

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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January 14, 2025  
Start: 10:05 a.m.  
Recess: 11:13 a.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Diana Ayala  
David M. Carr  
Crystal Hudson  
Keith Powers  
Yusef Salaam  
Nantasha M. Williams

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Sandy Nurse

A P P E A R A N C E S

Annette Hill, Deputy Commissioner of Customer Operations at the New York City Department of Finance

Jake Capistran, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs at the New York City Department of Finance

Paula Segal, Senior Staff Attorney in our Equitable Neighborhoods Unit at TakeRoot Justice

Alexander Knipenberg, Senior Staff Attorney at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

Tamara del Carmen, Director of the Foreclosure Program at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

Sunny Jo, Attorney with the Legal Aid Society

Joan Erskine, Board Member of Brooklyn Level Up

Tobias Campbell, East New York Community Land Trust

Hannah Anousheh, Campaigns Director for the East New York Community Land Trust

John Krinsky, self

Pamela Herrera, Land Justice Coordinator for the Western Queens Community Land Trust

Will Spisak, Senior Program Associate at New Economy Project

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

Lacey Tauber, representing Brooklyn Borough  
President Antonio Reynoso

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Alexis Foote, founder and board member of the  
ReAL Edgemere Community Land Trust

1 COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone  
3 check for the Committee on Finance. Today's date is  
4 January 14, 2025. We're located in the City Hall  
5 Committee Room. Recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and  
7 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for  
8 the Committee on Finance.

9 At this time, we ask that you silence all  
10 electronic devices and at no time are you to approach  
11 the dais.

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

16 Chair Brannan, we're ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Sergeant.  
18 [GAVEL] Okay, good morning, and welcome to today's  
19 Finance Committee hearing. I'm Council Member Justin  
20 Brannon. I have the privilege of Chairing the  
21 Committee on Finance. I want to recognize that we've  
22 been joined this morning by Council Members Nurse and  
23 Carr, and we have Council Member Moya on Zoom.

24 Today, the Committee will hold a public  
25 hearing to consider a number of bills and a

2 resolution related to the Department of Finance  
3 Administration of real property records and taxes,  
4 two primary administrative responsibilities that  
5 directly affect the rights and livelihood of real  
6 property owners and the families who call those  
7 properties home. This hearing continues the work that  
8 the Council undertook with the Home Preservation and  
9 Debt Resolution Reform Act. That bill put in place a  
10 number of reforms to ensure homeowners who are behind  
11 on their taxes and water bills would have realistic  
12 paths to resolving their delinquency status and  
13 safeguard their homes from predatory actors. We've  
14 seen that for many of our homeowners, the threat of  
15 losing their homes due to deed theft intensifies when  
16 the property is behind on tax bills. In prior  
17 hearings this session, the Council Committees have  
18 heard troubling testimony of thieves who prey on  
19 seniors and target black and brown homeowners as well  
20 as properties encumbered by liens. We can't forget  
21 that these problems exist against the backdrop of an  
22 ongoing housing crisis in our city. It's for these  
23 very reasons that I'm particularly interested today  
24 in discussing the ways that the Department of Finance  
25 does or can leverage its outreach and recording

2 responsibilities to help New Yorkers, particularly  
3 those at greatest risk of losing their homes, to  
4 ensure that they receive all the tax breaks that  
5 they're eligible for and afforded as much protection  
6 from deed theft as we can reasonably provide. I look  
7 forward to hearing feedback on how the legislation  
8 considered today could support this objective and  
9 promote security and stability for homeowners, their  
10 families, and their communities.

11           Three of the items we'll hear about today  
12 are prime sponsored by my good friend, Council Member  
13 Nurse, proposed Intro. Number 782-A, which relates to  
14 outreach to property owners subject to municipal  
15 taxes, Intro. 783, which relates to the public  
16 recording of tax liens, and Resolution 327, which  
17 would call on the State to adopt legislation giving  
18 real property tax owners the benefit of retroactive  
19 application tax exemptions. This is all a  
20 continuation of our promise when we did meaningful  
21 lien reform last year that we weren't done and that  
22 we were going to continue keeping our promise to  
23 homeowners. So, I'm now going to turn it over to  
24 Council Member Nurse for her remarks on this  
25 legislation.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair  
3 Brannan. Good morning. Today we're hearing three of  
4 my bills, as was just mentioned, that will help  
5 homeowners stay out of property tax debt and avoid  
6 the tax lien sale. These bills follow the significant  
7 changes this Council made to property tax debt  
8 collection and the lien sale last year. While we have  
9 made significant reforms to the lien sale, there will  
10 still be those owners who fall into arrears when they  
11 could and should be benefiting from property tax  
12 exemptions. For those owners who are paying more than  
13 they should be, Intro. 782 will require DOF to  
14 proactively notify owners of exemptions they may be  
15 eligible for, as well as their renewal applications,  
16 ensuring greater compliance for the City and relief  
17 for homeowners. Additionally, this bill will better  
18 protect homeowners from deed theft and other  
19 speculative behavior by notifying them or a  
20 designated third party on how to sign up for City  
21 Alerts if and when financial documents that have been  
22 recorded against their property.

23 Just as these reforms should be as easy  
24 as possible to access, it should also be easy to  
25 figure out if your property has a lien in the first

2 place. To this effect, Intro. 783 will require DOF to  
3 record tax liens on ACRIS when the lien exceeds  
4 5,000, thereby providing one more medium where owners  
5 can find out if they are behind in their taxes.

6           Lastly, Reso. 327 calls on the State to  
7 help struggling homeowners who may have accrued debt  
8 while being eligible for, but not taking advantage  
9 of, property tax exemptions. By allowing eligible  
10 homeowners to have these exemptions applied  
11 retroactively, we can bring at-risk households into  
12 compliance, save people's homes, and stabilize  
13 neighborhoods.

14           So, I'm hoping these bills will not only  
15 support our tax rules, but keep people in their homes  
16 and debt-free, and I'm really looking forward to any  
17 feedback the Administration has, and thank you, Chair  
18 Brannan.

19           CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council  
20 Member Nurse. We've also been joined by Council  
21 Members Hudson and Ayala.

