

COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY
JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON SMALL
BUSINESS

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November 18, 2025
Start: 10:34 a.m.
Recess: 12:15 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 2

B E F O R E: Julie Won, Chairperson of the
Committee on Contracts

Farah N. Louis, Chairperson of
the Committee on Women and Gender
Equity

Oswald Feliz, Chairperson of the
Committee on Small Business

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS:
Sandy Nurse
Althea V. Stevens
Inna Vernikov

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COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER
EQUITY:

Tiffany Cabán
Kevin C. Riley
Inna Vernikov

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS:

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Shekar Krishnan
Vickie Paladino
Sandra Ung
Susan Zhuang

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Shahana Hanif
Lynn C. Schulman

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

Dwight Flynn, First Deputy Chief Business
Diversity Officer of the Mayor's Office of M/WBE

Marcia Collier, self

Riya Varadhachary, Emgage Action

Kamla Millwood, President of Palatial Publishing
LLC

Camille Newman, Director of Economic Development
and Entrepreneurship at the Local Development
Corporation of East New York

Ararat El-Rawi, owner and proprietor of Cafe
Little Armenia

Steven Bari, self

Donnatella Craig, founder and Chief Executive
Officer of My Hungry World, Inc.

Mousa Naji, Director of Advocacy and Community
Relations at the Yemeni American Merchant
Association

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Abdessamad Elysjouri, Elysjouri Association

Geri Stengel, Chief Executive Officer and
President of Ventureneer

Anita Pierce, founder of Eleven3seven5

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Testing one, two, one
two. Today's date is November 18, 2025. Today's
hearing is Committee on Contracts, being recorded in
HR2 by Keith Polite.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and
welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
the Committee on Contracts jointly with the Committee
on Women and Gender Equity and Small Businesses.

Please silence all cell phone and
electronic devices and, as a friendly reminder, do
not approach the dais.

If you wish to participate in today's
hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the
Sergeant-at-Arms.

Without further ado, Chairs, we are ready
to begin.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: [GAVEL] Good morning,
and welcome to this joint hearing of Committee on
Contracts, Small Businesses, and Women and Gender
Equity. Today is Tuesday, November 18, 2025. My name
is Julie Won, and I have the privilege of Chairing
this Contracts Committee. I want to thank Chairs
Feliz and Louis for Co-Chairing this with me, as well
as Members of the three Committees for coming

2 together. I'd also like to thank the representatives
3 from the Office of M/WBEs, as well as advocates of
4 small businesses that are here to testify today.

5 I'd also like to state on the record that
6 we have Council Member Brooks-Powers on Zoom, Council
7 Member Nurse, Council Member Hanif, Council Member
8 Paladino on Zoom, Council Member Riley, Council
9 Member Ung also here with us. Before we begin, yes,
10 we are noting that they have joined us.

11 The City's M/WBE Disparity Study hasn't
12 been updated since 2018 in a study that relied on
13 data from 2015. That's 10 years ago. Local law 129 of
14 2005 requires the City to conduct a disparity study
15 every two years. We're not talking about running a
16 few months behind schedule. We're talking about it
17 being a full three reporting cycles behind where the
18 law should be. So what? This isn't the first time the
19 Administration has been late on a study, right? Well,
20 this study isn't just a paperwork problem. The
21 disparity study is the foundation of the entire M/WBE
22 program. Every day that passes without an updated
23 study makes the program more vulnerable and less
24 reflective of the current demographics and the needs
25 of our business owners. So, I need the Administration

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1 COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS 6

2 to tell us today, where's the next disparity study,
3 when will it be completed, and when will you update
4 the M/WBE utilization goals based on current data.

5 Because right now, we are operating on goals set from
6 2018 study that relied on 2015 data trying to address
7 discrimination using information from 10 years ago.

8 10, so a decade ago. The City has over 11,000

9 certified M/WBEs. These are businesses that went
10 through our certification process, submitted all the
11 paperwork, met all the requirements, and got

12 approved. Yet year after year, only around 20 percent
13 of them got awarded City contracts. That means 80
14 percent of certified M/WBEs get no City work at all.

15 These aren't businesses we are saying aren't

16 qualified. We certify them and then we don't hire

17 them. The Comptroller just released his FY25 M/WBE

18 Contracting Report, and the numbers remain terrible.

19 Last year, the City registered almost 1,300 (sic)

20 procurement contracts worth 42.5 billion dollars.

21 Certified M/WBEs got just under 2,500 of those

22 contracts worth around 2.25 billion dollars. That's

23 5.3 percent of the City's total procurement value

24 going to M/WBEs, so this is actually up slightly from

25 the 5 percent in FY24 so we've gone from 5 percent to

5.3 percent while the Administration is talking about hitting 60 billion dollars in M/WBE contracts by 2030. At this rate, we're not even close.

Emergency contracting has made all this worse. Since 2020, the City has spent billions of dollars on emergency contracts for the COVID response, the asylum crisis, monkey pox, emergency demolitions, and who knows what else. The Mayor issued Executive Order 34 in 2023 requiring agencies to consider at least one M/WBE quote when they do emergency procurements. That resulted in M/WBEs getting 15 percent of those contracts by count and 3.45 percent by value. What this tells us is that the system defaults to excluding M/WBEs in emergencies when there's less oversight and normal procurement processes get bypassed. The Comptroller's report found that it takes an average of 144 days for emergency contracts to get filed in the City's financial management system after work starts. That's almost five months where vendors are doing the work and paying their employees with no guarantee they're getting paid. If you're an M/WBE or a small business without deep pockets or easy access to credit, you simply can't afford to bid on this work. The payment

1 delay isn't just an inconvenience, it's a barrier
2 that keeps you out of the game entirely. This needs
3 to change.
4

5 Today, we're also hearing Introduction
6 1076 sponsored by Council Member Hanif which will
7 require the City to include businesses owned by
8 people of Middle Eastern and North African descent in
9 future disparity studies. We're trying to fix how the
10 City works with currently recognized M/WBE categories
11 and we need to make sure that we're not leaving out
12 other communities that face discrimination in City
13 procurement.

14 So, here's what we need from the
15 Administration today. We need a commitment to
16 acknowledge the urgency here and complete the
17 disparity study and update the M/WBE utilization
18 goals before the end of this year. We need to
19 understand what specific actions you're taking to
20 move the certifying 11,000 businesses to awarding
21 them contracts. We also need to know what
22 consequences agencies face when they fail to meet the
23 M/WBE goals year after year and how you're informing
24 emergency procurement so M/WBEs can compete. And we
25

1 need real timelines and real accountability, not
2 aspirational language about commitments to diversify.

3
4 The City created the M/WBE program to
5 address discrimination or procurement to increase
6 competition and to promote fairness. Right now, it's
7 not doing any of those things and, without an updated
8 disparity study, the entire program is at risk. We
9 need to fix this and we need to fix it now.

10 Before we hear from the Administration, I
11 want to thank my Contracts Committee, Senior Counsel
12 Alex Paulenoff; Policy Analyst Alex Yablon; Financial
13 Analyst Spencer Kuhn (phonetic), along with the
14 Staff from the Committees on Small Businesses, Women
15 and Gender Equity for their hard work for putting it
16 together.

17 I'll turn it over now to Chair Feliz for
18 his opening statement.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, Chair.
20 Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this joint
21 hearing of the Committees on Contracts, Small
22 Business, and Women and Gender Equity. I am Council
23 Member Oswald Feliz, Chair of the Committee on Small
24 Business, and I would like to thank you all for
25 joining us for today's hearing. I want to thank

2 Chairs Won and Louis for your leadership and for all
3 the work on the issue of M/WBEs, as well as for Co-
4 Chairing with me today, as well as Members of the
5 three Committees for coming together for this joint
6 hearing. I'd also like to thank my Staff and the
7 Committee Staff, the representatives from agencies
8 who are here today, as well as members of the public
9 who are here to testify.

