we can talk about the air quality piece of it.

Can you just give me your feedback on that piece of the bill, set separate, setting aside the air quality piece of it?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure. We have... we've been doing the cooling center program in the summers since the late nineties, and it is, you know, one of our standard programs. We, as everyone has said here, we know that people are vulnerable. We have fantastic partners -- all of the libraries, the older adult centers, community centers, you know, new partners that we've brought in. And so we stand by that program. We are very proud that, you know, last year at the beginning of the season, we had over 600 facilities that were signed up. Obviously not every facility is open every day. But by contrast, in the city of Chicago, they opened six cooling centers across the city when we're opening hundreds.

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2 As we said in 2020, the extensive legislation was
3 passed. We now put a plan on our website and we
4 update it every year. We have, over the last couple
5 of years, been able to change The Cooling Center
6 Finder from a just in time application to something
7 that is 24/7. So even today when it's cold out,
8 people can go on and they can look and plan if they
9 want for the summer.

10 So, you know, we feel like a lot of what is
11 covered in the bill is already covered by our daily
12 operations and by the 2020 legislation. But for the
13 cooling center part of the bill, you know, we don't
14 have any serious roadblocks.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, thank you for that.
16 Are there any plans at this moment to expand the
17 amount of cooling centers that the City has? I think
18 there's, you said, about 600 right now? Are there any
19 plans? There have been comptroller and others have
20 done reports indicating that certain communities that
21 were going be the most vulnerable did not have
22 adequate access or enough access. So what are plans,
23 in the coming year, to... what is the expected number
24 or are there plans to expand?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So we have been expanding every year. As we noted last year, we were able to add several cultural sites. I believe the Museum of the City of New York, the Brooklyn Museum, some others — which is fantastic. We also, uh, four council members opened, other elected officials had opened up their offices. We are always looking for new partners. You know, one thing we have found is that there are what we call (TIMER CHIMES) traditional cooling centers and nontraditional cooling centers. During COVID, and last year, because several of the hottest days, one was Juneteenth, which was a federal holiday, and a City holiday, and several were on Sundays, when understandably many locations are not open. So we have worked with other partners, for example, New York City Public Schools — at expense to them last year — nobody receives any type of funding to run the program, to be a center, to pay for the air conditioning. You know, there's no funding with this program. Schools did open last year. They on average saw less than five people total for the 20 schools. So most of the locations that opened last year on those Sundays did not have any people visit. And that was born out during COVID as

1 well. You know, I think that people are used to going
2 to libraries. Seniors are ,you know, enjoy their
3 older adult centers. They have a community there,
4 they may get food, they may do other activities. So
5 you know people really go where they feel
6 comfortable, where they know how to get there, they
7 are just sort of going to have them... they're not
8 just going sit there basically. So we are looking...
9 that's why cultural institutions are a really good
10 option to the extent they're able to participate. And
11 outside of just the cooling centers, like we said,
12 there are a lot of cool options. There may be malls,
13 there could be other locations, so we're noting all
14 of that on our website. But we are always... and over
15 the years, I've been at Emergency Management a long
16 time, over the years we, especially years, you know,
17 during COVID or other when we didn't have as many
18 sites open, we've asked people, uh, We Have A Share
19 Your Space Survey where people can note that they
20 would be interested. Specific elected officials or
21 community groups have sent us information and we've
22 followed up with them. So we are, as long as people
23 can give us the basic things we need, we're happy to
24 add them. But we don't have the power, the authority
25

or the funding to compel any organization to be a cooling center.

I will also say just looking at the Comptroller's report from a few years ago, that I believe was based on community boards. And so I think we all know you can live on the edge of one community board...

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: For sure, yeah...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: And, you know, but go to things next door. So I mean I think they needed a way to look at their analysis. But you could have something in other community board that's closer than the one closer to you. So we didn't really agree with all the findings in that.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. I got it.

I believe the Department of Health had updated their report from last year about individuals that had died related to heat. Originally was 350, and I believe the number is now up to 580. Can you talk about why that number got updated? What was the cause for that number to go from 350 to 580 and the discrepancy? Can you just talk us through that number change?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Definitely, thanks for that.

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2 So we discovered an error, quite literally a
3 typo, in our estimation of heat exacerbated. So this
4 is an analysis that requires application of a risk
5 estimate, which we didn't have any errors in, to the
6 number of deaths that occurred in the city, and we
7 are then able to estimate the number of people who
8 have had a condition that exacerbated by the heat.

9 So when we identified this error, we immediately
10 corrected it. And what we discovered was that
11 previously our estimate was 350 – approximately 350
12 deaths per year – and that number is closer to...it's
13 more than 500. So in our most recent five-year
14 period, because we estimate for five years at a time,
15 we see that it's about 580, as you said.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: For last year?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: No, I want to be
18 clear...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: All right.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: that this doesn't
21 represent an increase from last year. This just was
22 literally an error. So the last two years, which both
23 took... we do rolling five-year averages, so we add a
24 new year each year. And both of those were around
25 580, more than 500.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: I see. And where did the typo occur?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: It was literally in the code that we have. So, you know, we discovered that we had a character that was wrong, and it was pulling in the incorrect data sets for... in order to calculate that specific number.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And have you guys gone back to look at previous years to see if the same error...

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yeah, so those reports include trend analyses, which we actually started producing last year. So this was the second year, so we corrected and updated the 2023 and 2024 reports. And in both of those reports for the first time, we did trend analyses, and we have made certain that all of those analyses are providing the correct numbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And how did that get caught? Like how... what was the... what was the cause of going back to look at...

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Oh, yes...

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: those causes?

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. And just a few more questions, and then I want to hand it back, because I know we have a lot to do.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah, there's no funding. You know, we take our existing staff to administer the program. And we have built really strong partnerships with the libraries, with the older adult centers, with, other community groups, the Salvation Army, other places like that. So we are really grateful for the partnership of those

1
2 organizations, but there is no funding, no line item
3 for any City agency or nonprofit to run these
4 centers.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it. And right now, are
6 all... how many are 24/7 during a heat crisis?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: No cooling
8 centers are 24/7; the website is 24/7.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Website? Got it.

10 And what are the normal hours for most of them?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: They're
12 whatever the normal hours are for the facility. You
13 know, based on, and I think people probably
14 understand, you know, the hottest part of the day,
15 and when we have heat emergencies, unless it's
16 something really out of the ordinary, which has
17 happened from time to time and we have adjusted, but
18 usually as the sun starts to go down, we are out of
19 the heat emergency around seven - eight o'clock, and
20 then it can start up again the next morning. And so
21 and as Carrie (phonetic) said, you know, most people,
22 you need to get out of the heat for a few hours. You
23 know, this isn't like a coastal storm or something
24 where you're at risk obviously for the whole time.
25 You need relief for a few hours.

1
2 So we do, if we have extreme heat where it gets
3 the heat indices gets above a 100, we will talk to
4 City partners to see if they can extend their hours.
5 But I think as we all know, know, the nonprofits that
6 run senior centers, libraries, these are not you know
7 generously always funded organizations. So they are
8 super responsive, they work really closely with us,
9 but we try not to put too many demands on them as
10 they are not being funded.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, got it.