22           In addition to Council Member Nurse's  
23 three pieces of legislation, the Committee will hear  
24 Introduction 889, which was prime sponsored by  
25 Council Member Hudson. 889 relates to providing



2 notification to Council Members of the recording of  
3 certain real estate instruments. I'll now turn it  
4 over to Council Member Hudson for remarks on her  
5 legislation.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much,  
7 Chair Brannan, and good morning. This bill will  
8 require the Department of Finance to notify the local  
9 Council Member whenever a deed-related or mortgage-  
10 related document is recorded that affects a property  
11 interest held by the same party for at least 30  
12 years. Deed theft remains a significant issue,  
13 particularly in Districts like mine, which are  
14 experiencing rapid gentrification, and are home to  
15 many longtime black and brown homeowners. I've heard  
16 too many stories of older adults who have had their  
17 home titles stolen without their knowledge or  
18 consent. Over the past decade, more than 3,500  
19 homeowners have filed deed theft complaints with the  
20 Sheriff's Office. Despite important progress in  
21 Albany to make deed theft a crime and to expand the  
22 Attorney General's authority to prosecute these  
23 cases, there's still much work to be done to  
24 eliminate this problem once and for all. Over the  
25 past few months, I've worked with the Legislative

2 Division to explore ways the Council could intervene  
3 in the deed registration process to flag potentially  
4 fraudulent transactions before they're finalized.  
5 Unfortunately, we've learned that this Body is  
6 largely preempted from interfering in the deed  
7 registration process. However, that doesn't mean we  
8 shouldn't act. This bill will ensure that we are all  
9 notified whenever a longtime property has changed  
10 hands and gives us the chance to reach out to the  
11 constituent to ensure their deed was transferred  
12 legitimately and to connect them with the Sheriff's  
13 Office and Attorney General if it was not. We must  
14 take an all-encompassing approach to protect the  
15 homes that our elders have owned for decades from  
16 theft. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council  
18 Member Hudson. And last but not least, the Committee  
19 will hear Introduction 1086, which was prime  
20 sponsored by Council Member Williams. 1086 relates to  
21 notifying interested parties of the recording of  
22 certain real estate instruments. Council Member  
23 Williams is not with us just yet.

24 Before we turn to testimony from the  
25 Administration, I want to thank the Staff, obviously

2 the Finance Division, for their work in preparing for  
3 this hearing. Nick Connell, Counsel to the Division,  
4 Michael Sherman, Senior Policy Analyst, and Emra  
5 Adev, our Deputy Director. We're now going to hear  
6 testimony from the Department of Finance. Deputy  
7 Commissioner for Customer Operations, Annette Hill,  
8 and Director of Governmental Affairs, Jake Capistran,  
9 who is present for Q and A. I'll now have Nick, our  
10 Counsel, administer the oath.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CONNELL: Good morning.  
12 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
13 nothing but the truth, in your testimony before this  
14 Committee and to answer Council Member questions  
15 honestly? Deputy Commissioner.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CONNELL: And Director.

18 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: I do.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, you may begin.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: Good morning,  
21 Chair Brannan and the Members of the Committee on  
22 Finance. My name is Annette Hill, and I serve as the  
23 Deputy Commissioner for Customer Operations for the  
24 New York City Department of Finance. I'm also joined  
25

2 by our Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Jake  
3 Capistran.

4 I'm here today to address several pieces  
5 of legislation that fall under the Department of  
6 Finance responsibilities. Intro. 782, sponsored by  
7 Council Member Nurse, would require the Department of  
8 Finance to include information regarding personal  
9 property tax exemption with the Statement of  
10 Accounts, such as the Senior Citizens' Homeowner  
11 Exemption, Disabled Homeowner Exemption, and the Co-  
12 op Condo Abatement and the Veterans Exemption.  
13 Additionally, this bill would require the Department  
14 of Finance to provide information to property owners  
15 on how to sign up to receive notifications when an  
16 action is recorded, such as refinancing the mortgage,  
17 paying off the mortgage, liens, etc., against their  
18 property. Lastly, this bill would require the  
19 Department of Finance to notify property owners when  
20 their personal exemption requires renewal. The  
21 Department understands the desire and agrees with the  
22 proactive outreach to property owners and will  
23 implement this approach in several practices. Each  
24 January, the Department of Finance sends out notices  
25 of property values based on the Tentative Assessment

2 Rule. This informs property owners of their property  
3 value and their anticipated overall tax bill. Within  
4 this notification, the Department informs the  
5 taxpayer of tax exemptions that they can apply for.  
6 Secondly, every recipient of an exemption receives a  
7 notice in the mail as required by law when their  
8 exemption is up for renewal, accompanied by  
9 instructions on how to renew. Lastly, DOF sends new  
10 property owners a welcome package with information on  
11 how to sign up for notifications, including for  
12 family members. From the Administrator's perspective,  
13 we believe our current practices are the better  
14 vehicle for communicating all of this critical  
15 information. We are careful to walk the line between  
16 communicating effectively and overburdening taxpayers  
17 with too much information.

18           Turning to the second bill, Intro. 783,  
19 also sponsored by Council Member Nurse, which will  
20 require the Department of Finance to record a lien in  
21 ACRIS, the system of record for the City Register,  
22 any time a property occurs more than 5,000 in lawful  
23 debt that is over three years old. Currently, the  
24 Department records lien in ACRIS only when a property  
25 is sold through the tax lien sale. For liens that

2 have not been sold yet, meaning they have not met the  
3 qualifications for the lien sale, a property owner  
4 can view this information on DOF's online property  
5 tax system. The Administration believes the current  
6 practice of recording liens is the appropriate course  
7 of action and does not support changing it.

8 Delinquent balances appear in quarterly or semiannual  
9 bills, and under Local Law 82 of 2024, we send  
10 notices to property owners with overdue balances of  
11 over 100 dollars. In addition, once a debt reaches  
12 threshold for inclusion in the lien sale, we send  
13 repeated notices as part of the reforms included in  
14 Local Law 82. We will conduct extensive outreach to  
15 ensure owners are aware of their debt. Our goal is to  
16 help owners resolve their debt before the liens are  
17 sold. Recording liens in ACRIS would be redundant and  
18 risk exposing owners' financial strength to  
19 unscrupulous actors without providing clear  
20 additional benefits.

21 Intro. 889, sponsored by Council Member  
22 Hudson, would require the Department of Finance to  
23 notify Council Members any time a recording is made  
24 on a property that has not had an action taken within  
25 the last 30 years. Outreach notifications are our

2 first line of defense against deed theft or fraud.  
3 Since 2014, the City has implemented proactive  
4 measures to combat deed theft, including an internal  
5 flagging system for properties with no activity in  
6 the last 40 years. This bill is in the spirit of the  
7 City Register's work and we happily work throughout  
8 the legislative process with the Council.

9           Lastly, Intro. 1086, sponsored by Council  
10 Member Williams, would require the Department of  
11 Finance to notify through mail, email, or phone any  
12 recordings through ACRIS to interested parties within  
13 30 days. The Department of Finance supports this  
14 practice and the bill.

15           These four bills pertain to some of the  
16 Department of Finance's most important services to  
17 New Yorkers. We support the goals of this proposed  
18 law and we look forward to collaborating with those  
19 bill sponsors and Council. Thank you for allowing me  
20 to testify and I'm happy to take your questions.

21           CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,  
22 Commissioner. I now want to turn it over to Council  
23 Member Williams for remarks on her bill, 1086.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you so  
25 much, Chair Brannan, for convening today's hearing

2 and for your leadership in guiding the important work  
3 of the Finance Committee. I also want to extend my  
4 deepest gratitude to the Brooklyn Legal Services  
5 Corporation, for bringing this critical issue to  
6 light and for their tireless advocacy on behalf of  
7 our city's most vulnerable homeowners. Their work and  
8 dedication have been instrumental in inspiring the  
9 legislation we are discussing today. The bill before  
10 you that you just discussed, Intro. 1086, seeks to  
11 address a pressing issue affecting property owners in  
12 our city, the problem of title clouding. A cloud on a  
13 title creates significant uncertainty about a  
14 property's ownership, often leading to devastating  
15 consequences for homeowners. This issue is not merely  
16 administrative, it has real and lasting impacts on  
17 people's lives, leaving them vulnerable to fraud,  
18 extortion, and in some cases the loss of their homes.  
19 Intro. 1086 proposes an amendment to Section 7-628 of  
20 the Administrative Code to enhance transparency and  
21 protect property owners. Specifically, this  
22 legislation would require the Department of Finance  
23 to notify interested parties by email, text message,  
24 and postal mail when a deed-related or mortgage-  
25 related document has been recorded for a property.