10 Small businesses are the backbone of our
11 city. It is no secret that the procurement process is
12 just as important to the City as it is for local
13 businesses. Every day we rely on small businesses and
14 M/WBEs to keep our local government running. From the
15 paperclips on our desk to large industrial machinery,
16 the City is lucky to be able to tap into such a
17 diverse talent of businesses that can supply us with
18 the tools necessary to keep our government running
19 smoothly and efficiently. Our government, and
20 therefore our City, is made better when we're able to
21 tap into the diversity of our talent pool.

22 City procurement is a complicated,
23 lengthy process, and agencies often follow the path
24 of least resistance to get the resources they need.
25 It is for this reason that the City created the M/WBE

2 program to address historical discrimination and to
3 promote fairness. Without accurate data, it's hard to
4 see how we can accomplish these goals. To increase
5 M/WBE participation in the procurement process, to
6 increase the quality of goods procured for our City
7 workers, and to ensure that the City is giving a fair
8 shot to our small and local M/WBEs, it is imperative
9 that the City, that the Administration prioritize
10 this issue. I look forward to hearing from the
11 Administration on how they intend to utilize the
12 tools at their disposal to do just that.

13 I'll now turn it over to Chair Louis for
14 your opening statement.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you, Chair
16 Feliz. Good morning. I'm Council Member Farrah Louis,
17 Chair of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity,
18 and we're excited to join the Committee on Contracts
19 and the Committee on Small Business and their Chairs,
20 Chair Won and Chair Feliz, for today's oversight
21 hearing on the status of Minority Women-Owned
22 Business Enterprise Certification Program.

23 The M/WBE certification program is a
24 powerful tool that was developed to expand
25 opportunities for minority and women entrepreneurs to

1 access government contracts and grow their
2 businesses. For too long, minority and women-owned
3 businesses have faced systemic barriers to success.
4 M/WBEs are powerful engines of growth. They create
5 jobs, stimulate investments, and contribute
6 positively to the local economy. Supporting these
7 businesses is a sound economic policy that benefits
8 everyone in our community. By ensuring these
9 businesses have a seat at the table, we are building
10 a more equitable and more resilient economic future
11 for New York City.
12

13 Unfortunately, persistent inequities
14 exist in City contracting with M/WBEs. In FY24, just
15 6 percent of overall City contract value, which
16 includes prime contracts and purchase orders, went to
17 M/WBEs, and the contracts that were awarded to M/WBEs
18 were often smaller than that of white male-owned
19 businesses. On average, dollar value of a business
20 contract with a white male-owned business was more
21 than six times greater than an M/WBE contract. On top
22 of that, contracts are later than they've ever been
23 in the City, registering nearly three in four
24 contracts awarded to M/WBE as late. Clearly, there is
25 more work to be done to level the playing field for

M/WBEs. Our City must do better to serve our diverse community and the businesses that contribute to our vibrant economy.

So today, we'll hear from the Administration and we'll ask, how can the City increase the use of M/WBEs and ensure that M/WBEs have access to higher value contracts. By strengthening the M/WBE program, we are not just helping a group of businesses, we are building a more resilient, equitable, and prosperous future for all.

I would like to thank Members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity who have joined us today. I would also like to thank Committee Staff, Julia Goldsmith-Pinkham, Katie Salina, and Allie Stoffer, as well as my own Staff, Daniel Heredia and Shubhra Mishra for their work on today's hearing.

I would also like to recognize Council Member Cabán, and I will now pass it back to Chair Wan.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much, Chair Louis.

I'll now turn the floor to Council Member Hanif to say a few words about her Intro. 1076.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chairs
3 Oswald, Won, and Louis for convening today's
4 important oversight hearing and for including my
5 bill, Intro. 1076, on the agenda. I'm proud that 15
6 of my Colleagues have already signed on as co-
7 sponsors, and I want to extend special thanks to
8 Contracts Chair Won, Consumer and Worker Protection
9 Chair Menin, and Small Business Chair Oswald Feliz
10 for their leadership and support.

11 Intro. 1076 takes an essential step
12 forward toward ensuring the Middle Eastern and North
13 African-owned businesses can finally be considered
14 for the City's minority and women-owned business
15 enterprise, the M/WBE program. The bill requires the
16 City's next M/WBE Disparity Study to determine
17 whether MENA-owned businesses are underrepresented in
18 City contracting. If a disparity is found, they would
19 become eligible for M/WBE certification, opening
20 access to the very opportunities this program was
21 designed to address. I've heard directly from MENA
22 small business owners from grocers and restaurants to
23 construction firms and creative studios who want
24 nothing more than a fair chance to compete and yet
25 feel invisible under the current system. Their

2 experiences aren't captured in City data, leaving
3 them shut out of M/WBE certification and the contract
4 opportunities that could help them grow.

5 MENA Americans are currently classified
6 as White under the U.S. Census, an outdated
7 categorization rooted in a complicated history of
8 racial classification. But this label does not
9 reflect the lived realities of discrimination many in
10 the MENA community face in housing, employment, and
11 daily life. Last year, the City announced a record-
12 breaking 6 billion dollars in spending with M/WBE
13 firms, yet MENA businesses remain unseen in this data
14 because they are grouped under White. Their
15 participation cannot be measured, their barriers
16 cannot be identified, and their exclusion goes
17 unaddressed. Intro. 1076 is fundamentally about data
18 accuracy. When the City misclassifies an entire
19 community, it cannot design fair policy or close real
20 disparities. This bill ensures we collect the data to
21 understand MENA participation and, if needed, to act.
22 To be clear, M/WBE eligibility for MENA-owned
23 businesses would occur only if a disparity is
24 documented. If it is, they would receive distinct
25 contracting goals, just as Black-owned, Latino-owned,

Asian-owned, and Native American-owned businesses do now. They would not compete against these groups for the same goals. They would simply be recognized as a community with its own distinct needs.

Since this bill was introduced, Governor Hochul signed Senate Bill S6584B, sponsored by Senator Mike Gianaris and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, requiring State agencies to separately collect demographic data for White, Middle Eastern, and North African groups. This is a major step forward for data equity at the State level. Intro. 1076 builds on that momentum by ensuring New York City also collects accurate data to inform fair and effective policy solutions.

For far too long, MENA communities have been misclassified and overlooked, denied equal access to contracting opportunities that help businesses grow and participate fully in our local economy. Ending this exclusion is long overdue. Let's be the Council that rights this injustice and ensures MENA communities are finally recognized, counted, and included in our City's M/WBE program. Thank you.

Back to you, Chair Won.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Now I'll turn it over
3 to our Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Thank you,
5 Chair. Alex Paulenoff, Senior Counsel.

6 Will all members of the Administration
7 testifying or providing answers to questions today
8 please raise your right hands.

9 Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth,
10 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
11 testimony today, and to respond honestly to Council
12 Member questions?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL PAULENOFF: Thank you
15 very much. You may begin when ready.

16 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Thank you, and
17 good morning to the Council and Committee Chairs Won,
18 Louis, and Feliz. My name is Dwight Flynn, and I
19 serve as First Deputy Chief Business Diversity
20 Officer for the City of New York. It's a pleasure to
21 engage with you all on our shared commitment to the
22 advancements of the City's M/WBE program and the
23 health of our overall M/WBE community. As someone who
24 served a significant portion of my professional
25 career advancing M/WBE programming at the State

2 level, I'm honored to be here representing the
3 Administration. Chief Business Diversity Officer
4 Michael J. Garner sends his regrets as he could not
5 be here today due to his participation in the State's
6 annual M/WBE forum in Albany, which was scheduled
7 months in advance.

8 Considering our shared commitments
9 towards continuous programmatic and policy
10 improvements to the City's M/WBE program, I am also
11 here to share some of the great work we've
12 collectively produced over the past three years, as
13 well as provide answers to Council Committee
14 questions. As such, I'd like to preface that my
15 intent today is to solely respond to the Council
16 Committee questions we have received prior to today's
17 hearing. However, my office would be more than happy
18 to schedule a briefing with your offices to discuss
19 potential questions raised subsequent to this
20 testimony.