12 The last question here. What is the minimum
13 standard to be, one, and are there things that you
14 need to have? Like, do you need to have access to
15 public bathrooms? Do you need... obviously, I would
16 imagine, you need central air conditioning or some
17 other cooling mechanism. But, like, what is the
18 criteria to actually be eligible for one?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure. Again,
20 we keep it pretty low, because we want to encourage
21 different types of organizations to be a cooling
22 center. You need to be open to the public, to the
23 entire public, not to just a specific population. You
24 have to have air conditioning, it doesn't need to be
25 65 degrees. I think it has to be ,you know, in the

1 range of the mid-seventies. You need access to
2 seating and access to water. And you have to be able
3 to have a contact that is willing to work with our
4 staff. Because, sometimes, you know, we do have
5 warning that heats coming, but the... if we're on the
6 margins, it can change over the weekend, it can
7 change on a holiday. Like I said last year, we were
8 activated on Juneteenth, we were activated several
9 Sundays, and not all organizations run 24/7 like our
10 organizations.

12 We prefer, obviously, that they are accessible,
13 about 90% of cooling centers are accessible, since
14 they are mostly older adult centers and libraries,
15 but not all of them are.

16 So we work with them. There are, uh, once people
17 have air conditioning, we can probably work through
18 the other things if they really would like to be a
19 cooling center.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Got it, thank you. Thank
21 you, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sure, thank you, thank you
23 Council Member.

24 I just want to mention that we have joined by
25 Council Member Ariola.

1
2 So how many heat emergency days did New York City
3 experience in 2024, and how does this compare to
4 previous years?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So last year,
6 we were activated for 23 days. Sometimes... that was
7 between June and August. Sometimes it was one day, we
8 did have a long heat activation, which I think was
9 about five or six days. The average is usually two to
10 three days. The year before, we were activated for
11 five days. So it's not, you know, just like we might
12 have a rainy spring, or we might have more hurricanes
13 one year than another, or more snow, less snow. It's
14 not like we can predict it. We are seeing over time
15 generally, obviously, that things are becoming
16 hotter. But usually, we're... the least we've had is
17 about five days and the most we've had is 24 days.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What trends are being seen
19 due to climate change, and what can New Yorkers
20 expect to see regarding the timing and length of heat
21 waves in the coming years?

22 And as a supplement to that question, given that
23 the federal government is looking to pull apart the
24 National Weather Service on some level, what
25

mechanism do we have to make sure that we are aware of what weather is coming to New York?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I mean, our number one partner that we work with is National Weather Service. We continue... we had calls with them last week based on some flooding concerns. So we are still working closely with them. I can't speak to what would happen if we start to lose more specific federal partners, like the weather service, it would really hamper our ability to forecast. We also work with a... we have a smaller contract with a private weather forecaster that we use, you know, from time to time as we need them. But, know, NOAA and the National Weather Service cannot be replaced for city and state governments with, you know, some private contractors.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: For in terms of... I know this is not a budget hearing, but in terms of the private contractors, and if we need to go that route, I would just... we do have Executive Budget Hearings coming up in May, so I'm just putting it out there to be something to think about in terms of letting Council know what might be needed.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I'll just say, and Council Member Ariola knows, because we had our budget hearing a few weeks ago, you know, New York City Emergency Management is more than 50% federally grant funded. Two-thirds of our staff are federally grant funded through Homeland Security and FEMA. So if some of the predictions come, you know, that have been laid out, come true, we're going have much bigger issues than maybe weather forecasting.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What guidance does the Administration provide to New Yorkers to help prepare for extreme heat events? And where can this guidance be found?

I know you mentioned the website. Is there anything else, or?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yes, we do extensive work to educate New Yorkers in advance of extreme heat events and then of course during extreme heat events. So the Health Department has a lot of information on our website. Our Heat Mortality Report is there. We have great information for New Yorkers about how to stay safe. And a huge part of our push is also to help people get access to residential cooling if they don't already have that.

So you know it's one thing to have an air conditioner, but if you can't afford to turn it on, it's a problem.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So we continue to
3 advocate for that. And again, as we're all kind of
4 sounding the drumbeat, we know that there are federal
5 changes. The Home Energy Assistance Program in
6 particular is one of the ones that has been reported
7 as cut. And so we need to continue to advocate for
8 these funds for New Yorkers who need it.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you know if all the air
10 conditioners last year?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Yes, so last year,
12 the program closed in mid July, so they no longer had
13 funding to provide.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And one of the questions
15 that I was thinking about when both of you were
16 testifying is - because it is true that people... if
17 people have air conditioning, they're not gonna go to
18 a cooling center. Right?

19 So, is there a way to figure out where the...
20 where people have the least amount of air
21 conditioners - in terms of the aging population and
22 people with disabilities and all of that - so that
23 maybe we have more cooling centers in a particular
24 place than somewhere else?

1
2 Like, for example, you know, the district that I
3 have is mostly, not all, mostly middle, upper middle
4 class. So there may be less of a need there than
5 someplace else. So I'm just curious as to whether or
6 not that data is available.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I'll say a
8 couple things. There is the Heat Vulnerability Index,
9 which, not always, but generally will coincide with
10 lower income neighborhoods which, you know may have
11 more vulnerability overall. And so we definitely, I
12 think at a scale of a four or five, are the ones
13 where it really can be a serious issue, so we do
14 focus on those areas.

15 We also, you know, we've received outreach from
16 council members, and others, so depending on
17 different populations, when things may be open, we
18 have worked with them. You know, some areas are more
19 isolated than others. So we're well aware of, you
20 know, where our cooling centers are located, where
21 some may be... you know, and sometimes it's also not
22 socioeconomic - it can also be if you're in Northeast
23 Queens, if you're in Staten Island, public
24 transportation is much more limited.

25 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: And people also may not be isolated in a social sense, but they may not live in, you know, apartment buildings. They may live in homes where someone isn't checking on them every day. So there are many different – with heat – there are many different vulnerabilities things that we're looking at. We work with Visiting Nurse, and with other meal providers, especially over long weekends, times when we know, you know, that there could be a heat emergency.

So we're looking at all these different vulnerabilities. And again, we appreciate all the outreach that the Council does, you know, along with us to bring this to the forefront.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So what campaigns initiatives has the Administration conducted to help educate New Yorkers on the health risks of extreme heat?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So as Carrie said, they do a lot of outreach. We also have done a lot. One thing we focused on the last couple years is outdoor workers, you know, delivery workers – we've distributed cool kits, cooling towels, water and other things, because ,you know, as she said, the

more time you spend outside, and the level of your activity, that can also put you at risk. So that is a population that we have focused on.

I'm proud to say that Emergency Management, 100% of our advertising last year went to ethnic and local media. So we have done a lot of advertising around... Our three that we focus on are heat, Notify NYC, and coastal storms, evacuation routes. So we did a lot of messaging in many different languages and very hyper-local papers.

And also people may come from another country where they're used to heat and so maybe they think, you know, that they can handle it, and then things, know, I think by the time you start realizing that you're ill, you know, it may be too late to get the help that you need. So we focus very locally...

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: on heat and other advertising.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you do any collaboration, like with the Parks Department, to make...because where there are more trees, the temperature seems to be lower, because you have the asphalt and all that that creates heat. So is there

any, in terms of planting trees or whatever, collaboration there?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah. If you look... so the overall website, the "Cool It!" website, and the Cool Options, we do put things -- like if there are pools -- I don't know if we get to the level of, you know, shadier areas, but we do talk about splash pads, about other things that may be available if somebody doesn't want to go to a library, but they want to visit a park or something like that.

We're also working with C40, the City got a grant to work with some nonprofits to set up misting stations. So, like, if you've ever been to an amusement park or something like that, you may go by where the cool mist goes on you and you get immediate relief. So we, and other partners, are working with some nonprofits to set some of those up in some of the more vulnerable neighborhoods that you've mentioned as a pilot project.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What factors are used to measure the HVI (Heat Vulnerability Index) in communities?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I'll take that one.