2 These notifications must be sent no later than 30  
3 days after the document's recording. This simple but  
4 crucial step would create an additional safeguard  
5 against title clouding by ensuring property owners  
6 are properly informed of any changes affecting their  
7 title. It provides homeowners with an opportunity to  
8 address potential issues quickly, reducing the risk  
9 of being caught unaware by fraudulent activity. Title  
10 clouding often stems from predatory schemes that  
11 disproportionately target low-income and elderly  
12 homeowners, many of whom have built their lives and  
13 families around their homes. Brooklyn Legal Services  
14 Corporation A has seen firsthand the devastating  
15 effects of these scams as they have helped  
16 constituents who fall victim to title fraud or  
17 orchestrated by bad actors seeking to extort or steal  
18 their homes. This bill is a proactive measure to  
19 empower homeowners, providing them with tools to  
20 protect one of their most valuable assets. By  
21 leveraging multiple channels of communication, email,  
22 text, and postal mail, we ensure that homeowners  
23 receive timely and accessible notifications  
24 regardless of their preferred method of  
25 correspondence. As elected officials, it is our duty

2 to protect our constituents from harm and provide  
3 them with the resources they need to safeguard their  
4 futures. Intro. 1086 is one step toward achieving  
5 that goal, and I urge all of you to join me in  
6 supporting it.

7           Again, in closing, I want to thank Chair  
8 Brannan for convening this hearing and for BKA for  
9 their advocacy and partnership, and thank you because  
10 you have no problems with my bill, so that's  
11 exciting. I look forward to moving forward and  
12 bringing this meaningful protection to homeowners  
13 across the city. Thank you.

14           CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council  
15 Member Williams. I just have a couple of questions  
16 and I want to turn it over to the bill sponsors for  
17 some of their questioning.

18           Just broadly, what efforts does  
19 Department of Finance make to inform residential  
20 property owners about available tax breaks?

21           DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Thank you for the  
22 question, Council Member. The Department of Finance  
23 does proactive outreach in a number of ways. We have  
24 an outreach team that does hundreds of events a year  
25 that interact with thousands of New Yorkers that

2 inform New Yorkers about our benefit programs. We  
3 partner with council members. We go out to community  
4 boards. We do a number of events. Separate from that,  
5 we do a number of direct mailings. So, we inform  
6 property owners through our notice of property  
7 values, NLPVs, which will go out to property owners  
8 tomorrow, actually, funny enough. It has exemption  
9 information in those mailings. We inform property  
10 owners through our late-day notices as well, 45-day  
11 late-day notices, which thanks to Local Law 82, the  
12 Tax Lien Sale Bill, that notifies property owners of  
13 exemptions. And additionally, we also offer a welcome  
14 package to New Yorkers any time a property owner buys  
15 a new property in New York City. That informs  
16 property owners of exemption information that could  
17 benefit them. And most recently, as of last year, we  
18 did direct mailings to recipients that we thought  
19 would be, that would qualify for SCHE and DHE  
20 benefits, and so we did about 19,000 mailings last  
21 year, and this year, we're looking to do about 41,000  
22 mailings. So, we're really trying multiple different  
23 avenues to do proactive outreach on our benefit  
24 programs.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. And does DOF  
3 have available data that would give us the info we  
4 need to compare the number of taxpayers who are  
5 eligible for a tax break versus those who are  
6 actually taking advantage of the tax break?

7 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: In 2022, we did this  
8 for SCRIE/DRIE recipients. We paired some data that  
9 we had from the state level, and we found about  
10 135,000 eligible households. SCRIE/DRIE is a little  
11 different because we do that based off income, but  
12 there's other criteria for SCRIE/DRIE. It's a little  
13 bit different than SCHE and DHE. In that population,  
14 we're not aware of everyone's rental status and what  
15 they pay for rent, which is critical. As for SCHE and  
16 DHE, we work with the State as well to determine the  
17 eligible population. There should be upcoming numbers  
18 in the next few months that we will have to determine  
19 the eligible populations for these programs.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Does DOF have  
21 any specific or explicitly stated goals related to  
22 enrollment in these tax breaks? Like, we'd like to  
23 see 75 percent of eligible taxpayers.

24 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Of course. Yes,  
25 Council Member. Prior to the pandemic, we had more

2 folks on program, and now we're back. I think the  
3 numbers as of FY24 were, I believe, 64,000 or so for  
4 SCHE and DHE.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: 64,000 folks who are  
6 enrolled?

7 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Let me pull up the  
8 right numbers for you. Excuse me. SCRIE/DRIE was  
9 about 64,000 last year, and SCHE/DHE was about  
10 46,000.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Those numbers were  
12 enrollment?

13 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: On program.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And what about  
15 eligibility?

16 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: As I said, Council  
17 Member, excuse me, we don't have those numbers just  
18 yet. We're still working through the eligibility, and  
19 they'll be ready in the upcoming few months here. But  
20 to your point, if a New Yorker is available for a  
21 program, available for benefit, we're trying our best  
22 to get to them, to reach out to them. As I mentioned,  
23 we have direct and indirect outreach through our  
24 community events and through direct mailings. Our  
25 outreach team is willing to partner with any Council

2 Member and any community board to try to get the word  
3 out there. If I can reference the mailings I spoke  
4 about earlier, the 19,000 mailings we sent out to  
5 households directly last year, we received about  
6 3,900 responses. And of those 3,900 responses, about  
7 3,300 of them were accepted on program. And so, even  
8 with direct mailings, it's still not a sure shot that  
9 we're going to get them on program.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What happens if a  
11 homeowner sends in an application for a tax break  
12 after the deadline?

13 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: If it's after the  
14 deadline, if it's after March 15th, they will not be  
15 considered until the following fiscal year.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And would you pre-  
17 enroll them for the upcoming year?

18 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: I want to make sure  
19 I'm 100 percent correct. We have an application  
20 period for new applicants and renewals. Renewals  
21 starts in September and ends on March 15th for these  
22 programs, and I believe the initial application is  
23 January to March.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Let's say a  
25 homeowner sends in an application for a tax break

2 after the deadline. Is at least a record kept of that  
3 application to make sure that you reach out to them  
4 for the next year?

5 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: I will have to talk  
6 to the team to see if that's something we do.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'd like to know  
8 what happens to those... If people get in late, what  
9 happens to those applications?

10 I want to turn to Council Member Hudson  
11 for some questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Sure. Just a  
13 couple. Thank you. What efforts does the Department  
14 of Finance via ACRIS or another system currently  
15 undertake to proactively notify title holders when  
16 changes to that title have been registered?