21 Since Fiscal '23, the Mayor's first full
22 year in office, we've achieved key M/WBE successes
23 and meaningful accomplishments. Our program's Fiscal
24 '25 successes has put us on track to meet the Mayor's
25 Fiscal '26 year-end goal of awarding 25 billion

1 dollars in M/WBE contracts via all procurement
2 dollars spent by City and City-affiliated agencies by
3 the end of December of this year, fully six months
4 ahead of schedule. Moreover, our record for Fiscal
5 '25 M/WBE outcomes are a progression of key
6 achievements over the last three years. They include
7 three straight fiscal years of over 6 billion dollars
8 in total City M/WBE contracts, with Fiscal '25 being
9 6.9 billion dollars, which is a record for any year;
10 two straight fiscal years of over 30 percent M/WBE
11 utilization among LL1 agencies, Fiscal '25 being 36
12 percent, yet another record, and up from 23 percent
13 in Fiscal '22; Fiscal '25 LL1 M/WBE contract awards
14 of 2.2 billion dollars, a 39 percent increase up from
15 1.6 billion dollars the prior fiscal year, again, for
16 the first time in history; and three straight years
17 of fiscal records for the use of the M/WBE small
18 purchase method. Now, using that method in Fiscal
19 '25, we achieved 350 million dollars in contract
20 awards under this method, which more than doubled the
21 175 for Fiscal Year '23 of 175 million dollars, and
22 adds up to 822 million dollars when measured from
23 January 2022 to present.
24
25

2 We've also had key New York State
3 legislative victories and local policy program
4 improvements. We've raised the small purchase method
5 threshold twice, from 500,000 to 1.5 million dollars,
6 creating more and expanded opportunities for M/WBE
7 there. Regarding LL1, agencies secured the ability to
8 self-register small purchase method contracts from
9 the New York State Comptroller. Executive Order 26
10 and 34 better aligned M/WBE programs and provided
11 agency guidance on the creation of potentially more
12 equitable contracting opportunities wherever
13 practicable. And secured funding, the Administration
14 secured funding for an integrated technology solution
15 platform to better measure City M/WBE performance in
16 a near real-time manner, as well as we have
17 established weekly CompStat meetings with various
18 agencies to review agency's M/WBE data and
19 performance.

20 The upshot of all of this is that since
21 January of 2022, the City has awarded a record 24
22 billion dollars in M/WBE contracts to M/WBEs, the
23 most nationally of any program of its kind.

24 Now, turning now to the legislation
25 attached to today's hearing, Council Member Hanif's

2 bill, Intro. 1076, seeks to add Middle East and North
3 African, MENA, Americans as an additional eligible
4 category to the definition of minority groups in the
5 city's minority and women-owned business program.

6 Before any amendments to the program, the City must
7 conduct a disparity study to determine whether there
8 is a significant statistical disparity between the
9 number of available contractors able to provide goods
10 and services and the number of these firms in
11 contract with City government currently. SBS is
12 already conducting an updated disparity study that,
13 for the first time, includes an analysis of MENA
14 businesses with the goal of completion by the end of
15 2025. As part of this study, SBS conducted outreach
16 to business owners in Little Yemen, Astoria, Bay
17 Ridge, and brief business-serving organizations in
18 MENA communities. We look forward to completing the
19 study and continuing conversations with the Council
20 on ways to support MENA-owned businesses through our
21 existing capacity building and technical assistance
22 resources available to all small businesses. We
23 recognize that there is more work to be done, yet we
24 remain appreciative of the leadership of the
25 Administration, our oversight agency principles, and

1 the collective commitment of the City and City-
2 affiliated agencies whose efforts have been the
3 driving force behind the City's M/WBE achievements.
4 Thank you.
5

6 Now, if I can take a few minutes to
7 directly respond to the questions that was proposed
8 to the Administration, I'd like to do so and read it
9 into the record.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay.

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Thank you.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: If you could just
13 hold, I want to pass it over to Council Member Hanif
14 to ask her questions because she's got a hard stop.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much
16 for your testimony. Can you share if SBS is tracking
17 how many Middle Eastern and North African-owned
18 businesses are operating in New York City?

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Council Member,
20 we are taking questions today, and we will circle
21 back with specific answers to those questions so as
22 to ensure that we're being complete and responsive so
23 we'll circle back in a short period of time.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Well, that's a
25 little disappointing to hear because the hearing is

2 about 1076 and MENA businesses. So, either way, we
3 will wait to get that statistic.

4 If 1076 passes, how would SBS implement
5 the requirements to include MENA-owned businesses?

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Again, those
7 conversations, we're happy to have those
8 conversations with you and your Staff regarding
9 specific concerns you may have on implementation or
10 scope, and we're happy to set up a meeting and
11 schedule one in a short period of time.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I mean, that would
13 be great. It was only recently that I learned that
14 SBS is collecting data from the MENA community, and
15 this bill has been introduced for quite some time now
16 and I was very disappointed to learn that we weren't
17 added to the conversation and instead there was an
18 attempt to not have this bill heard.

19 So, I just want to share that this bill
20 is extremely important for our community, and SBS
21 needs to take this much more seriously than it has
22 done since the last time a study came out. We are
23 still waiting, and it's hard to understand why SBS
24 studies are taking this long and I'd love to hear
25 what has been the cause of the delays.

2 And then, I'd like to know, lastly, we've
3 had cases in my District where an applicant has not
4 heard back for over a year regarding their M/WBE
5 application. What's the average time from application
6 submission to certification approval? And then, how
7 does SBS work to inform M/WBE applicants of where
8 they are in the process and if the process is
9 delayed?

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Right. And
11 again, I would be happy to take that information and
12 schedule a call to discuss the process in any
13 particular detail that is needed. And as I've stated
14 earlier, we are expecting the study itself to be
15 completed by the end of December.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, the two
17 additional questions, I asked about the delays in
18 certification.

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Right, if...

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: You're taking that
21 back, you said?

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yes, we are.
23 And if there are specific certification questions
24 from members of your constituency, you know, we're
25 happy to take those specific questions back to SBS

1 and have them be in contact with the particular
2 constituent. Happy to do that. We're also happy to
3 circle back with you on any questions you have about
4 the process.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Again, I was under
7 the impression that in this hearing, we would learn a
8 little bit more about how the M/WBE certification
9 works. So, asking for an average time of when
10 certification takes place, I think is one of the
11 basic questions and where they are in the process and
12 how SBS is supporting them so disappointed, but not
13 surprised.

14 I will pass it back to Council Member
15 Won.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much. I
17 echo the sentiment of Council Member Hanif, our first
18 Muslim woman representative in the City Council, and
19 we hope to see more improvements in the next
20 Administration.

21 You can return to answering the questions
22 that we had sent as courtesy before the hearing. You
23 are not limited to only answering those questions.
24 You are here for an oversight hearing so you will
25

1 have to answer other questions from all of us, but go
2 ahead.

3
4 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Thank you. The
5 questions regarding the number of certified M/WBEs as
6 of Fiscal '25, that number is 11,382. The breakdown
7 by ethnicity of that number would be Black-owned, 33
8 percent; Asian-owned, 22 percent; Hispanic-owned, 18
9 percent; Native American, 0.14 percent; and non-
10 minority women-owned, 26 percent.

11 M/WBE utilization in City contracting,
12 again, in Fiscal '25, again, there was 2.2 billion
13 dollars of M/WBE awards made to LL1 agencies.

14 The overall M/WBE utilization or
15 percentage was 36 percent, which is up from 31
16 percent the prior year in Fiscal '24. The breakdown
17 of those numbers, again, were Black-owned, 17.6
18 percent; Asian-owned, 44 percent; Hispanic-owned,
19 14.8 percent; Native American-owned, 0.01 percent;
20 and non-minority women-owned, 23.6 percent.

21 There was a question regarding progress
22 towards the 60 billion dollars by 2030. The City
23 remains and is on track to meet the 60 billion
24 dollars in contract award by Fiscal 2030. The
25 Administration set interim targets of 25 billion

dollars by the end of Fiscal '26 and 60 billion dollars by the end of Fiscal '30. As of Q1 of Fiscal '26, the City has awarded approximately 24 billion dollars in contract awards to M/WBEs, and the City expects to exceed the 25-billion-dollar goal by year's end.