1
2 So our Heat Vulnerability Index is designed to
3 look at community level heat health impacts and
4 includes both environmental, like green space, as
5 well as social, like access to air conditioning
6 indicators. There's a total of five indicators. It
7 also includes surface temperature, poverty, surface,
8 access to air conditioning, green space, and race.

9 So together, they provide us with the ability to
10 understand, at a community level, where we want to be
11 prioritizing and where people have the greatest risk
12 at, again, a population level for those heat health
13 impacts.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How often is the Heat
15 Vulnerability Index updated?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: We update it... So
17 those five indicators are all ones that are
18 relatively slow to change and the data are not easy
19 to collect. So what we do is we update the analysis
20 when there's new data available for all five
21 indicators, and the last time we did that was in
22 2023. It's included in our Heat Mortality Report, and
23 we can definitely send that to you if you'd like more
24 information.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Which neighborhoods currently have a five HVI rating? Which is the highest risk?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I don't have that directly in front of me. But...

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You can get that to us?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: But we can definitely get that to you. It's also available online. And we have maps as well.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: And we have an interactive Heat Vulnerability Index Tool that allows people to type in their zip code, and then they can see what the indicators is, and each of those individual ones as well. So we'll make sure to send you all that information.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, have you been seeing trend the HVI risk?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So the HVI is designed as point in time, so it's not designed for trend analyses.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: But we do have trend analyses, and the best way for us to look at

1
2 that is with our heat mortality data. So I can share
3 with you that, uh, when we look at trends exacerbated
4 deaths, we see that there was a great decline between
5 the early 1970s to 2000s and that directly is
6 associated with the increase in residential air
7 conditioning that we know happened during that
8 period.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: And more recently,
11 we have started to see an increase, which we know
12 reflects the growing number of hot days and extreme
13 heat days that we're seeing in our city. And we've
14 now plateaued out at about, as mentioned earlier,
15 about 500, more than 500 deaths each year.

16 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can you walk us through the
17 process of activating the heat emergency plan just
18 like step by step?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sure.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thanks.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So we, our
22 watch command is, you know, our eyes and our ears,
23 they're 24/7. So they are monitoring National Weather
24 Service forecasts, you know, continuously. And once
25 they start to see - it could be as much as five to

1
2 six days out – Once they start to see that we might
3 get close to hitting the triggers, the triggers,
4 which I think Carrie mentioned, are a heat indices of
5 95 degrees or higher, for two or more days, or heat
6 indices of 100 degrees for any amount of time.

7 Once they see that we might be hitting those
8 triggers, they will talk to our on call team, they'll
9 talk to me, to the Commissioner, and we'll start to
10 monitor internally to see if, you know, if there's
11 any confidence, if we think it's really going get to
12 that level.

13 We will also, our Human Services Unit, will start
14 to reach out to our partners. Because, as we said,
15 many of them, you know, they're nonprofits, they may
16 have smaller staff, they may not be open every day.

17 So we try to give them – they have let us know
18 over the years – that they would much rather get an
19 early heads up. And then if it turns out we don't
20 have to activate, which is better than on a Sunday
21 calling them and saying, "The forecast has changed.
22 Can you all open tomorrow morning?" So we will be
23 very proactive with them. We will also start
24 messaging to the public, not to scare anyone, but
25 just so people are aware, so they can start to make

1
2 plans, you know, maybe start to look in on people
3 that might be more vulnerable. We'll definitely give
4 a heads up to elected officials, to our nonprofit,
5 and other partners.

6 Once we get within a few days, and we can see
7 that we have confidence that we probably will be in a
8 heat emergency, we set up an interagency heat call
9 that can have upwards of a 100 people on it. All City
10 partners, nonprofit, the Library Systems, all of them
11 – and then we'll have state partners, regional
12 partners – and we'll go through, make sure that
13 people understand, is it gonna be, you know, extreme
14 heat? Is it going be regular heat emergency? Is it
15 going to be something where we're going look for
16 extended hours, or are we hitting a federal holiday?
17 You know, there's Memorial Day, there's Juneteenth,
18 July Fourth, Labor Day. These are all holidays where
19 we could have a heat emergency. Is it going to go
20 over a weekend? – which can be more challenging. I
21 will say Wednesdays are the best day for a heat
22 emergency. Almost every almost every facility is open
23 on Wednesday. So, you know, but we can't we don't get
24 that lucky.

1
2 So then, you know, what we also do is, once we
3 know that we're moving towards a heat emergency,
4 we're working on the messaging, our GIS Unit is also
5 looking – Do we have to update the map? Is anybody
6 offline, because their air conditioning broke,
7 because they have construction, you know, they have
8 something else going on? And so we will do that.

9 We usually will have a press conference. We'll
10 have the Health Department, Aging, and City Hall so
11 we can let people know. Then we'll continue to
12 monitor throughout the heat emergency.

13 We send our Citywide Incidents Coordinators kind
14 of as secret shoppers. I know elected officials do
15 too, Gale Brewer's staff loves to do that. But ,you
16 know, to go into the sites and to see is it open, is
17 there signage? They all have signage in 14 languages.

18 But ,you know, sometimes there can be a little
19 error, and we want people to find them, we want them
20 to use the locations. Then at the end of every day,
21 we get a census, so we'll see you know are people
22 going to them?

23 One thing we haven't talked about is ,you know,
24 people will not go to a cooling center if they have
25 to leave their pet at home because it can be

1 dangerous for cats, for dogs. And so a couple years
2 ago we opened up a partnership with Petco. So they
3 are on our Cooling Center Map Now. They are well
4 utilized. I go to the Petco in College Point to check
5 out to see how things are going. So ,you know, that's
6 another thing that we will advertise. We don't want
7 anyone staying home, putting themselves at risk,
8 because they don't want to lose their dog, you know,
9 they don't want to leave their dog at home.

11 And so that is kind of the overall. We'll do a
12 report at the end, we'll deactivate the Cooling
13 Center Finder ,and we'll get ready for the next one.

14 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Are there any projections
15 in terms of the heat emergency for 2025 or not yet? I
16 mean, there's no long range.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: No we do do a
18 preseason call. We also do a preseason call with the
19 Council as I'm sure you're both aware.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: You know,
22 those will be coming later in May. But you know, we
23 being emergency managers, we plan for the worst. You
24 know, so we look at, you know, what if we had 25
25 days? hat if we had 30 days? And we definitely look

to holidays, to Saturdays, to Sundays, to days that we know are more challenging.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Have you has any thought been given to using hospitals? Sometimes they have auditoriums and things like that.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Sometimes when we've had an extreme heat emergency, we have talked to them about, you know, if there is our facilities. I will also say if there is... because we have a heat emergency, doesn't mean we don't have fires, don't have water main breaks...

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Hurricanes, all the things that can happen. But we will also bring out, uh, we'll work with the MTA just like we bring warming buses to sites in the winter. We can also bring buses that can be used as cooling buses.

So if you had an incident in your district at a specific building and people had to be out, we would also work to get cooling buses there for that point in time.

But again, we're always looking for new partners, new people that we can put on the map that people can avail themselves of.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, is there anything that should be included in the Heat Emergency Plan that's not currently mandated by Local Law 85 of 2020?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We don't think so. I mean, we've laid everything out. Like I said, I think when this bill was first drafted, the website was not 24/7. You know, technology has caught up and we're able to make it 24/7 now, which I think is hopefully helpful for your offices when you're advertising that a heat emergency is coming. It can be helpful for the public.