17 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Could you repeat your  
18 question again? Sorry, Council Member.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Sure. What efforts  
20 does the Department of Finance via ACRIS or another  
21 system currently undertake to proactively notify  
22 title holders when changes to that title have been  
23 registered?

24 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Apologies for making  
25 you repeat that question.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: No, no. It's okay.

3 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Every property owner  
4 in New York City will receive a notification when a  
5 recording happens through ACRIS. It goes out via  
6 mail, and so that is one way. I believe that's our  
7 most direct and effective effort of notifying a  
8 property owner when something happens against their  
9 property record. Deputy Commissioner, do you have  
10 anything to add?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: Also, we do a  
12 lot of outreach. At all the outreach sessions, we  
13 ensure that we talk about the notification program.  
14 We give our brochures on how to sign up. But like  
15 Jake just mentioned, the way we get information is as  
16 soon as it gets recorded, you will get a  
17 notification. You don't have to sign up. It's  
18 automatic for all New Yorkers who has property get a  
19 notification, and that usually goes out within three  
20 to five days.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Thank you.  
22 And then does DOF currently have internal processes  
23 to flag potentially illicit title changes?

24 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Yes, Council Member.  
25 There's a number of flags. Assistant Commissioner,



2 our City Registrar, Colette, who testified back in  
3 September, she runs an amazing team, an amazing,  
4 wonderful team of examiners, and so there's dozens of  
5 flags that are in ACRIS, and so a majority of  
6 recordings that happen, they happen online. Folks do  
7 them from their homes, from their computers. We have  
8 an internal flag system, and any time a document that  
9 sets off a flag, our examiners will carefully review  
10 them, make sure to double-check. There's clear signs  
11 of deed fraud and deed theft, as she went over it  
12 articulately in the last hearing. But any time it's  
13 not in... it warrants further review, it then goes to  
14 an internal audit team, essentially, and the  
15 examiners take an even closer look than that. And if  
16 we still feel as though this is a fraudulent  
17 document, then it goes to the Sheriff's Office. And  
18 so there's a number of checks and balances that the  
19 examiners do. Deputy Commissioner, if you want to go  
20 over some of them.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: Yeah, the  
22 quality review team really looks to ensure that we  
23 look at the prior deeds. We want to make sure that  
24 there is a direct transfer. We can't do a title  
25 search, but we do look to see if there's a direct

2 transfer. We'll look to see if there hasn't been a  
3 recording on the property within the last 40 years.  
4 We'll go back and we'll look at the records. We  
5 ensure that the assessed value, it's not being  
6 transferred for zero consideration. Any time there's  
7 zero consideration, we pull that and we look at it  
8 and we look at the assessed value. There's several  
9 things that we also... several flags in our system  
10 eludes the examiners that this potentially could be  
11 fraudulent, as Director has just mentioned. And one  
12 of them will tell us if the same, we have repeat  
13 offenders. If somebody has come in before and they  
14 actually put something on, they tried to record  
15 something that was fraudulent, it alerts us right  
16 away and it goes to a quality review team and we'll  
17 notify the sheriff.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, great. Thank  
19 you so much.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I now want to turn  
21 to Council Member Nurse for some questions.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yes. One, I just  
23 want to thank you for laying out some of the numbers  
24 that you've said, but given that you don't have hard  
25 numbers for underutilization of exemptions, I think

2 it behooves DOF to just continue to over outreach as  
3 much as possible, and this is why we put so much  
4 emphasis on that in-person outreach funding for  
5 people who might be missing that January piece of  
6 mail or they're elderly or their nephew is not paying  
7 attention to what type of mail comes in. So, you  
8 mentioned the direct mailings that you sent out, but  
9 can you, for the record, for the purposes of this  
10 hearing, list out the schedule of direct mail that  
11 goes out starting in January, that list out the  
12 opportunities for exemptions, how to sign up for  
13 notifications, that has all that information, just so  
14 we can have it on the record for folks.

15 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Yes, I can. January  
16 15th notice of property value goes out to every  
17 property owner in New York City. On January 1st, just  
18 to take a step back, on January 1st statements of  
19 accounts, SOA, will go out, and then 45 days after  
20 that, there will be the 45-day late notice, so that  
21 will also go out this year. Then renewal mailings go  
22 out as well. If you want an actual calendar, I can  
23 get you...

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: If you can't list  
3 them, if you could just provide us a schedule  
4 calendar.

5 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: I can get you an  
6 actual calendar. Instead of working backwards in my  
7 head right now.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yeah, I would just  
9 like a concrete number of this is how many direct  
10 mailings a household would receive specifically that  
11 has here's if you qualify for exemption, here's how  
12 to get notification, here's how to get someone else  
13 notified if you're not able to deal with these  
14 matters yourself, so that we can have an  
15 understanding exactly for the record on the public. I  
16 don't have any other questions at the moment.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I appreciate DOF's  
18 partnership on this whole process. I think you guys  
19 have been great. There's a perception out there that  
20 there's a bag of money sitting on a table somewhere  
21 that says property of the taxpayers, and unless they  
22 call and ask about it, they never get the money. The  
23 more outreach we can do, the more ways that we can  
24 partner with you on that outreach, the better. I  
25 think meeting people where they're at is more

2 important than ever now. Again, we've been very  
3 encouraged by the partnership on the lien sale  
4 reform, but I think continuing that maintenance and  
5 making sure that we're making sure that the reforms  
6 that we made, that they're actually working and have  
7 the intended desired effect are super important, but  
8 also just doing a better job at writ large of so many  
9 of these tax breaks and different programs that are  
10 out there that could really help people if only they  
11 knew about them.

12 I want to turn to Council Member Williams  
13 for questions.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you,  
15 Chair. I just had one question and it's about the  
16 steps that the Office of the City Register takes when  
17 reviewing a document that someone has submitted for  
18 recording. Is the agency capable of detecting  
19 forgeries of fraud in this process?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: The examiners  
21 look for basic things that are required by law and by  
22 statute for recording. Document must be dated. The  
23 name and address of the parties must be on the  
24 recording endorsement page. The documents must be  
25 signed, notarized, and acknowledged. Property

2 description should be in the document, including the  
3 borough block and lot. If it's a deed, we look for  
4 additional information, such as a New York City tax  
5 return form, New York State transfer report, New York  
6 State transfer tax form. We look at all of those  
7 things. On the New York City return, it gives the  
8 assessed value. That's one of the things that the  
9 staff will look for, the assessed value. If the  
10 property is being transferred with zero  
11 consideration, that's usually a flag that we will  
12 move to our quality review group to look at it. As I  
13 said before, if we see that this property is being  
14 transferred by somebody who has been on our radar as  
15 possibly committing fraud, we'll also move it to our  
16 quality review. We also verify with the State that  
17 the notary is registered with the state. If we find  
18 there's a notary issue, we'll also remove it. The  
19 examiners can't look at it as right away and  
20 determine it is fraud, but because of our flags,  
21 we'll do a deeper research and partner with our  
22 Sheriff's Department to go out and talk to the person  
23 who is actually doing the recording and speak to the  
24 property owner.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I know you're in  
3 support of my bill. Would you say allowing for  
4 homeowners to have information about when there are  
5 any changes can also support the work of making sure  
6 there isn't fraudulent activity with title clouding?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: Absolutely,  
8 which is why we do say that when the property is  
9 recorded, everyone gets a notice immediately. The  
10 owner of record for Finance will get a notification  
11 saying something has occurred on your property,  
12 something was recorded. We give them the sheriff's  
13 number if they're not aware of it. We tell them how  
14 to look up the information, and we also encourage  
15 people to actually be proactive and go into ACRIS and  
16 look and see what's being done against your property.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.  
18 Thanks, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Last question for  
20 me. Does DOF have any research or data that shows  
21 which type of outreach has been more effective than  
22 others so far? You know, in-person events, emails,  
23 letters?