Emergency contract awards to M/WBEs in 2025. In terms of using that method, there was a total of 107 contracts awarded, of which M/WBEs received 93 of those. That was roughly 86.9 percent, totaling roughly 9,371,000. To non-M/WBEs that were awarded, there were 14 contracts, roughly 13.1 percent, and that totaled a bit more than 125 million dollars. For a total of the 107 contracts totaled in dollar value, 134,682,851 dollars.

There was another question regarding the percentage of M/WBE contracts registered late. Now, MOCS evaluates timeliness based on the registration within 30 days of the contract start. For instance, the total M/WBE small purchase method awards were roughly 1,145 contracts that were registered. Retroactive in that number were roughly 338 of them, about 29 percent. Retroactive more than 30 days, 66. So of the 1,145, there were roughly 66 contracts that

1 were retroactive meeting more than 30 days in this
2 instance.

3
4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. Let's stop here
5 so that we can go through section by section.

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Okay.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Because instead of
8 going back, I think we should just talk about each
9 section of the data that you're talking about.

10 So, for the total certified firms, you're
11 saying that we certified 11,382.

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: As of end of
13 '25.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Yes. And in the City
15 of New York, how many firms total are registered with
16 the City of New York? I imagine probably hundreds of
17 thousands.

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. I mean we
19 will circle back with you on that specific number for
20 that specific question.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Because that already
22 is too little. 11,382 firms for the City of New York
23 that has a 118-billion-dollar budget, 30 percent of
24 that is going to contracting. That is an abysmal

25

2 amount of money that is being, our taxpayer dollars
3 go straight back into the hands of White people.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Well, I can say
5 that, all that come in in terms of potential M/WBEs
6 looking to be certified, those applications are taken
7 in and processed. But if you have a specific question
8 regarding that specific number relative to the larger
9 number, we're happy to consider it and provide you
10 with a response.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Yeah. We're going to
12 have to get certifications up for all of the M/WBEs,
13 but especially for looking at your breakdown of
14 certified firms, there's more non-minority, so White
15 women-owned firms, 26 percent than Asian-owned and
16 Hispanic-owned and Native American-owned that are
17 certified, so you're going to have to get the
18 certification numbers up so that we actually have
19 people of color who are also certified, not just
20 White women.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Right. The goal
22 is to certify all eligible that are ready and willing
23 and that apply and that meet the qualifications. And
24 again, we're always happy to have discussions with
25

2 this Committee on any specific questions you may have
3 on any specific group.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So, can you help me
5 understand how many people applied to become
6 certified M/WBE? Because I want to know how many
7 rejections you've had.

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: And that's a
9 question I will circle back with you on specifically
10 on that answer.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you don't know how
12 many people are applying?

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: For what particular
14 timeframe and so on, we will we will get to that
15 response.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So, within Fiscal
17 Year '25 to close, how many people of color and women
18 apply for M/WBEs? Because I want to know how many
19 you're rejecting and why you're rejecting them.
20 What's causing them to not qualify? And if we're only
21 having a few thousand people apply to become M/WBE
22 certified with the City of New York, that is a
23 disservice to our city. We need to make sure that we
24 are helping minorities become certified.

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: One point that
3 you just brought up, in terms of denials for '25, it
4 was 39.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you deny 39
6 percent? 39 people?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. 39
8 applicants.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So that means that we
10 only had really 11,400 something people apply for the
11 entire fiscal year to become an M/WBE certified with
12 the City of New York?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, this is
14 the vendor pool itself. It's not 11,000 applying that
15 year.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you're saying if
17 there's 11,382 that are total certified, and you
18 reject a 39, that only adds up to be about 11,400.

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Well, what
20 we're saying is of the applicants, of those that are
21 certified, gone through the process, been accepted,
22 you have at the end of Fiscal '25, 11,382, right? In
23 that timeframe, there were there were there were
24 applicants that came in, some of which were denied,
25 and that number was 39.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Right. So, are you
3 seeing a pattern of the denials? Why are you denying
4 these people? To have only 11,382 firms that are
5 minority-owned, women-owned in the City of New York
6 for our applicant pool is abysmal, and it's a
7 disgrace so we need to get that number up, and we
8 have to figure out why even out of the 39 that did
9 apply, why they were rejected.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We're clearly
11 happy to work with the Committee to improve and to
12 socialize in any meaningful way to the community the
13 M/WBE opportunities that are available from being
14 certified. And being certified is based on one's
15 ability to meet the eligibility criteria. We're happy
16 to work with this Committee and to circle back in a
17 short period of time.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So what is the SBS
19 team doing for M/WBEs as well as MOCs M/WBEs to get
20 certifications up for people of color? How are we
21 doing our outreach to make sure that small business
22 owners who are minorities, that they're aware that
23 they can become certified? How are you making it
24 easier? Because I've gone through this process with
25 Small Businesses in my District. It is not easy.

1 There isn't language access. They're not translating
2 any of these forms into Spanish or Chinese or Korean.
3 It's extremely difficult for them to understand the
4 portal. So, what are you doing to make sure that
5 minorities can actually access the certification?
6

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We're clearly
8 willing to work with not only other City agencies,
9 and we do, but also with the City Council here to
10 improve M/WBE awareness or potential M/WBE awareness
11 of certification opportunities. We have borough-based
12 forums that we do and many outreach events that SBS
13 does do, not only by themselves, but with other
14 agencies and with other oversight, so we're happy to
15 circle back on a comprehensive response of the
16 various outreach activities that the Administration
17 has on a regular basis to encourage potential M/WBEs
18 to get certified and to help them understand what the
19 certification process entails.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So how many events
21 are you doing per month and in which boroughs?

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: It does vary on
23 a month-to-month basis. Again, I'll circle back. I'd
24 rather give you specific answers that are accurate
25 and to the point that you're trying to get answers

2 to, so we'll circle back in a short period of time
3 with that answer.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: And how much money is
5 dedicated to increasing M/WBE certifications within
6 SBS? Where's that funding amount?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: That I will
8 circle back with you on.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: How many staff
10 members do you have dedicated to increasing M/WBE
11 certification?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Again,
13 Committee Chair, we will circle back with you on
14 that.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: How many people are
16 employed to do the certification process for M/WBEs,
17 at MOCS or at SBS?

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: The
19 certification process is SBS, and we'll circle back
20 with specific numbers.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you don't know how
22 many staff members you have dedicated to working on
23 M/WBE certification?

24 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: There is a
25 certification unit at SBS, and it is a substantial

1 unit. I just simply want to make sure that the number
2 I give you is accurate.

3
4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. Whose staff is
5 here with you from your team today? Are they sitting
6 behind you?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No.
8 Unfortunately, they weren't able to be here today.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Oh, so the
10 Administration didn't think that it was important for
11 you to be here at this hearing?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Well, yes, they
13 do, which is why I'm here. Again, I am the First
14 Deputy Chief Business Diversity Officer. But that
15 said, if there are specific questions that go to the
16 heart of issues you're concerned with and should be
17 regarding how M/WBES are getting in and what they're
18 accomplishing in the system, I want to make sure that
19 we circle back to you with specific answers that give
20 you the tools you need to make decisions on a going
21 forward basis.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay, I see some of
23 the Admin folks here with us. Can you please make
24 sure that we get a clear answer of how many staff
25 members are dedicated to certify M/WBES at SBS and

1 MOCS for each agency? And what is the funding
2 allocation for each agency to ensure that this is
3 happening? We would like to hear it before the end of
4 this hearing.

5
6 For the Mayor's Executive Order 34
7 requiring agencies to consider at least one quote
8 from an M/WBE vendor for all emergency procurements,
9 how is this being enforced? And does MOCS track
10 whether agencies are complying with the EO34
11 requirement to consider M/WBE quotes? For emergency
12 contracts where M/WBE vendors are not selected, are
13 agencies required to document the reasons why?