So we feel that, you know, everything that needs to be there for the cooling center to run as efficiently as possible is already codified.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is there any kind of hotline or any way that somebody can locate someone if a cooling center is supposed to be open and it's not, or in terms of locating a cooling center?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So for elected officials, as always, you can use the inner gov email, and many people do. People can call 311, you know, if they reach out, sometimes they reach out to reporters and they get to us, but definitely if a

1 member of the public, if the hours are wrong or
2 something, the most efficient is to call 311. Our
3 representatives are on all the calls that we have and
4 they will route any information. Because once we get
5 that information that a cooling center isn't open or
6 the air condition is broken or something – again we
7 don't manage those sites, so then we will have to you
8 know figure out, okay, that's this older adult center
9 and work with aging and their contractor or we'll
10 work with the library. So it is a multi-pronged step.

12 Also if we get reports like that, we'll send out
13 our citywide incident coordinators to make sure that
14 it wasn't just a blip and see if there's any
15 emergency needs that that site needs right at that
16 moment.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Have any of the
18 recommendations in the New York City Comptroller's
19 Report on Cooling Centers been adopted?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: So the site is
21 24/7 now, the website, which I think was ,you know,
22 one of the best things that we could do. We also have
23 looked to expand. Like I said, last year we added
24 some elected offices, we've added cultural locations,

and we continue to talk to other partners to see what other spaces can be added.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You know, according to the 2022 report, Queens had the lowest number of cooling centers per 100,000 residents. What steps has the City taken to increase the number of cooling centers in Queens. And how many are intended to open during the next Heat Emergency Plan Activation?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We're right now working with our partners to see how many locations will be open this year. Like I said, last year we started the season with 620 potential, and many days we had many more than 500 set up.

Looking at other locations, I think I mentioned before the city of Chicago for the entire city opens up six centers. There's no...

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is that right?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: There's no city, no jurisdiction to our knowledge that opens up anything remotely close to what we do. But we understand that people want to stay home, stay close to home. And so if you have ideas, you're both from Queens, if there are other places that you think could be helpful, you know, let us know and we will

reach out to them and see if they want to join the program.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We have a casino soon, you can do that. (LAUGHTER) Is... I said Queens.

What I wanted to ask you, other cities, do you know what they do in, aside from cooling... cooling centers aside, do you know what they do in heat emergencies? Because I know, I mean, particularly places like LA and other places? I'm just curious. Do you...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: They, you know, it depends. I would say that places like LA, we work with Houston, Harris County, Miami. People... and Carrie knows more about the science, but, you know, their triggers I think are higher than ours just because they have so many hotter days. I think they have much more air conditioning saturation there, because I don't think you want to live in one of those cities and not have air conditioning. So it's a little bit apples and oranges, but we have looked, especially during COVID, you both were active during COVID. In the summer of 2020, there was the Get Cool Program that Emergency Management oversaw with many partners, and we actually... the City was

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Some City Council offices have had challenges in the past with a lack of communication from NYCEM as to when the cooling

centers are open and where the nearest open cooling centers are located. So you're proactively reaching out you'll proactively reach out to council members and all that?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Yeah, for sure. I think also, again, making the website 24/7.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh (INAUDIBLE)

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: That has really helped. You know, and I think, look, New Yorkers are smart. They generally know how to find out, you know, if they want to go to a library, they want to go to a older adult center, they know what the hours are. But people can also call 311.

And you know, Emergency Management, especially our Inner Gov Team, and Commissioner Iscol and I work very hard to be very responsive. So if there are any any communication challenges, we can address those.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE) You spoke about Council Member Brewer, so the Office of Investigation, her, Committee on Investigations went out and audited a bunch of centers and all that. You've made the corrections there, I guess, in terms of the signage and all that. And do you have QR codes there or you just have just text on the signage?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I don't think we have QR codes on our... Again, we don't receive funding for this program. When we do update the materials and everything, we'll see if we could put a QR code on that. We definitely have QR codes on our advertising and things, which will push people to the cool option site and to the cooling partner...

(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Pretty easy, yeah.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Then you can do that in other languages, too, which I've done with stuff.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: We do. Our cooling center, all of that information is available in 14 languages just like Notify NYC.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How many cooling centers are temporarily closed as a percentage of all available cooling centers on average every year?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: On average, about 90 percent are open and 10 percent will be having, you know, some kind of incident.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. So public access... oh, public access to water has been an issue at library cooling centers. Has any work been done to

coordinate that and make water available to people at the libraries?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: If a library or something is having specific issues, they could reach out. When you sign up to be a cooling center, part of what you promise is that you will have water available. But if there are some specific issues that we can help with, we're happy to see those through.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: California, Washington, Arizona, and Oregon all have Clean Air Center Initiatives. Clean air centers are areas with air filtration systems or portable air cleaners and provide safe places to go during wildfires, smoke, and other air pollution events similar to cooling centers.

Has the City considered this as an option, and the bill aside, in light of the increase in air pollution and wildfire smoke in New York?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: You want to start?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So I'll start just by talking from a from sort of a public evidence-based, uh, for public health.

1
2 So we definitely are always looking at ways we
3 can protect New Yorkers' health and protect folks and
4 reduce their exposure to poor air quality. But I
5 really want to draw a distinction between what we
6 know about heat emergencies and what we know about
7 air quality emergencies.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Mm-hmm.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So for heat, we
10 have this acute risk, right? We have data that show
11 us very clearly as the temperature rises, we see that
12 increase in illness and in death. We have hundreds of
13 deaths every summer.

14 But for quality, we're more concerned about
15 chronic exposures, and there isn't the same type of
16 exponential risk for these short term exposures.

17 And so what we've always leaned on and what we
18 have really worked on with the City, with Emergency
19 Management, and others is developing clear messaging
20 around reducing your time outdoors. If you're
21 outdoors, reduce the intensity of your activity and
22 potentially wear a mask if that's appropriate for
23 you.

24 So opening a clean air center here for the very
25 few circumstance... I mean, we're all thinking about

2023, right? We all were here, was very, very frightening. But the idea of opening a clean air center, we don't want to be introducing a potential increase in risk for individuals from leaving an indoor environment, which by definition is going to be better than that air outside, and travel, which we know all New York... right, we're all going to have to go outside, we're going to take a walk to the subway, whatever it is.

So that's our concern. And what we're really focused on is leaning into the evidenced-base, providing clear messaging to New Yorkers in an air quality emergency around reducing their time outdoors.

Then for heat emergencies, we lean into cooling centers, because that is a proven evidence-based way to support an emergency response as part of our larger response.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: During the COVID-19 pandemic, certain older adult centers throughout the City as well as public schools were outfitted with air filtration systems. Do these air filtration systems also operate to filter out particulate matter from wildfire smoke?

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: So there's a number
3 of different types of filtration systems that can be
4 put into a variety of different places. Most air
5 filters are designed to do some level of filtration
6 specifically for fine particulate matter. I can't
7 speak specifically to the ones that were installed in
8 the schools, et cetera. I don't know the details of
9 that, but we could check on that if you're if you're
10 interested.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you know, Christina, or
12 no?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I don't. I
14 know they have put a lot things in. We focus mostly
15 on the generators in schools and ,you know,
16 outfitting them for coastal storms, for power outages
17 for things like that - looking at an all hazards
18 approach. But they have done a lot of work in this
19 area.