24 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: To my knowledge, I  
25 would have to go back to the team and ask if we have

2 that information. I think we only have... I'll have to  
3 ask the team.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. None of my  
5 Colleagues have questions. We are good to go. Thank  
6 you, guys, very much.

7 DIRECTOR CAPISTRAN: Thank you all.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HILL: Thank you.  
9 We've also been joined by Council Member Salaam.

10 Now, we're going to end our  
11 Administration testimony and open up the hearing for  
12 public testimony.

13 Before we begin, I must remind members of  
14 the public that this is a formal government  
15 proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all  
16 times as such. Members of the public shall remain  
17 silent at all times unless you are testifying.

18 Witness table is reserved for people who  
19 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is  
20 allowed from the witness table. Furthermore, members  
21 of the public may not present audio or video  
22 recordings as testimony, but they may submit  
23 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-  
24 Arms for inclusion in the official hearing record.



2           If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
3 please make sure you've filled out an appearance card  
4 that you can get at the desk in the back, the  
5 Sergeant-at-Arms desk at the back, and wait for your  
6 name to be called. Once you've been recognized,  
7 you'll have two minutes to speak on the legislation  
8 considered today.

9           If you have a written statement or  
10 additional written testimony you wish to submit for  
11 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony  
12 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. For those in the Committee  
13 Room today or those watching at home, you may also  
14 email written testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)  
15 within 72 hours of the conclusion of this hearing.  
16 Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

17           When you hear your name, please come up  
18 to the witness panel. I'll now call our first panel  
19 of witnesses. We have Alexander Knipenberg, Tamara  
20 del Carmen, Sunny Joy, or Sunny Jo, sorry, and Paula  
21 Segal.

22           Paula, you want to start? Just say your  
23 name and your organization and then begin.

24           PAULA SEGAL: All right. Thank you so  
25 much. Thank you so much for holding this hearing, and

2 my written testimony says good afternoon, but good  
3 morning, and it's great to be here. Paula Segal. I  
4 work at Take Root Justice, and I'm speaking today as  
5 Senior Staff Attorney in our Equitable Neighborhoods  
6 Unit. We are a member of the Abolish the Tax Lien  
7 Sale Coalition. As I think the Members of the Council  
8 know, the Coalition advocates for the full abolition  
9 of the New York City lien sale for properties in the  
10 city and its replacement with systems that preserve  
11 homeowners and tenants' ability to stay in their  
12 homes, promote racial equity, and support community  
13 land trusts. I just want to respond directly,  
14 actually, to something that the Department shared and  
15 point out an article that I printed for you all, so  
16 you can have it. This came out in December. It's  
17 called How Savvy Investors Can Spot Distressed  
18 Properties Before New York City's Tax Lien Sale. I  
19 used to serve on a city bar committee with Benjamin,  
20 the author. Speculators have all of the information  
21 they need to find distressed homeowners in today's  
22 world. In fact, by publishing the tax lien sale  
23 lists, the Department is providing a clear road map  
24 to find all of them in one batch. We are asking to  
25 level the playing field and make sure that individual

2 property owners also get City liens recorded on their  
3 individual properties if they're in a position where  
4 they have a lien that is more than three years past  
5 due and worth more than 5,000 dollars. That's the  
6 same threshold we're using, the highest threshold  
7 we're using for inclusion in the lien sale and for  
8 putting folks on that speculator's road map that  
9 we're going to publish in February, that they're  
10 already getting ready for. I think anything the  
11 Department has to say that suggests that what we  
12 would be doing by utilizing the powerful ACRIS  
13 system, which you heard a lot about just now, to let  
14 folks know when they have liens due to the City of  
15 New York is going to be harming property owners is  
16 just a red herring. It's infuriating. I hope that  
17 this Council will help homeowners because speculators  
18 are already doing fine.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Paula. Go  
20 ahead.

21 ALEXANDER KNIPENBERG: Good morning,  
22 Council Members.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Make sure your mic's  
24 on.

2 ALEXANDER KNIPENBERG: Good morning,  
3 Council Members. I'm Alexander Knipenberg. I'm a  
4 Senior Staff Attorney at Brooklyn Legal Services  
5 Corporation A. Tamara will testify today, and I will  
6 answer if there are any questions on the end of the  
7 testimony.

8 TAMARA DEL CARMEN: Good morning. My name  
9 is Tamara del Carmen and I am the Director of the  
10 Foreclosure Program at Brooklyn Legal Services  
11 Corporation A, or Brooklyn A. I'm here with my  
12 colleague, Alexander Knipenberg, Senior Staff  
13 Attorney for our Foreclosure Program. Our team  
14 provides vulnerable homeowners throughout New York  
15 City with free direct legal representation, advice,  
16 and appropriate referrals to protect home equity. Our  
17 organization consulted with Council Member Natasha  
18 Williams on the drafting of Intro. 1086 relating to  
19 the clouding of title, and we are eager to see it  
20 passed by the City Council. By requiring timely  
21 notice when a deed or mortgage related document is  
22 recorded for a property, this bill would offer  
23 vulnerable homeowners a new resource to prevent title  
24 clouding and deed theft scams. Fraudulent clouding of  
25 title is a serious and growing issue for homeowners.

2 It involves bad actors filing false or misleading  
3 claims, liens, or encumbrances against a property's  
4 title with the goal of creating confusion over  
5 rightful ownership. Scammers seeking to cloud a title  
6 will file forged or invalid documents on properties  
7 at risk of foreclosure, making it difficult for the  
8 rightful owner to secure loan modifications or  
9 otherwise rectify the financial situation of their  
10 property. Title clouding scammers may then attempt to  
11 claim ownership of the property by pressuring the  
12 vulnerable homeowner into signing fraudulent  
13 documents or authorizing documents under duress,  
14 which are then recorded to create false claims on the  
15 title. Intro. 1086 would address the current lack of  
16 adequate oversight in this area. Brooklyn A supports  
17 this bill and all the other bills introduced today  
18 and hope to see them passed. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

20 SUNNY JO: Good morning. My name is Sunny  
21 Jo. I'm an Attorney with the Legal Aid Society, and I  
22 didn't realize I only had two minutes, so I'm going  
23 to skip over a whole bunch of things about Legal Aid.  
24 Based on our experience... actually, I should say this.  
25 The Legal Aid Society has been at the forefront of