14 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I believe the
15 answer is yes, but what I will do also is circle back
16 with the specific mechanism on which that response
17 happens between the agencies and MOCS in terms of
18 just how they track the various types of procurement
19 methods.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. So your answer
21 is yes, that you are following the Mayor's Executive
22 Order on the record, that you are considering at
23 least one quote from an M/WBE vendor for all
24 emergency procurements, for every single one that has
25 happened in the last four years?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: My response is
3 that following the Mayor's Executive Order, it is
4 policy for the City, and I will circle back regarding
5 the actual performance by circling back to MOCS and
6 getting back to you in a short period of time.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. We will have to
8 know on the record that the answer is yes, that you
9 had considered at least one quote for each M/WBE
10 vendor for every single emergency procurement,
11 because that is not what we have seen from our past
12 hearings, as well as when we have pulled all the
13 contracts, as well as what we've discussed before.

14 And for emergency contracts where M/WBE
15 vendors were not selected, did the agencies produce
16 documentation on why those M/WBEs did not qualify?

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: For each and
18 every... well, in terms of an omnibus, what I will have
19 to do is circle back with you regarding the responses
20 that are provided by MOCS on this specific question.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. Because from
22 the hearings that we've had within the last four
23 years, M/WBEs were not selected, they were not given
24 quotes, and they were given no documentation on why
25 they were not selected for emergency procurement.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Understood, and we will circle back with you shortly just to ensure that our response gets to the heart of the matter.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. I'm going to pass it over to Council Member Lewis to ask follow-up questions.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you, Chair Won.

So in your testimony, you stated three straight fiscal years of over 6 billion in total City M/WBE contracts. FY25 would have a record of 6.9 billion.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: So I wanted to know, what kinds of contracts does this include, and is it the spending year of FY25 or outyears? How are you all calculating that number?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We are looking at the total spend of City agencies and City-affiliated agencies with M/WBEs for each fiscal year, but we're happy to circle back with more detail if that would be helpful.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: You said different city agencies?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No. City agencies and City-affiliated agencies. The total M/WBE spend from those.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: And that's how you're coming up with the 6 billion for FY25?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: For each fiscal year.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: So is this only for Fiscal Year '25 or is this outyears as well, the 6 billion in totality?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No. This is over the three fiscal years is what you're referring to.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Got it. All right.

Just like my Co-Chairs, I'm appalled that we offered the courtesy and gave the gesture to provide questions so that you all prepared for the hearing and, for me, it's just completely ludicrous and unacceptable that you would just come here today as the First Deputy to say that you're going to answer questions that was provided and not be able to answer additional questions.

I'm going to proceed with asking my questions for the record because you hold a huge

2 leadership role in your agency and you should be able
3 to answer these questions.

4 We know that women of color,
5 entrepreneurs often start with significantly less
6 capital than their White or male counterparts. So
7 when 61 percent of M/WBE contracts are registered
8 late leading to payment delays, this is an equity
9 crisis that bankrupts these specific businesses so I
10 wanted to know, as a First Deputy, can you explain
11 how the Administration plans to prioritize contract
12 registration specifically for smaller women-owned
13 firms that do not have the cash reserves to float the
14 City for six months?

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: It is the
16 City's goal to ensure that small businesses, M/WBEs
17 and so forth, small businesses, that their
18 registration is as on time as practicable, and that
19 is general policy. I know that's policy through MOCS.
20 For any specific tranche of registration, I would
21 circle back with you on it, but clearly our goal has
22 always been M/WBEs being successful and not having
23 obstacles in their way. So this Administration is
24 committed to ensuring that we improve on a year-over-
25 year basis on our ability and actual fact the

2 registration of M/WBES as well as just the overall
3 program performance.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right. Would a
5 restructuring of the M/WBE program, perhaps
6 consolidating oversight or giving SBS more authority
7 over agency spending, alleviate the reporting delays
8 and utilization gaps we're seeing?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, this
10 would be something we'd be happy to have further
11 discussion with your office on to see if these or
12 other ideas may be helpful in accelerating
13 performance and improvements. We're happy to do so.
14 We're happy to circle back.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: But I wanted to
16 know from your point of view.

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: It's difficult
18 to say without getting into the details. I would
19 rather get it right.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right. That's
21 honest.

22 When large prime contractors win bids for
23 projects, for instance, in Brooklyn, they often bring
24 in their own preferred subcontractors from outside
25 boroughs, so I wanted to know how is the City

2 enforcing local hire or local subcontracting
3 specifically for M/WBES? And can your agency mandate
4 that a percentage of subcontracts on Brooklyn-based
5 projects must go to M/WBES located within the
6 specific boroughs?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Regarding
8 mandating, it's something that for logistic and
9 possible legal reasons, we would have to take back
10 and examine, and we're happy, again, to have the
11 discussion. I think we all get to a better place when
12 we put our best foot forward on these things.

13 But in terms of the commitment to local
14 businesses, this Administration has always said the
15 City is open for business, and we support local
16 businesses in a strong and robust manner. Which is
17 why, in all frankness, you see performance increase
18 and outcomes increase year over year with the M/WBE
19 community so, yes, we will continue to do that and
20 we're happy to circle back with you on specific ideas
21 you may have that may improve the outcomes.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right. For
23 construction and trade vendors in my district, the
24 cost of insurance and bonding required for City
25 contracts is often the primary barrier to entry, even

1 more so than certification, so I wanted to know,
2 while we have the contract financing loan fund, what
3 is being done to subsidize or assist with bonding
4 capacity, specifically for smaller M/WBES in the
5 outer boroughs who cannot afford the upfront premiums
6 required for bid?
7

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Again, I can
9 say that I would like to and will circle back with
10 you on this. I can tell you that SBS has technical
11 assistance that includes bonding support and so
12 forth, and that one of the things we certainly want
13 to do is ensure that our small businesses and M/WBES
14 are interfacing with the agencies for information
15 richness purposes, so that they themselves can
16 benefit from these programs, which, as you pointed
17 out, it's helpful for small businesses when they're
18 taking on these projects.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: This is my last
20 question. In central Brooklyn specifically, and some
21 of those businesses are here today, many Caribbean
22 and immigrant-owned businesses operate effectively,
23 but rely heavily on cash transactions or older
24 banking models, which disqualifies them from City
25 contracts that require rigorous digital trails beyond

2 standard loan applications. What specific technical
3 assistance programs are you running to help Caribbean
4 and minority owned businesses to modernize their
5 financial back end so that they are audit ready for
6 the City procurement?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Well, I would
8 like to get back to you what the specific programs
9 are, so that I give you a complete list for which you
10 can review.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Is this something
12 that you all have been thinking about?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: The various
14 oversight likely are, but let me circle back because
15 then I can give you a more accurate answer.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Have you all heard
17 of this before? Is this a theme or a trend?

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. We've
19 heard various communities have expressed the various
20 needs they have within the program, but my concern is
21 ensuring that when I respond, we respond to you, it's
22 accurate and useful for your purposes so we'll circle
23 back.

CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. And we've also been joined by Council Members Zhuang and Vernikov.

I'm going to pass it back now to Chair Won.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

I'm going to now pass it over to Chair Feliz for his questions.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much, Chair. I would like to recognize some of the Members of the Small Business Committee, including Council Members Ung and Zhuang.

Just want to start by echoing some of the points mentioned by Chairs Won and Louis. We have to support our M/WBEs. We have to get serious about reducing disparities and providing opportunities to underrepresented groups. We have to get serious about promoting diversity in our economy. This is New York City, the most diverse city in the entire country. We have to get serious about that issue. Based on this data that you provided today, it is clear that that is not getting prioritized or getting done, and it's very unacceptable. On this issue, this Administration has issued everything. Goals, executive orders, has

2 issued basically everything except results, and that
3 is a perfect example of bad government. Also, the
4 first question, we provided months of notice about
5 this hearing, so my first question is, where is SBS?
6 Where's the Small Business Services Agency? Where are
7 they? We weren't told anything. I don't see them
8 anywhere in this room. Where are they?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. Pardon
10 me. Chair, the SBS Commissioner could not be here
11 today, wanted to be, but could not be here today.
12 Again, if you have specific questions for any of the
13 oversight, whether it's MOCS, SBS, or just the
14 Administration, we're happy to circle back.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah. We provided
16 months of notice about this hearing, and simply not
17 showing up, very unacceptable, and I think that says
18 a lot about how serious this Administration is about
19 this issue.