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, because the reason I
21 am asking is whether or not they could be used as
22 clean air centers if they do have the filtration. So
23 maybe that's something to look at.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: I appreciate the
25 thought. I think one thing that I will just

1
2 reemphasize is, regardless of our knowledge of the
3 quality of the air in a particular center or school
4 or whatever, we still have this issue that we don't
5 know the quality of the place where somebody is at
6 home and they have to leave their home and go
7 outside, which is gonna increase their exposure to
8 get to that location.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What agency or agencies
10 would be... you've already talked about the issues
11 about the... I know about the cooling center program,
12 but what agency or agencies would be best equipped if
13 we did this?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: I think, you
15 know, we would have to look at, like Carrie said, do
16 more research, look, talk to some of our partners on
17 the West Coast. The difference being that they
18 unfortunately experience wildfires and things at a
19 much larger rate than we do, so this is something
20 that they may have to turn on more often.

21 You know, I think, outside of some of the
22 challenges that Carrie said, one thing that we fear
23 is, as we've said, these cooling centers are really
24 an unfunded mandate. Right? That our partners have
25 stepped up and I can't, you know, I can't amplify

1
2 enough how fantastic the libraries have been, the
3 older adult centers, the community centers, all these
4 places. But, know, to put more requirements on them,
5 I mean air conditioning is not getting cheaper. We
6 all know how much, you know, energy and other things
7 cost. And so to put another mandate on them, and to
8 start to say... because I mean there aren't hundreds
9 of community locations that we're not aware of.
10 Right? I mean you all know your districts, Health
11 Department knows, you know, we know. So it would
12 really be going back to the same partners, putting
13 more requirements on them, you know, at a very large
14 cost with money that the City probably, you know,
15 wants to spend on other programs.

16 And then, again, we don't... so we have you know,
17 when that all happened in June of 2023, we quickly
18 made masks available at many locations. We have seen
19 very low demand for that. And so we don't see that
20 these sites would be utilized.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. I'm gonna that's I'm
22 done with my question. I'm gonna ask a Council Member
23 Narcisse if she has some questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, Chair. Thank
25 you for being here.

So from my understanding that you rather, which I'm in agreement with what you said, you rather, the focus should be for people to stay indoors, especially when the AQI increase, right? And even in the heat, when it's really hot, you rather the person stay in their home air conditioning instead, right?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OLSON: Specifically projects around expanding home air conditioning is what you're interested in? Yeah, we are very much.

1
2 So the Health Department has been working for
3 some time with our partners specifically on trying to
4 increase the resources that are available for the
5 Home Energy Assistance Program. So this is the
6 benefit program that will buy a person and install an
7 air conditioner in their home. And over the last four
8 to five years, we've done tremendous outreach and
9 increased the uptake of that program in here in New
10 York City. It's a statewide program and it's
11 federally funded. However it needs more funding
12 dedicated to it. So in the last two years the program
13 has closed early, the Summer Assistance Program has
14 closed early because they've run out of dollars,
15 right? They don't have any more funds. And so part of
16 what we've done is really done a lot of advocacy with
17 the State to encourage additional funds be put toward
18 that program. And we also want to see that program
19 expanded to also include utility costs, because as
20 you know, you can have that air conditioner, but if
21 you can't afford to turn it on, it's not helping you,
22 right? So this is really our has been our focus to
23 try to help expand access to home air conditioning.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And, please give some
25 focus around NYCHA houses as well. Because a lot of

folks are not getting the information (TIMER CHIMES)
you get from promote that.

Now quickly, I want to know how many cooling
centers that we have around our city?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Last year, we
had 622 locations registered as a cooling center.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: How many that we have in
each borough when we talk Brooklyn, by example?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: It...I mean,
each one has well over a 100. It you know, some it
it's not the same. It's not... I don't have the
numbers by borough, but it's hundreds in each
borough, over a 100 in each borough.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. About a 100-
something in...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Well, it's 620
across the city and then divided up. You know we are
working right now with our partners to see what
locations will be available this year, and then it'll
be broken down by borough.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: For the elected
officials, are we talking about New York City elected
officials, or are we talking about across the board
that can be a cooling center?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Anybody. We reached out, uhm, last year to all of the elected offices. So there were four council members, there are also some assemblymembers and state senators. We talked to the borough presidents. So ,you know, houses of worship can be a cooling center. Any, again, any space that's available to the public that has access to air-conditioning, has some seating, and water, those are the bare bones standards of what we need.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay, so the listing that we're talking about is including those partners? Like the elected officials and all of that?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Mm-hmm.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So that...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: The 620 was all of the partners from last year.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And what...

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: There were about seven elected officials all together I think.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay, one of my biggest concerns is the fact that elected officials offices, most of them are not open on the weekend. And if they

1
2 have a heatwave or AQI increase, there's no place for
3 them to go.

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARRELL: Right, so
5 that's why on... we list, if you go on Cooling Center
6 Finder today, it will show you the location; it will
7 say that we're not in a heat emergency; it'll tell
8 you to check back. When, if say, June 23rd of this
9 year, it becomes a heat emergency, we will activate
10 the website in advance, and then you can click - if
11 your office were a cooling center, you would click on
12 it, and it would say it's open 9:00 to 5:00, Monday
13 through Friday. If the heat emergency went into
14 Saturday, it would then show that your office is
15 closed. So we always tell people to check ahead.
16 Because libraries, like my branch library, I know
17 Thursdays they don't open until noon but it's open
18 until 8:00 p.m., it's open Saturday 10:00 a.m. to
19 5:00 p.m.; Sundays it's not open. So every location
20 has different hours. So people ,you know, there is a
21 little work you have to do to make sure that the site
22 is open.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I appreciate it, that's
24 where I go back to trying to get the smartest out of
25 it, trying to get (INAUDIBLE) especially the seniors

1
2 if they cannot. Just having a home air-conditioning
3 that would be an ideal approach right now. Because
4 we're talking about how expensive it is for us to do
5 the air testing quality and all of that. So now by
6 starting, I think that's one of the areas we should
7 be pushing for. So, thank you, Chair, thank you so
8 much. I'm moving back and forth, I'm sorry, that I'm
9 not sitting in one place, because I have two
10 hearings. I apologize.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I just want to acknowledge
12 that we have been joined by Council Member Feliz.

13 Council Member Ariola, do you have any questions?
14 Do you have any questions, Council Member? No.

15 All right, so, thank you. Thank you very much for
16 your testimony, we appreciate it.

17 PANEL: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, I now open the
19 hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the
20 public that this is a formal government proceeding
21 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As
22 such, members of the public shall remain silent at
23 all times.

24

25

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on Introduction 998 and Resolution 822.

If you have a written statement or additional testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms.

You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

The first panel is Shravanthi Kanekal – okay, so come up and have a seat – Shelby Luster, Raísa Lin Garden-Lucerna, and China Copperstone.

Okay, just know that you have two minutes for each of your testimonies. After two minutes, I will ask you to summarize, and then you can submit written testimony in a longer form.

So, do you want to start? Make sure the mic is on.

SHRAVANTHI KANEKAL: Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Council. My name is Shravanthi Kanekal, and I'm the Senior Resiliency Planner at the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). We are a membership network linking 13 grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, and we work with them in their struggle for environmental justice.

I am testifying here today alongside member organizations from NYC-EJA in support of Introduction 998 with necessary amendments.

An increasing number of New Yorkers are experiencing the negative impacts of our changing climate, especially the impacts of heat, which is a silent killer. As we've heard from DOHMH today, the number of heat related deaths that occurred annually was corrected from 350 and to 580 New Yorkers, with

the highest burdens among Black New Yorkers, who are twice as likely to die from heat related impacts as white New Yorkers, and these are alarming figures.

The City must appropriately adapt its policy management and response to heat as a climate threat. And it's critical to ensure that there are sufficient publicly available cooling options to help all New Yorkers.