2 advocating for the rights of homeowners at the city,  
3 state, and local level since 2000 through our  
4 Foreclosure Prevention and Home Equity Preservation  
5 Project, which I am a part of. We therefore  
6 appreciate the opportunity to testify today. Based on  
7 our experience, many homeowners, in particular senior  
8 homeowners, continue to be unaware of the various  
9 property tax reductions and related programs for  
10 which they are eligible. Intro. 782 would provide an  
11 important step to more timely provide homeowners with  
12 this critical information. In addition, Intro. 782  
13 might add a provision to require DOF to provide the  
14 same information to homeowners who elect to pay their  
15 taxes in person at a DOF office. From what our  
16 clients tell us, too many times homeowners go to the  
17 DOF offices to pay their taxes and are not given that  
18 information. Intro. 783 seeks to amend the existing  
19 law to require DOF to record on ACRIS tax liens once  
20 they exceed 5,000 dollars and are past due for a  
21 period of three years or more. It has been our  
22 understanding that once DOF has sold arrears for  
23 their property taxes or water and sewer charges to a  
24 trust, such liens are recorded. We have some concerns  
25 about recording of tax liens on ACRIS, I think others

2 have said this before, because such recordings have  
3 become a road map for predatory investors and  
4 scammers. Properties with recorded tax liens are  
5 clearly identifiable as distressed properties and, as  
6 such, have become targets for various deed theft  
7 schemes.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You can finish up.

9 SUNNY JO: Thank you. Perhaps instead of  
10 recording tax liens on ACRIS, such liens could be  
11 docketed with the county clerk, similar to how other  
12 liens and judgments are docketed. Intro. 889. the  
13 questionable transfers occur within much shorter  
14 periods than 30 years and typically involving  
15 transfers to an LLC so we would respectfully suggest  
16 that any transfers to an LLC be included in such  
17 notification. Intro. 1086, while such notifications  
18 might strengthen the protection of vulnerable  
19 property owners against unauthorized deed transfers,  
20 the definition of interested parties doesn't seem to  
21 include heirs who have not yet started surrogate  
22 court proceedings, and it is precisely those heirs  
23 who have become a primary target of predatory  
24 transfers. Therefore, we respectfully propose that  
25 the City Council address how potential heirs could

2 protect their family homes. The Consumer Financial  
3 Protection Bureau, CFPB, has developed guidelines on  
4 how potential heirs who are not on the mortgage yet  
5 can assert their rights as successors in interest,  
6 and perhaps UOF could adopt a similar approach. Thank  
7 you for the opportunity to testify today.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Any questions from  
9 my colleagues? Okay. Thank you all very much. Thank  
10 you.

11 Our next panel, Joan Erskine, Tobias  
12 Campbell, Hanna Anousheh.

13 JOAN ERSKINE: Good morning, Chairman  
14 Brannan and Committee Members. My name is Joan  
15 Erskine. I am a Board Member of Brooklyn Level Up, a  
16 community organization concerned with the  
17 preservation and healthy development of Flatbush,  
18 East Flatbush, and Flatlands. These are neighborhoods  
19 where the majority of homeowners are people of color,  
20 these are neighborhoods where people of color broke  
21 the barriers to their homeownership in the 1970s, and  
22 these are neighborhoods where the tax lien sale has a  
23 disproportionate impact. Brooklyn Level Up is a  
24 member of the Abolish the Tax Lien Sale Coalition.  
25 I'm here today to urge you to pass all of the



2 measures before you because, as the saying goes,  
3 knowledge is power. Each of these measures is about  
4 reaching out to property owners and, in the case of  
5 Council Member Hudson's measure, to the property  
6 owner's Council Member, and making sure that they  
7 have the information and the tools they need to  
8 avoid, address, and resolve debts to the City, surely  
9 the goal of the City as well. With regard to Intro.  
10 782 of 2024, thank you, Council Member Nurse, for  
11 doing the work of researching and crafting this.  
12 There is little point to having exemptions to  
13 property taxes if the people who qualify for those  
14 exemptions don't know about them. Likewise, ACRIS is  
15 a powerful tool for the property owners, but, again,  
16 only if they know about it and know how to use it.  
17 With regard to 783, again, thank you, Council Member  
18 Nurse. Requiring liens over 5,000 dollars to be  
19 recorded serves to inform property owners of the  
20 extent of the encumbrance on their title, and can  
21 spur them to seek help in clearing it. With regard to  
22 889, thank you, Council Member Hudson. Older property  
23 owners are at risk of real estate scammers and sharks  
24 as the record has amply demonstrated. They deserve  
25 the attention of their Council Member if there is

2 suspicious activity around their deed. With regard  
3 to...

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just conclude. Just  
5 wrap it up.

6 JOAN ERSKINE: Okay. Finally, with regard  
7 to again, it's all about notice. Knowledge is power.  
8 We need to give the people the knowledge they need. I  
9 just want to say, with regard to the methods and  
10 frequency of notice, I used to own a business, and it  
11 came to my sad attention that you cannot find enough  
12 ways to advertise. You cannot find enough time to  
13 advertise. You have to find many ways. You have to do  
14 it over and over again, or you will not get noticed.  
15 Thank you for your time.

16 TOBIAS CAMPBELL: Good morning, Committee  
17 on Finance Chair Brannan, and all Committee Members.  
18 My name is Tobias Campbell. I'm a member of the East  
19 New York Community Land Trust, and a lifelong New  
20 Yorker. I'm here with the Abolish the Tax Lien Sale  
21 Coalition, which advocates for the full abolition of  
22 the New York City lien sale, and its replacement with  
23 systems that ensure housing stability and racial  
24 equity, while promoting the community land trust  
25 model. For any temporary financial benefit the City

2 might see out of the sale of tax liens, we know that  
3 ultimately, this system only serves to enrich  
4 speculators and to fuel displacement. If the City  
5 cares about preserving a culturally rich and  
6 democratic New York, the tax lien sale is a kind of  
7 self-sabotage, a kind of shooting oneself in the  
8 foot. We appreciate the work the City Council has  
9 done thus far to ameliorate the tax lien sale. We're  
10 here today to call on the City Council to continue  
11 that good work by passing two commonsense bills  
12 introduced by Council Member Nurse to ensure that New  
13 Yorkers have access to important information ahead of  
14 this year's upcoming tax lien sale. Let's pass Intro.  
15 782 so that along with the property tax bills they  
16 receive every three months, New York homeowners are  
17 also informed of the exemptions they qualify for and  
18 of how to get on the ACRIS alert system, and let's  
19 pass Intro. 783 so that ACRIS reflects any  
20 significant accruing debts that property owners might  
21 not be aware of otherwise. This way, no one will be  
22 subjected to the lien sale speculation and  
23 foreclosure simply due to a lack of knowledge. Making  
24 sure people have the information they are entitled to  
25 is truly the least we can do. Please vote on these

2 bills so they can become law in time to help reduce  
3 the number of properties headed to the May 2025 lien  
4 sale as well as the other pieces of legislation that  
5 were discussed today. Beyond making these commonsense  
6 changes, we hope that the City will abolish the tax  
7 lien sale and replace it with a system of municipal  
8 debt collection that prioritizes neighborhood  
9 stabilization and the coalition has done really good  
10 work in laying out that alternative system. Thank  
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