20 So, I guess a few questions. I'll ask
21 some general background questions related to the
22 M/WBE process, just for general background
23 information and for the record. Talk to us about the
24 M/WBE process. How can one become certified? What's
25

2 the process like, and how long could it take to get
3 certified?

4 COMMISSIONER LONGLEY: I mean, again, I'm
5 happy to circle back with the specific answers that
6 you're looking for. Generally speaking, for any
7 certification, it's always based on the eligibility
8 criteria, whether or not one meets them. But we can
9 circle back with the verbiage on the specific
10 details.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: I would also like
12 to recognize Council Members Vernikov and Krishnan
13 who have joined.

14 Once a business becomes certified, what
15 are processes that must be followed to compete for a
16 City contract?

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Again, because
18 it may vary somewhat, I'd rather circle back with you
19 with a specific response as to any of those nuances,
20 so that you have information in front of you that you
21 can use in an actionable way.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: How lengthy can
23 these applications be? Are we talking about 10 pages,
24 20 pages of information that you must provide to
25 compete for a contract?

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, it
3 likely varies, but I will circle back, we'll circle
4 back with you with a more comprehensive response.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What outreach is
6 done to make sure businesses are aware of
7 opportunities with the City? Any outreach at all?

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, again,
9 the City does borough-based outreach events. We do,
10 you know, Get Stuff Done and Build your Business with
11 New York campaigns, offer small business and end up
12 specifically M/WBEs, but we're happy to circle back
13 with you with a more comprehensive response of the
14 various types of outreach to the M/WBE communities
15 and what they're entailed and what they're intended
16 to accomplish.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Out of all the
18 contracts, what are some of the industries that the
19 City has awarded most of the contracts to? Are we
20 talking about the food industry, the education
21 industry, technology, construction?

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, again,
23 we're happy to, you know, you can, if you look at
24 some of the responses given today about how Fiscal
25 '25 was sort of broken down, you know, but we're

2 happy to circle back with you on the industry level
3 basis, which is what you're asking about, so we can
4 circle back with that specific information.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What is the average
6 time from application submission to certification
7 approval?

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I'm sorry, I
9 didn't hear that. Can you repeat it?

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What's the average
11 time from the time one applies to the time one is
12 approved for a specific certification?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Oh, to get
14 certified, the average time? We'll circle back with
15 you on that.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Do we know if
17 there's a backlog?

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I am not aware
19 of one, but we'll circle back with you on that.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: How many certified
21 M/WBEs have ever been awarded a City contract, ever?

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I want to make
23 sure you get...

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: You could just give
25 us a ballpark if you don't have this.

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Well, the thing
3 is that'll like vary over time. So, I'd rather give
4 you an answer that's accurate so that you're
5 basically looking at accurate information.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right, but do we
7 have a ballpark even through end of 2025? Any
8 information on that?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: You know, we
10 recognize that that number would vary so I'm going to
11 circle back with you if you'd indulge me.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: So, I think it's
13 very clear that this Administration came with very
14 little to no information about this issue, and I
15 think that shows a lot about how seriously all of the
16 agencies under this Administration are taking this
17 issue related to M/WBEs. Not only the lack of
18 information, but also the lack of results on this
19 issue.

20 A few more questions. Hopefully we can
21 get some answers. Can M/WBEs certified at the State
22 apply to participate in the program?

23 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: There is a fast
24 track process between the two of them, where one is
25 certified with one and then seek certification with

2 the other, and it accelerates the process. It's not
3 guaranteed, but it does, but we can get back to you
4 with the specifics on that issue.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What information is
6 available to businesses seeking assistance with
7 certification? And also, what does outreach look like
8 to inform businesses of this information related to
9 certification?

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: The City,
11 specifically SBS, has a number of technical
12 assistance programs that are geared to assist M/WBEs,
13 and we're happy to give you a comprehensive list of
14 those and categorize them for you so that, as to, for
15 your own edification and also for sharing and
16 socializing with constituents.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Has SBS or any
18 agency or the agency that you're with received any
19 feedback regarding the certification process? If yes,
20 what has that feedback been?

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Have they
22 received any feedback regarding the process itself?

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Regarding the
24 certification process, but also regarding the
25 application process?

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean, they
3 collect data on a continuous basis. Specifically, you
4 know, I'm happy to circle back regarding, how can I
5 put this, the overall trend that those questions are
6 asking for any particular type of help or assistance
7 or clarification.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Is there any
9 information that stands out that anything that you've
10 heard from the small business community regarding the
11 application process?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I mean,
13 obviously, every business that comes in wants to be
14 certified and that's a great thing and they're
15 enthusiastic and that's also a good thing. And, you
16 know, the City tracks their performances in terms of
17 those that are certified and those that aren't and
18 why, but I'm happy to circle back with general trends
19 just so that this Committee can better understand
20 what, what the interactions have been.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. I would
22 like to recognize Council Member Stevens, who has
23 joined.

Any improvements that have been made based on the feedback that we've received from the small business community?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Improvements in...

CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: In terms of the certification process or to the process related to applying for a contract with the City?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: The leadership are always looking for and listening to and, to the extent practicable, acting on and opportunities to improve the process. Again, I'm happy to circle back on specific instances of that so that you'll have a comprehensive list to review regarding steps that have been taken.

CO-CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah. So again, I'll pause here with the questions, but we provided months of notice. We've been chatting about this hearing since the summer. This Administration has come with very little to no information about the data that we've been requesting for months and that is unacceptable and, again, I think that shows the seriousness that we're giving to this issue.

I'll pass it back to Chair Won.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much,
Chair Feliz.

I do echo the sentiment that it is a
disgrace that the agencies are not here.

I want to go back to some of the data
that you had provided. I am seeing discrepancies. So
for Checkbook NYC, it says that overall M/WBE
spending for Fiscal Year '25 is 11.5 percent of an
overall contract spending, not 36 percent. That's a
huge discrepancy that you're stating in your
testimony. So can you explain this discrepancy? Why
is there such a large gap?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I thought you
said Checkbook. I can't speak to Checkbook right now,
but I...

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Checkbook is a
transparency tool that the Comptroller's Office uses,
and I can actually pull the contracts and read
through them and quantify how they got to 11.5, but I
cannot seem to find how to quantify 36 percent.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No, I
understand. What I meant to say, what I was trying to
say, is that this 2.2 billion dollars based on LL1
agencies, City agency spend for M/WBEs is the number

2 that we've come up to for Fiscal '25. That includes
3 just those items that would be allowable under LL1
4 procurements which would, which would exclude certain
5 items. It excludes things like goods over a million,
6 it excludes other items... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: If you were excluding
8 contracts your number would not be higher, it would
9 be lower.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: But we're happy
11 to circle back with you regarding the specific
12 distinction between those two.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Yes. If your
14 calculation was excluding contracts because of LL,
15 then it would not be a higher number of 36 percent
16 instead of 11.5 percent which is what the
17 Comptroller's Office is reporting..

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Right.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: With justifications
20 by the evidence of the existing contracts.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No. We're happy
22 to take a look at both.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Your response makes
24 no sense.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We're happy to take a look at both and circle back with you with what the distinction is between the two.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. So it is on record that you are testifying for 36 percent for FY25 for overall M/WBE spending whereas all we can find on record is 11.5 percent.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. It's 36 percent.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: That's a huge discrepancy, over 20 percent.

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah, and we'll circle back with you, we'll take a look at and circle back.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: For 80 to 90 percent of the questions that we've asked you, all you keep on saying is I'll circle back with you. You have no staff with you from your office and the other agencies are not here.