We acknowledge that the existing cooling center program does play a lifesaving role for many but there are also many shortcomings. For example, from an informal survey that we conducted in some of our member districts a few years ago, we found that some cooling centers didn't have working ACs, didn't have extended hours, and some staff did not know that they were actually designated cooling centers. And I say all this to emphasize the importance of clear guidelines and dedicated resources for the program.

At a minimum, we'd like Introduction 998 to ensure a minimum number of cooling centers that operate across the city, to ensure that there's a subset that work over the nine to five regular working hours, that they have clear guidelines and minimum working standards, and that they ensure risk

information is available all throughout the year and to the top ten spoken languages. We also want the City to evaluate key statistics (TIMER CHIMES) utilized.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just summarize, and then...

SHRAVANTHI KANEKAL: Okay, I can summarize.

In conclusion, we are supportive of Introduction 998. With the right amendments, we know that this can be a good bill that will support and save a lot of New Yorkers' lives.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

CHINA COPPERSTONE: Thank you, Chair Schulman, and New York City Council members for providing time to testify today.

My name is China Copperstone, and I work at We Stay Nos Quedamos. It's a community development corporation in the South Bronx. We Stay Nos Quedamos joins our partners with the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance to request that Introduction Number 998 be amended to incorporate the recommendations we share today to center the lives of community members most vulnerable to extreme heat related impacts.

Cooling centers are an essential part of urban infrastructure to protect people from the risks of extreme heat days. And our organization is proud of New York City for investing in a program that is meant to ameliorate the threat of extreme weather.

However, the current cooling center resources are insufficiently accessible and inadequately equitable from alleviating environmental justice areas from the increased harms of climate and structural exacerbated extreme heat events.

The limited availability of cooling centers, both in terms of locations and hourly operations, leaves our most vulnerable populations at significant risk of heat related illness and death.

Our organization represents the voices of underserved neighborhoods in the South Bronx that are disproportionately impacted by heat related health risks – due to lack of community green spaces and access to waterfronts, proximity to pollution sources such as highways distribution centers, and peaker plants, as well as financial barriers to health care and owning household cooling units.

The New York City Department of Health 2024 New York City Heat Related Mortality Report reports that, and I quote, "Heat contributes to the deaths of about 580 New Yorkers on average each year during the warm season of May through September. Inequities by race and income persist in the people and neighborhoods most impacted."

Five-hundred-eighty deaths from high temperatures is outrageous and it's preventable. Our organization recommends that there are a minimum number of cooling centers located across communities, especially those with high concentrations of low-income residents, a high heat vulnerability index, and in areas with poor air quality and high pollution. This includes the most vulnerable neighborhoods across New York City where environmental burdens are highest.

(TIMER CHIMES) Centers must be easily accessible — I'll wrap it up — by public transit and ideally located within walking distance of each neighborhood.

Additionally, we support that cooling centers be operated beyond regular business hours, including evenings, weekends, and overnight, and additionally

on those days of poor air quality. These operations should be inclusive and accessible to all and equipped to provide the public with health information... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Summarize, summarize.

CHINA COPPERSTONE: Sure – Awareness of cooling centers should also be improved through proactive outreach and multilingual languages. And additionally, we recommend that there is safeguarded funding for these cooling centers to be improved for services in order to maintain that functioning that we heard about earlier today. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

SHELBY LUSTER: Good morning, Council Members, my name is Shelby Luster, and I am the Resiliency Planner at UPROSE. UPROSE is Brooklyn's oldest Latino community-based organization, serving Sunset Park since 1966 in working at the intersection of racial and climate justice.

The Sunset Park neighborhood in Brooklyn is a frontline, working class, environmental justice community of over 130,000, with a population of about 80 percent people of color. Sunset Park's industrial

1
2 infrastructure and limited green spaces contribute to
3 heat retention in the neighborhood, making it
4 particularly susceptible to high ambient heat levels.
5 Waterfront districts like ours often experience
6 temperatures that are six to eight degrees higher
7 than the citywide average.

8 Extreme heat is the deadliest natural disaster
9 worldwide, claiming the lives of around 580 New
10 Yorkers each year and disproportionately impacting
11 the health of environmental justice communities.

12 According to the New York City Panel on Climate
13 Change, the frequency and intensity of heat waves in
14 New York City will only continue to rise as climate
15 change worsens, making cooling centers a critical
16 lifeline.

17 In my work at UPROSE, my primary focus has been
18 filling in the gaps in the City's current cooling
19 center program by establishing our own safe havens in
20 the community spaces around our neighborhood.

21 Our community has made it clear that the currents
22 the City's current cooling center program is
23 inadequate to address the immediate threat of extreme
24 heat. The program does not actively engage with the
25

communities it serves leading to lack of awareness and trust.

We recommend that this bill establish a minimum number of cooling centers in the city, with clear operational standards set by the New York City Office of Emergency Management, particularly focused on environmental justice communities that experience high heat index scores.

Cooling centers and environmental justice communities should be hyper accessible and operate beyond the typical nine to five hours. They should provide real time information about heat related health impacts and cooling center operations in the top 10 most spoken languages in the City throughout the year.

We urge City Council to pass legislation that addresses the heat lethal outcomes of our city's most devastating natural disaster, and prioritize the safety and health of our communities, especially those that are disproportionately burdened by extreme heat and climate injustice. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

RAÍSA LIN GARDEN-LUCERNA: Good morning, Chair Schulman, and members of the Committee. My name is

1
2 Raísa Lin Garden-Lucerna, I am the Environmental
3 Justice Manager at El Puente. Founded in 1982, El
4 Puente is a human rights organization, located in
5 Brooklyn and Puerto Rico, dedicated to holistic youth
6 and community development through arts for social and
7 environmental justice.

8 I'm testifying on behalf of El Puente in support
9 of the intent behind Introduction 998. However, there
10 are amendments needed for it to have the greatest
11 impact.

12 With the level-four heat vulnerability index in
13 Williamsburg and Bushwick, we know it's caused by the
14 lack of trees and green open spaces and air pollution
15 from truck routes and high traffic roadways. Climate
16 change will only exacerbate these issues from
17 Brooklyn to the Bronx. That is why Introduction 998
18 should not only mandate a minimum number of cooling
19 centers to operate across the city but place an
20 emphasis on EJ communities and neighborhoods with an
21 HVI of four and five.

22 We need greater accessibility for communities to
23 know and utilize these services, too. Many of our
24 members are working class, migrant, and recently
25 arrived families who may not have access to adequate

cooling at home or in shelters. Urban heat island effect causes heat to linger into the night, and restricting cooling centers to operate during typical working hours neglects these populations. Thus, Introduction 998 needs to expand cooling center operation beyond the nine to five schedule.

Additionally, Introduction 998 should prioritize making information on cooling centers and heat risks readily available with live time updates in the top 10 spoken languages of the city.

Furthermore, three of our NYCHA Cornerstone centers are cooling centers. However, they are not well equipped nor funded to optimally operate and serve the community.

Introduction 998 must include clear guidelines for minimum working standards for cooling centers functionality from the New York City Office of, Emergency Management, and dedicate funding to support operations and maintenance for designated sites.

Finally, Introduction 998 has the opportunity to directly address extreme heat risk in communities. It won't be perfect at first, but that is why Intro Introduction 998 must also consider the submission of annual reports outlining data analysis and metrics to

identify areas of improvement to meet the growing risks of extreme heat emergencies.

Ultimately, El Puente is supportive of the goals of Introduction 998. Heat affects us all, but we all experience it differently. And we believe with the aforementioned amendments, Introduction 998 can truly serve (TIMER CHIMES) all New Yorkers, especially those most heat vulnerable. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you all very much for testifying, appreciate it.