13 HANNAH ANOUSHEH: Can you hear me? Great.  
14 Good morning, Council Members. My name is Hannah  
15 Anousheh and I'm the Campaigns Director for the East  
16 New York Community Land Trust. I'll try to shorten my  
17 testimony. We formed the Abolish the Tax Lien Sale  
18 Coalition in 2020 when we realized that there were  
19 thousands of residents in East New York and  
20 Brownsville who were impacted by the lien sale just  
21 like in many other working-class black and brown  
22 communities across the city. As I think you all know,  
23 as a Coalition, we advocate for the full abolition of  
24 the lien sale for all properties in New York City. We  
25 advocate for its replacement with a municipal debt

2 collection system that ensures that the City collects  
3 its debt, we want the City to collect its debt, but  
4 also keeps homeowners and tenants in their homes by  
5 working with CLTs and other entities instead of  
6 outsourcing this core government function to a  
7 private trust that's accountable to investors that it  
8 enriches. We're really glad that the Council is  
9 hearing Council Member Nurse's bills to improve  
10 Department of Finance's processes. We support Intro.  
11 783, and Intro. 782 is just commonsense. The  
12 Department of Finance already sends out notices, so  
13 it should send out more detailed notices giving  
14 people information about existing exemptions. We've  
15 done so much outreach in our neighborhoods so we  
16 really understand how easy it is for people to not  
17 get the information about exemptions. We've come  
18 across so many people who weren't aware that they  
19 were eligible for an exemption and then racked up so  
20 much debt compounded with interest and fees when they  
21 should have been exempt. That's another reason why  
22 Resolution 327 calling on Albany to allow retroactive  
23 exemptions is so important because there's so many  
24 people in that situation. We also support Council  
25 Member Williams' and Hudson's bills to protect

2 homeowners from deed fraud. We urge you to pass all  
3 of these bills out of Committee so that they can get  
4 voted on in time to reduce the number of properties  
5 in the May lien cell. Lastly, I just want to  
6 reemphasize or ask that this Committee and the  
7 Housing and Buildings Committee really work with us  
8 to fully abolish the lien cell and replace it with a  
9 more fair system. There's a lot of other bills that  
10 are important to making that happen. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very  
12 much for your testimony.

13 We just have to address an IT issue, and  
14 then we're going to get to the folks who are on Zoom.

15 Okay. We're going to start on Zoom with  
16 John Krinsky.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

18 JOHN KRINSKY: Can you hear me?

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes. Go ahead, John.

20 JOHN KRINSKY: Thank you. Good morning.

21 Chair Brannan and all Committee Members. My name is  
22 John Krinsky. I'm a professor of political science  
23 and public policy at the City College of New York and  
24 the CUNY Grad Center. I'm also a co-founder and board  
25 member of the New York City Community Land

2 Initiative, but I come here on my own behalf. NYCCLI  
3 will be submitting its own testimony to thank you for  
4 hearing Intros 782 and 783 and urge passage of those  
5 and also the other legislation in front of the  
6 Committee. I wanted to just mention as well in my  
7 testimony, which I've submitted written testimony,  
8 that this has a much longer history. I worked at the  
9 Housing Policy and Research Division of the Community  
10 Service Society from 1993 to 1996 and saw the  
11 transition to the tax lien sale from the earlier  
12 system of tax foreclosure from the perspective of  
13 efforts to forestall disinvestment and abandonment of  
14 housing. Back then, as the City and its real estate  
15 market recovered from the long crisis that began in  
16 the late 1960s, tax delinquent properties, which had  
17 been nearly valueless, were instead becoming very  
18 valuable. Tax delinquency was understood, however, to  
19 be an early warning sign of trouble, whether because  
20 of the more obvious financial instability of housing  
21 or because of the deeply deteriorating conditions for  
22 tenants, and tenants are an important piece of this  
23 that we're not really addressing too much today. It  
24 was clear to us then that pooling liens and selling  
25 them as investments would make it harder for the City

2 to build on the success of its community-based non-  
3 profit housing programs that enabled some of the  
4 worst buildings to more easily enter City and then  
5 community ownership. The specificity of conditions  
6 would be hidden, in effect, by the focus on the value  
7 of the lien and dissolved in the larger pool. Having  
8 a nearly 30-year perspective on a City policy that's  
9 persisted in the face of evidence of its racial  
10 disparities, facilitation of deed fraud, and  
11 increasing hardship on people..

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your  
13 testimony. Your time has expired.

14 JOHN KRINSKY: Okay, I'll just say that 30  
15 years of seeing the harms that the lien sale has  
16 done, and at least 10 in advocating against it, it's  
17 like screaming at a wall. But someday it's going to  
18 fall, and it falls to you, and someday should start  
19 today. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, John. Now  
21 we have Pamela Herrera.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

23 PAMELA HERRERA: Hello, good morning,  
24 Committee on Finance Chair Brannan and all Committee  
25 Members. My name is Pamela Herrera, and I'm the Land



2 Justice Coordinator for the Western Queens Community  
3 Land Trust. I belong also to the Abolish the Tax Lien  
4 Sale Coalition. As Paula mentioned, we preserve  
5 homeowners and tenants' ability to stay in their  
6 homes, promote racial equity, and support community  
7 land trusts. My testimony is more about door-  
8 knocking. When I had gone to Astoria and Queens, I  
9 had noticed that there were a lot of vacant  
10 commercial properties and neglected apartment  
11 buildings. We saw illegal conversions. We saw unlit  
12 hallways, broken front doors, broken intercoms, and  
13 more alarming, dangerous conditions. These conditions  
14 continue the predatory practice we see across our  
15 boroughs. As for homeowners, we saw the deceased  
16 relatives with no plan left behind, leaving behind a  
17 stack of bills with no resources. We saw income  
18 restricted families trying to make ends meet. Today,  
19 we're really glad that the Council is hearing the two  
20 imperative bills that Council Member Nurse that will  
21 improve the DOF's process. Let's pass Intro. 1782  
22 that will give owners access to ACRIS, which is  
23 another form of alerting families in DOF and giving  
24 them another form of communication to support low-  
25 income families, and Intro. 1783, which can alert

2 property owners to accruing debt about which they may  
3 not have been aware of before and help them avoid the  
4 lien sale, speculation, and foreclosure. We also are  
5 supportive of all efforts to reduce the opportunities  
6 for deed fraud, which we thank Council Members  
7 Williams and Hudson for identifying ways that the  
8 City can use its powers to do that. So please vote on  
9 these bills so that it can become law in time to help  
10 reduce the number of properties headed to the May  
11 2025 lien sale. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Pamela.  
13 Now we have Will Spisak.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

15 WILL SPISAK: Thank you and good morning  
16 to all the Members of the Committee on Finance. My  
17 name is Will Spisak. I'm a Senior Program Associate  
18 at New Economy Project. We are co-founders and  
19 coordinators of the New York City Community Land  
20 Initiative Citywide Coalition of Community Land  
21 Trusts, and we're a member of the Abolish the Tax  
22 Lien Sale Coalition, and you heard from a number of  
23 our colleagues already today so I'm going to make  
24 this relatively short and just reiterate that we are  
25 in full agreement with our colleagues in the Abolish