Similarly, Checkbook says 1.7 billion dollars of contract spending went to M/WBE in Fiscal Year '25, not 2.2 billion that you're stating in the testimony so can you help me understand the discrepancy there?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We'll take a
look at it and circle back.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Are you inflating the
number by a billion dollars almost?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: No, but we will
take a look at it and circle back.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: What do you mean by
circle back? Are you going to send me the contracts
to justify how you're getting to 2.2 instead of 1.7?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We're going to
look at both. We'll look at Checkbook and the sources
you're looking at and we'll circle back with the
distinction.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you're going to
send me the contracts of how the difference is being
made up by a billion dollars?

FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: We will circle
back with a response as to what we see the
differences are.

CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: You said in your
testimony that you're going to have the next
disparity study completed by end of Calendar Year
2025 so we're in mid-November 2025, that leaves you a
month and a half, so are you saying on record that

2 the Mayor's Office and you will issue an executive
3 order to update the M/WBE utilization goal before
4 this Administration wraps December 31st, 2025?

5 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: What we're
6 saying is that the study will be completed, it's
7 slated to be completed by the end of this year, and
8 we will circle back regarding the finding of the
9 data.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Are you going to
11 publish it and make it public so that the good people
12 of New York City can read this study?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Once we have
14 reviewed the data itself and the conclusions, we'll
15 circle back on what the process will be for
16 socialization.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So are you going to
18 publish it?

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Uh...

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Circle back. What
21 does this mean? You keep on saying circling back.

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: I'll be
23 specific, meaning that for me, I can't tell you
24 specifically what will be published and shared, but
25 we'll circle back and discuss what will be published

2 and shared once we've completed the study and taken a
3 look at it.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Okay. I guess the
5 Council needs to update this law to make sure that
6 publishing publicly is part of this study.

7 All right. So, moving on to contracting
8 financial loans. For M/WBEs that applied for
9 financial loans in Fiscal Year '25, how many loans
10 were approved and what was the total dollar value and
11 what is the average loan amount? How many loans were
12 denied and what were the reasons behind the denials?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Are you asking
14 regarding a specific agency? I'm sorry. The
15 question's a bit broad.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: For the financial
17 loans for all of the agencies, for any M/WBE who has
18 applied for the contract financial loan.

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Okay, well, if
20 you're referring to a specific loan, we're happy to
21 circle back with you on that.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So you don't have an
23 answer?

24 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: For a specific
25 loan, no. Not without examining the data first.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: So it's on your
3 website on newyorkcitybusiness.nyc.gov for New York
4 City businesses and it's called Contract Financial
5 Loan Fund. Get the funds you need to take on City
6 contracts, loan eligibility, have an operating
7 business, be seeking financing as a prime or
8 subcontractor towards a contract with a City or a
9 City-funded entity. This is SBS. It would have helped
10 if the SBS Commissioner decided to attend this
11 hearing or sent staff, but it's SBS Connect account
12 and that is how you apply to make sure that you can
13 get the Contract Financial Loan Fund. Because as
14 Council Member and Chair Louis has said, it is not
15 easy for people of color, especially Black women, to
16 qualify for the M/WBE certification and to be able to
17 finance it for these contracts.

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Yeah. We
19 certainly understand and agree that there is a... it's
20 often a barrier to entry financing and SBS does
21 provide a number of technical tools and financial
22 assistance and with that specific loan fund we'll
23 circle back.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: I'm going to pass it
25 over to Chair Louis for another round of questions.

1
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Chair Won, I'm
3 going to just add an addendum to my statement for the
4 record regarding Reso. 281. We often speak of New
5 York City as an engine of opportunity, yet the data
6 before us reveals a broken promise for the
7 demographic that serves as the very backbone of our
8 neighborhoods, women of color. The Comptroller's
9 recent report uncovered a disturbing disparity within
10 the disparity. In Fiscal Year 2023, despite our
11 stated goals, Black women-owned businesses receive a
12 staggering 0.39 percent of citywide contract value.
13 For Hispanic women-owned businesses, that number
14 drops to a near invisible 0.11 percent. These
15 statistics represent the systemic exclusion of
16 thousands of qualified entrepreneurs in Districts
17 like mines in central Brooklyn. While we celebrate
18 incremental gains in the broader M/WBE program, the
19 reality is that the male-owned M/WBEs are receiving
20 nearly eight times the number of contracts as those
21 owned by women. We are seeing a valley of death where
22 women of color navigate the bureaucracy to get
23 certified, only to be completely shut out when it
24 comes to time to cut checks. Resolution 281 calls
25 upon the Mayor's Office to stop treating the M/WBE

1 program as a monolith. It demands that the
2 Administration identify and implement specific target
3 measures to close this gender and racial gap. We
4 cannot claim to be fighting inequality while the
5 City's own wallet reinforces it. It is our
6 responsibility to ensure that the path to
7 generational wealth is not paved only for a select
8 few. Passing this Resolution is a necessary step
9 forward, ensuring that the women who build our
10 communities are finally given a fair shot at building
11 our city.
12

13 I'm going to pass it now back to Chair
14 Won.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

16 We are going to be doing a lot of circle
17 back, circle circles, and we're going to hear from
18 you soon. This hearing is now adjourned.

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Thank you.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Oh, sorry. The
21 Administration is dismissed. Thank you for being the
22 lone person who showed up and, you know, taking
23 everyone else's heat that you didn't have to do
24 alone.
25

2 But now we're going to move on to public
3 testimony.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHIEF FLYNN: Thank you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: The first panel that
6 we're going to hear from is Marcia Collier, Riya
7 Varadhachary, Kamla Millwood, and Camille Newman. So
8 it's Marcia Collier, Riya Varadhachary, Kamla
9 Millwood, Camille Newman.

10 I now open the hearing for public
11 testimony. I remind members of the public that this
12 is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be
13 observed at all times. As such, members of the public
14 shall remain silent at all times.

15 The witness table is reserved for people
16 who wish to testify. No video recording or
17 photography is allowed from the witness table.
18 Further, members of the public may not present audio
19 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit
20 transcripts to such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
21 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

22 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
23 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
24 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,
25 you will have two or three minutes to speak on

today's oversight topic, Status of Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, M/WBE Certification Program, or any of the following bills attached to the hearing, Intro. 1076 or Reso. 281.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

For in-person panelists, please come up to the table once your name is called, and we will now turn, oh okay, okay so you may begin.

MARCIA COLLIER: Okay. Good morning, everyone. So a bit of a pivot from today's topic, I'm actually here for Women and Gender Equity. So again, dear Members of the Committee and Chairs, thank you for the opportunity to speak. While today's agenda focuses on M/WBE certification, I'm speaking to a core pillar of gender equality and equity, survivors safety, and access to services. So, my name is Marcia Collier. I'm a medical doctorate and master's of public health student from Jamaica Queens, New York,

1 and I'm asking for you guys to support the New York
2 State Bill S-2280A, which requires a standardized
3 lethality assessment and an immediate warm handoff
4 from police or hospital staff to trained advocates
5 based on the results of that assessment that would
6 connect survivors with resources during that
7 immediate incident. So why should we act now?
8 Domestic violence is a persistent driver of serious
9 harm in our city. From 2010 to 2022, DV victims
10 accounted for about 17 percent of all New York City
11 homicides, and intimate partner homicides has risen
12 in recent years. In a review of recent cases, 8
13 percent of intimate partner homicide victims had an
14 active order of protection at the time of the
15 incident, underscoring gaps at first contact. What is
16 proposed we do about it? The lethality assessment
17 program...

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: I'm so sorry to
20 interrupt you. We're only taking testimony for on
21 topic items today, but if you want to submit the
22 testimony you have, you can with the Sergeant or the
23 email that we provide here but, unfortunately, we're
24 only taking on topic testimony.

2 MARCIA COLLIER: Okay. Well, I've
3 submitted it through email for you guys as well, but
4 that's okay. I'm willing to hear you guys out in
5 another venue.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you for being
7 here.