In the next panel, Jorge Andres Ramirez, Aryanna Osorio, Anita Kwok, and Deaunte Johnson. Okay, go ahead.

ARYANNA OSORIO: Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Council. My name is Aryanna Osorio and I am the Resiliency Coordinator at The POINT CDC. Founded in 1994, THE POINT is dedicated to youth development and the cultural and economic revitalization of Hunts Point in the South Bronx. Our approach through the lens of arts and education is what enables our community to understand what it means to live in an Environmental Justice neighborhood. Aside from being an Environmental

Justice community, Hunts Point is home to the largest food distribution center in the western hemisphere. This makes living conditions and the massive infrastructure that's here even worse when it comes to the heat vulnerability index. At times, some the reported temperature within the city is actually four to five degrees higher because of PM 2.5 and because Hunts Point is a heat basin.

I am here today to voice THE POINT's support for the intent of Introduction 998. We want to ensure that City government appropriately adapts its policy, management, and response to heat as a climate threat.

Since before the pandemic, THE POINT has participated in extensive research and collection of air quality and temperature data for the purpose of understanding the impact that rising climate has on our quality of life. However, as shared in the New York City Heat Related Mortality Report, summers are only getting hotter and our preparedness for such climate emergencies cannot keep pace that safety demands.

One strong case is represented by a project we led, with the help of NYCEJA, in Summer of 2023 called CAMP EJ, where our organization led community

members in an air quality and temperature study in efforts to understand our neighborhood climate landscape. While the results of our efforts are shown in NYCEJA's Heat-Related Risks, Air Pollution, and Social Vulnerability in New York City Report, what you do not see is the physical impact the site monitoring had on our members who were outside during those extreme heat conditions. Young people from ages 16, staff members, and volunteers ranging from ages 30 to 50 (TIMER CHIMES) years were physically and mentally affected by extreme levels of heat trapped in the air, as well as the temperatures that were much higher than reported borough-wide..

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If you could just summarize, go ahead.

ARYANNA OSORIO: In summary, we support this, and one of the... we support this bill, but one of the things that is missing and that we would like to amend is the communication on a citywide level. We believe that bureaucratic agencies do not do enough work, I guess, like even with the MTA and transit to let people know that this is a serious matter, that climate change is real, and we would propose that the same efforts that were put out for COVID-19, mask up,

that kind of graphics, we need that kind of backing by LinkNYC, MTA, any kind of local advertisement in our neighborhoods.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Next?

ANITA KWOK: Thank you, Chair Schulman, for convening today's hearing on Introduction 998.

My name is Anita Kwok, I am a policy analyst representing United Neighborhood Houses, a policy advocacy organization representing settlement houses in New York. Our members operate senior centers, youth centers, and community centers, which serve as cooling centers. These sites are vital as part of our city's emergency response.

And as climate change accelerates, the likelihood of more frequent and intense heat waves increases, and the City must have a plan to keep people safe, especially those who are at risk of medical conditions such as older adults.

UNH supports Introduction 998, but while the bill sets strong expectations, the City must also ensure that the organizations are supported in meeting these expectations.

As one of our members bluntly puts it, "Cooling centers are critical, but we do not like being a

policy of providing reimbursements to nonprofits for meals and activities at their cooling centers.

In addition, we urge the City to invest more capital funds to repair HVAC systems. These recommendations will not only increase the utility of cooling centers (TIMER CHIMES) but they'll also save lives. Please see my testimony for more. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.

DEAUNTE JOHNSON: Hi, my name is Deaunte Johnson; I am the Policy Fellow at the New York League of Conservation Voters. NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Schulman, and members of the Committee on Health for the opportunity to comment.

NYLCV strongly supports the passage of Introduction 998 of 2024, sponsored by Council Member Powers. New York City is especially prone to extreme heat which is the deadliest weather related hazard in The United States. It has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorbs and reemits the sun's heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit seniors,

low-income, and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism such as residential redlining.

While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access and funding for the City's Cooling Center Program in an equitable manner. This Program helps New Yorkers who might not have access to air conditioning or cannot afford increases in their utility bills to take refuge in public places such as community centers, libraries, and senior centers during extreme heat events.

Introduction 998 is vital because in the past, the Cooling Center Program had been found to be inequitably administered. For example, a previous study by the Comptroller, which was mentioned earlier today, found that heat vulnerable neighborhoods such as Central Brooklyn, Central Queens, and parts of the Bronx had the fewest per capita cooling centers.

While we support this bill, we also recommend the building which consider the following edits:

One, using the latest available data when establishing the number of cooling centers of legislative mandates instead of a number based on data from 2017.

Two, there should be a minimum number of cooling centers operating beyond regular working hour... days and hours in neighborhoods with high heat vulnerability index scores. As we've seen that hot nighttime temperatures is the same as hot daytime temperatures, there's no difference. So, the cooling centers availability should reflect that.

Three, the cooling center website should be available in the top 10 spoken languages in New York City. The website should include real time updates on locations, hours, and services provided.

And lastly and most importantly, if passed, we urge the Administration and City Council to allocate sufficient long term funding to ensure the City's cooling center program is effectively carried out. This includes funding for staff, extended operating hours if necessary, programmatic needs and more.

We look forward to working with City Council, Administration, advocates to ensure New York City is well prepared (TIMER CHIMES) for climate and public health emergencies for all New Yorkers, but especially our most vulnerable. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I want to thank this panel, thank you very much for testimony. And if you have longer testimony, uh, we have yours, we have both of yours, so you can always submit. Thank you very much, we really appreciate the work that you do.

Okay, next panel will be Sophia Milazzo, Rex Tai, Caleb Smith, and Liz McMillan.

Which way do you want to start? You can go first.

CALEB SMITH: Hi, my name is Caleb Smith. Good, morning, Committee Chair Lynn Schulman, and Committee on Health, I am the Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT for Environmental Justice. I'm glad to be here today with WE ACT members.

WE ACT is a membership-based organization headquartered in Harlem serving all Northern Manhattan. Our mission is to build healthy communities by empowering residents to engage in the creation of sound and fair environmental policy. I am here alongside our members to uplift this critical emergency program to better support safety and health equity in the face of deadly heat events.

The cooling center program is an essential safety net for households that do not have air conditioners or cannot afford to run one. Cooling center visits

1 result in an estimated 66 percent reduction in the
2 risk of heat attributable deaths. However, the
3 program is in many ways ad hoc – it has no dedicated
4 budget, little consistency in services and hours and
5 some neighborhoods lack a location within a five
6 minute walking distance. Residents also report
7 limited wayfinding, signage or advertisements.
8 Community members have told us how to remedy these
9 issues in WE ACT's Cooling Center Audit released in
10 2020. The passage of this bill will ease the
11 allocation of resources to increase awareness of the
12 program and address barriers to access highlighted by
13 the audit. This bill also prioritizes equity in the
14 quantity and citing of cooling center locations to
15 better serve the most vulnerable populations.

17 Proven best practices for the program such as
18 extending hours of operations, coordinating outreach
19 with local transit authorities, consistent program
20 reporting and establishing feedback mechanisms for
21 cooling center patrons can be implemented here.