2 the Tax Lien Sale Coalition that it's imperative that  
3 we pass all of these bills and the resolution as  
4 quickly as possible. These are really commonsense  
5 measures that shouldn't be controversial. These will  
6 help inform property owners about issues that they  
7 may be facing in regards to their tax bills as well  
8 as help protect people, keep them in their homes,  
9 which is ultimately the goal of the work that we're  
10 doing. I just want to take a moment to say that while  
11 we fully support this legislation and in particular  
12 the two bills introduced by Council Member Nurse, we  
13 recognize that they are merely band-aids on a broken  
14 system. We encourage the City Council to continue to  
15 work with us and the Coalition to abolish and replace  
16 the tax lien sale. It's time that we put this  
17 Giuliani-era system to the side and behind us and  
18 move forward with a more equitable system that helps  
19 to keep people in their homes and preserve community  
20 wealth in our black and brown neighborhoods. Thank  
21 you so much, and we will be submitting our written  
22 testimony with further thoughts. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Will. Now  
24 we have Lacey Tauber.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 LACEY TAUBER: Thanks. Good morning, Chair  
3 Brannan, and thank you for holding this hearing  
4 today. I'm here representing Brooklyn Borough  
5 President Antonio Reynoso. In November, our office  
6 testified at another Council hearing about deed  
7 theft, and we encourage the Council to hear these  
8 bills so thank you for acting quickly to make this  
9 hearing happen. As was discussed at length at that  
10 hearing, deed theft is a pressing issue in Brooklyn,  
11 especially for older adult homeowners. Deed theft  
12 scammers are targeting these communities through  
13 illegal tactics such as refinancing scams, equity  
14 stripping, and foreclosure bailout loans, resulting  
15 in the displacement of our neighbors and the loss of  
16 generational wealth. Additionally, unfortunately, the  
17 Council reinstated the tax lien sale last year,  
18 albeit with significant updates to help homeowners  
19 avoid having their liens sold and new options for  
20 keeping people in their homes. But still, any sale of  
21 liens to private purchasers can put property owners  
22 at risk of foreclosure and open the door for  
23 predatory actors. We want to prevent this and that's  
24 going to take interagency coordination at the city  
25 and state levels. Today what we're really focused on

2 is the Department of Finance's role in outreach and  
3 education, and what we really want to do is just  
4 ensure that the homeowners have the tools and  
5 information they need to protect their homes. So, the  
6 Borough President supports 782-A. In addition to  
7 saving property owners money, having information  
8 about exemptions, will exempt them from the lien  
9 sale, and having information about the ACRIS Alert  
10 System is an important tool for awareness if someone  
11 has made unauthorized changes to their property  
12 documents. 1086 builds on this by requiring DOF to  
13 conduct more corrective outreach. While ACRIS Alert  
14 System is helpful, it's important that homeowners  
15 don't have to rely on it alone for this important  
16 information, especially because of the digital  
17 divide. Intro. 899 creates a role for the City  
18 Council to assist with outreach for long-term  
19 homeowners in their District..

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your  
21 testimony. Your time is expired.

22 LACEY TAUBER: Which can be very helpful.  
23 All right, and I will just add that we also support  
24 783-A and Resolution 327, and thank you again for  
25 your quick attention to these important proposals.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now we  
3 have Christopher Leon Johnson.

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Can you hear me  
5 now? Hello? Can you hear me?

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah. We've also  
7 been joined by Council Member Powers. Go ahead,  
8 Christopher.

9 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Good morning,  
10 Council Member Brannan. My name is Christopher Leon  
11 Johnson, and I'm here to support the bills that  
12 Council Member Sandy Nurse has introduced to protect  
13 the small business owners when it comes to notify,  
14 educating, and outreach on the property tax. This is  
15 my opinion that the homeowners (INAUDIBLE) in the  
16 city need these protections and these outreaches  
17 because everybody knows that the City has one of the  
18 highest taxes in the country when it comes to  
19 property tax, and they need to be educated on where  
20 that money is going to and why they're paying it,  
21 while at the same time that the City Council needs to  
22 support the bills that were introduced by Council  
23 Member Farrah Louis and the Speaker Adrienne Adams  
24 when it comes to short-term rentals for Airbnb. I  
25 know that the City Council is scared of the Hotel

2 Trades Commission and the Hotel Trades Union, but  
3 they need to support that bill while at the same  
4 time, I hope that Sandy Nurse, who likes to always  
5 put bills to get around things, she needs to  
6 introduce a bill to not only give tax rebates to any  
7 property owner that delivers short-term rentals for  
8 people that want to rent out at homes or condos or  
9 co-ops. So, I hope that the City Council, they do  
10 outreach for people that are paying property tax,  
11 they need to do outreach to protect the people that  
12 are doing short-term rentals. They shouldn't be  
13 allowing people who (INAUDIBLE) own homes to do  
14 short-term rentals. Instead, just letting Hotel  
15 Trades Union run the show. But like I said, I hope  
16 Sandy Nurse introduces a bill to start giving tax  
17 rebates, tax cuts, and tax exemptions to any property  
18 owner in New York City, every property owner in New  
19 York City that do short-term rentals in the city. We  
20 need short-term rentals because...

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your  
22 testimony. Your time is expired.

23 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Not everybody  
24 can afford a hotel. All right, but thank you so much.  
25 Thank you. Enjoy your day.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. Now we have Alexis Foote.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

5 ALEXIS FOOTE: Hello. Can you hear me?

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Is that you, Alexis?

7 ALEXIS FOOTE: (INAUDIBLE) but I  
8 (INAUDIBLE) support both of the bills that are in the  
9 tax lien. I'm from Far Rockaway. I was born and  
10 raised in Harlem. I live in Far Rockaway, and a lot  
11 of our homeowners are being affected, especially the  
12 black and brown, by the tax lien sale, because they  
13 don't know that their homes are going on sale, on the  
14 tax lien sale. My community has been devastated by  
15 Hurricane Sandy, and my homeowners could not afford  
16 to have their homes put in the tax lien sale. I am  
17 the founder and board member of the ReAL Edgemere  
18 Community Land Trust, which stands for Residents  
19 Acquiring Land, and the majority of my homeowners are  
20 scared of the tax lien sale, because it doesn't give  
21 them an opportunity to pay off their water bills, to  
22 have a chance to catch up to the bills. Another  
23 thing, the City needs to make sure that they educate  
24 our homeowners on ways to get out of the tax lien  
25 sale. Once again, I'm sorry for the echoing, but my



2 community is suffering because of the tax lien sale.

3 We're suffering because we're not getting enough

4 services out in Far Rockaway, we're in the

5 transportation desert, in an amenities desert, and we

6 need the City to look out for us. We need a hospital.

7 We have all these needs, and the tax lien sale

8 (INAUDIBLE)

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

10 Okay. We have no more witnesses.

11 With no other questions from my

12 Colleagues, we are going to conclude this hearing.

13 Thank you very much. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date January 15, 2025