22 If cooling centers are codified and properly
23 funded, we will be a more heat resilient city.

24 WE ACT for Environmental Justice strongly urges
25 the New York City Council to enact Introduction 998,

and we will be providing written testimony with more detailed recommendations. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

ELIZABETH MCMILLAN: Hello, my name is Elizabeth McMillan. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

I want to thank Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

In my neighborhood, the cooling center program needs more support, because extreme heat events are increasing in frequency, severity, and duration in New York City. Cities such as New York are seeing more severe extreme heat events than surrounding areas, not only due to climate change, but because of the contribution of the urban heat island effect, in

1
2 which cities experience much hotter temperatures than
3 surrounding suburban and rural areas due to the
4 prominence of closely placed buildings that radiate
5 heat, high vehicle traffic, concentrated building
6 emissions, and less heat-absorbing vegetation.

7 The New York City Panel on Climate Change (NPCC)
8 2019 Report found that the number of hot days has,
9 and will continue to increase in frequency, duration,
10 and severity.

11 Introduction 998 would significantly improve the
12 accessibility and use of cooling centers in my
13 neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for
14 those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is
15 why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this
16 legislation.

17 We also hope that the City Council will
18 prioritize the cooling center program with adequate
19 funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can
20 only be realized (TIMER CHIMES) if the City
21 reinforces its climate disaster response goals with
22 financial support. Thank you for your time and
23 consideration.

24 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?
25

1
2 SOPHIA MILAZZO: Hello, my name is Sophia Milazzo,
3 and I am here with WE ACT for Environmental Justice,
4 and I live in City Council District 39. I work in
5 pediatric environmental health research at Mount
6 Sinai, which is located in City Council District 8
7 and serves New Yorkers from all districts. Thank you
8 Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in
9 support of equitable climate policy.

10 The cooling center program is a critical safety
11 net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat
12 events. New York's Climate Impact Assessment's
13 climate projections for New York City show some of
14 the state's largest increases in extreme heat. New
15 York City has historically experienced an average of
16 four days per year over 95°F; this number is
17 projected to increase as high as 32 days per year by
18 mid-century, which is over a month each year of
19 dangerously hot days and is to almost two full months
20 per year by the end of the century.

21 Cooling Centers are a vital community resource on
22 these extreme heat days. Extreme heat causes direct
23 and indirect health effects that span acute illness
24 to chronic health issues. These health effects are
25 more likely to affect our most vulnerable community

members. Children are a particularly high-risk group. As someone who works with a team of pediatricians, I cannot overstate how important it is for families with children and low-income families of color to have options for cool, safe, convenient spaces if they don't have adequate AC where they stay. It's a life-saving health measure.

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of cooling centers across the city, providing a much needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

(TIMER CHIMES) Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next?

DR. REX TAI: Good morning, my name is Rex Tai, I am a resident of Central Harlem in City Council District 9, a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and a physician working in New York City at Health + Hospitals.

I want to make the case for addressing heat-related death and illness through crucial steps — improving access to cooling centers is overwhelming and indisputable.

Very recently a wide swath of professional medical societies have adopted physician statements to study and prepare for climate related health effects with the utmost urgency. Leading health journals like the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* have all issued advisory reports for how physicians and public health officials should address and advocate around climate health and heat specifically.

Heat has multisystem health impacts and a lot of attention is given to the acute health consequences such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, but I also want to bring attention to the statistically significant increase in chronic illness exacerbations that come from heat as well. This includes allergic triggers for asthma attacks, increased risk of cardiovascular disease like heart attacks, pre-term birth, developmental delay, the list goes on and on. Again, it's a whole system, whole body set of health consequences.

In the post-pandemic era with rising health care costs, hospital closures, systemic staffing shortages, an inability to proactively and comprehensively prepare for extreme heat will stretch the City's health care infrastructure only further.

New York City makes political and budgetary decisions about how sick it chooses for its residents to be. Please empower the Department of Health, health care workers, and community advocates to serve New Yorkers in the best ways we can.

I strongly urge the Council to support this introduction to enable cooling centers to be widely available, accessible, and operated (TIMER CHIMES) to a high standard.

I additionally endorse all of the testimony and recommendations of my environmental justice allies and urge close collaboration in its effective and equitable implementation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you for all of the work that you do, and thank you for coming to testify today.

Okay, next we will be hearing from Misha Sharp.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Before we move on, if there is anyone present in the room that has not had the opportunity to testify, please see the Sergeant at Arms and fill out a card.

All right, Misha, go ahead.

MISHA SHARP: Great. Thank you, Council Member Schulman, and committee members for the opportunity to testify. My name is Misha Sharp, and I am the Assistant Director of Policy for 32BJ Health Fund. We provide health benefits to over 200,000 32BJ union members and their families using contributions from over 5,000 employers.

For many years we have talked about the rising prices at New York City hospitals which drive up the cost of health benefits and squeeze workers' wages. For too long, purchasers and patients have been expected to shoulder the burden of skyrocketing hospital prices. New York needs to act immediately to lower commercial hospital prices and to slow those increases over time.

Today, we thank Council Member Schulman for introducing Resolution 822, calling on the New York State Legislature to pass the Fair Pricing Act being

sponsored by Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Jackson.

The Fair Pricing Act would lower prices for routine health care services so that the same procedure costs the same price regardless of whether that care is delivered in a doctor's office or a hospital outpatient clinic.

This legislation would create over a \$1 billion in savings for New York in one year with over \$200 million directly back to New Yorkers by lowering out of pocket costs.

Safety net and public hospitals are notably exempt from the Fair Pricing Act because these are not the hospitals charging New Yorkers the highest prices. We can't let the fear of the problems faced by struggling safety net hospitals prevent us from taking common sense action to rein in the highest prices that leave our healthcare market vulnerable to profit seeking behavior. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I really appreciate it, and I appreciate you coming here today.

All right, we will now move to Zoom testimony.
Please wait for your name to be called to testify, and please select "unmute" when prompted.

Isabel Friedman?

ISABEL FRIEDMAN: Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Isabel Friedman and I am an Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). NRDC strongly supports Introduction 998, which would codify the City's cooling center program, enabling it to better protect frontline communities.

Extreme heat kills more people than all other natural disasters combined, resulting in 350 fatalities in New York City alone, each summer. However, the burden of extreme heat falls overwhelmingly on low-income communities, communities of color, and older populations.

Cooling centers are an essential tool in combating extreme heat, especially for low-income communities and unhoused individuals who lack access to cooling devices and face higher rates of energy insecurity. In fact, cooling center visits can reduce the risk of heat-related deaths by an estimated 66 percent.

However, the current program lacks consistency across sites, staff trained to identify heat related illness and signage to increase public usage.

Introduction 998 would strengthen this program by ensuring environmental justice communities are prioritized in the quantity and citing of the City's cooling centers as well as empower the City to better allocate resources to improve utilization of the program.

To maximize the bill's effectiveness, we propose the following short additions:

First, the responsible agencies should base the number of cooling centers on the most recent data to account for rapidly changing climate risks and update the number annually.

Second, a minimum number of cooling centers that operate outside of the nine to five window should be established in each heat vulnerable neighborhood.

Third and most important, sufficient and dedicated funding must be allocated to this program by the City. With what's likely to be another record breaking summer quickly approaching, we must act now.

On behalf of NRDC and our partners, I urge the City to pass this legislation and allocate funding for these life saving pooling spaces.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, very much for your testimony.

Okay, thank you to everyone who has testified. If there is anyone present in the room or on Zoom who has not had the opportunity to testify, please raise your hand.

Seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by committee staff, may be submitted for the recorded up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

I want to call one more time for Jorge Andres Ramirez? No?

I want to thank everyone who testified today on this very important topic. Climate change is only going to make our heatwaves worse. So we need to make sure that we have our cooling centers, and make sure that we have the ability to have places to go for people where the air quality is a problem.

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So, thank you very much to everyone. And with
that, I close out today's hearing.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)

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 April 29, 2025