8 MARCIA COLLIER: Thank you so much.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. You may
10 begin.

11 RIYA VARADHARCHARY: Good morning. My name
12 is Riya Varadharchary, and I'm speaking on behalf of
13 Emgage Action, an organization that advocates for
14 Muslim American civic and political empowerment.
15 Thank you, Chair Won and Members of the Committee for
16 the opportunity to testify today. I'm here in support
17 of Intro. 1076, a bill that would pave the way for
18 Middle-Eastern- and Northern-African-owned businesses
19 to become eligible for the City's minority and woman
20 owned business enterprise program. The most damaging
21 impact is that MENA-owned businesses are locked out
22 of the M/WBE program entirely, not because they lack
23 capacity, but because they are still misclassified as
24 White under outdated federal standards. This
25 misclassification means these businesses have zero

1 access to the over 6 billion in City contracts
2 reserved for certified minority- and woman-owned
3 firms. It is a structural exclusion baked into the
4 system, and it will continue unless this Council acts
5 now. We see this exclusion clearly in MENA
6 communities. Many MENA-owned small construction,
7 catering, bodega, and professional service businesses
8 would be excellent matches for City contracts. They
9 are deeply rooted in neighborhoods, they employ local
10 workers, and they have the expertise. But without the
11 M/WBE status, they lack visibility and procurement
12 databases, and cannot access small business set-
13 asides, and they miss out on capital mentorship
14 programs tied to certification. This bill is also
15 urgent. The next M/WBE disparity study is
16 approaching, and if MENA businesses are not included
17 now, they will be excluded for another full study
18 cycle, likely several years. We urge the Council to
19 pass Intro. 1076 so this critical study captures the
20 reality facing these communities. I will be
21 submitting a more detailed written testimony, and I
22 want to thank the Council for considering this long
23 overdue step towards economic equality for MENA-owned
24 businesses. Thank you.
25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. You may
3 begin.

4 KAMLA MILLWOOD: Hello, everybody. My name
5 is Kamla Millwood. I am the President of Palatial
6 Publishing LLC, which is a M/WBE certified company. I
7 also have a master's in management from St. Francis
8 College, and I'm here to give you my testimony, and
9 I'm happy that I'm able to extend it from what I had
10 before, now that we have a little bit more time.
11 Okay. My company, through my work, has been helping
12 small businesses navigate certification.
13 Consistently, we're hearing the same concerns, that
14 the current M/WBE application process is too long,
15 too complex, and too burdensome for micro and small
16 business owners. To improve access and reduce
17 disparities, I strongly recommend creating a shorter,
18 simplified application that eliminates unnecessary
19 requirements and can be reasonably completed under 60
20 minutes. This would allow the smallest and most
21 vulnerable businesses to participate more fully in
22 the program. I also express my full support for
23 Resolution 281, and its call for concrete measures to
24 address the disparities women of color-owned
25 businesses face in securing and performing public

2 contracts. My company has certified within this year
3 only, Fiscal Year 2025, 170 businesses. 170
4 businesses. And the thing is, I personally do these
5 certifications, and I sit with these individuals, and
6 I see a lot of them have tried many, many years to do
7 these certifications by themselves, and they'll see
8 things like asking about stocks and shares, or
9 meeting minutes. Many of these things don't apply to
10 these companies. The process takes an average of six
11 to eight hours to complete, and that's with me
12 sitting right next to them with my laptop. Six to
13 eight hours. Many of them don't have resumes. They
14 don't have logos. (TIMER CHIME)

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: If you could wrap
16 it up.

17 KAMLA MILLWOOD: Okay. So, I'm just
18 letting you know that because I'm determined to make
19 sure these businesses get certified, I've never had
20 any denials. That's the first step. The second step
21 is to make the process more simple for more people to
22 be certified and to get these government contracts.
23 Thank you very much.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you.
25

2 CAMILLE NEWMAN: Good morning, Council
3 Members. My name is Camille Newman, Director of
4 Economic Development and Entrepreneurship at the
5 Local Development Corporation of East New York, home
6 to the Brooklyn Women's Business Center and New York
7 State Entrepreneur Assistance Center. Every week, we
8 encourage entrepreneurs to pursue M/WBE
9 certification, but what we see is business owners
10 spend months navigating a difficult process only to
11 receive no new business once they're certified. For
12 the smaller M/WBEs we serve, the City's procurement
13 system is simply not built for their stage of growth.
14 Opportunities are too large, too complex, or too hard
15 to find. Access is a barrier, but capacity is
16 another. Even firms under half a million dollars in
17 annual revenue struggle with working capital, cash
18 flow gaps, and long payment delays that make City
19 contracting risky for the smallest M/WBEs. To close
20 these gaps, we recommend three priorities: Require
21 agencies to publish clear procurement pipelines so
22 emerging M/WBEs can see opportunities in advance;
23 standardize commodity codes across agencies so firms
24 can reliably find opportunities they match their
25 services; track first contract metrics and explore

1 bonus evaluation points for agencies that award
2 contracts to emerging M/WBES under half a million
3 dollars in revenue.

4
5 Our entrepreneurs are ready to work and
6 eager to contribute to local hiring, but they need
7 the procurement pathways with real entry points. We
8 also encourage the City to explore a procurement
9 readiness accelerator to help smaller M/WBES navigate
10 this entire process.

11 In closing, we support Resolution 281,
12 and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you all.

14 Do any of my Colleagues have questions
15 for the panel?

16 All right. This panel is dismissed. Thank
17 you so much.

18 Please forgive me if I butcher your name.
19 Ararat El-Rawi, okay, you may come forward, Mousa
20 Naji, okay, Donnatella Craig, and Steven Bari.

21 You may begin.

22 ARARAT EL-RAWI: Sure. Members of the
23 Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for having me.
24 My name is Ararat El-Rawi. I'm the owner and
25 proprietor of Cafe Little Armenia in Greenpoint. I'm

2 here today to speak on behalf of 1076. You know, my
3 parents were Armenian immigrants that came to this
4 country from Iraq, so they were already, you know,
5 twice burdened, you know, coming over here and trying
6 to start a business and trying to do something like
7 that. I opened my own business after my father also
8 had a business, too, and what I do see, I see a lot
9 of people represented, and I mean, I spent 30 years
10 in the business, so for me to have that kind of input
11 and insight before I opened my restaurant was already
12 great, but the troubles that I faced going into it, I
13 sure wish that there was a little more help or a
14 little more something, recognition, something that I
15 could have done that would have certainly helped me,
16 you know, to overcome some of the barriers. It's not
17 easy, you know, to open a restaurant and to go
18 through procuring a lease and then, you know, all the
19 little things that you need to do to gain something
20 like that, you know, and as I said, I think we live
21 in one of the best cities in the world and there's so
22 much representation of so many different things in
23 here, and one thing I do see, I see a lot of Middle
24 Eastern food and sometimes I see Greek food and
25 Mediterranean, and I never really saw the banner of

1 Armenian food. Like, I don't know if we were
2 represented in that way. When I first moved back to
3 New York 20-some years ago, my friend had opened a
4 Korean restaurant, and I remember before I opened my
5 Armenian restaurant, I spoke to her about it, and she
6 said, you know, I read, she said 20-some years ago
7 when I opened Moim, she said, you didn't see that
8 many Korean restaurants. You saw a lot of Asian
9 restaurants and different things, but you really see
10 the banner of Korean restaurants around outside of
11 Koreatown. She said, now when you drive around, you
12 see a lot of places that have Korean food and it's
13 represented all over the place, and, you know, she
14 encouraged me to open my restaurant just based on the
15 fact that I don't see a lot of Armenian
16 representation. She said, you kind of have a leg up
17 on there, and, you know, right now there's only
18 three, you know, and one of them focuses on catering,
19 you know, and so I just think that, yeah, it would be
20 nice to see more representation and more help, and I
21 think that there's a lot of people that are out there
22 that want to represent their food and their cultures,
23 and we just want to be part of the dance as well.
24 We're not trying to say we're being left out or that
25

2 we're better or anything like that. We just want to
3 be part of the dance too. If everybody else can, you
4 know, get their foot in, then I think that we should
5 be able to as well, and when I see things like this,
6 and I think that these are things that help people,
7 this would be amazing for people like my parents, you
8 know, they wanted to have a business, they wanted to
9 start a business, and weren't quite sure how to go
10 about it, and then doors get shut in your face, and,
11 you know, leases get, you know, taken away because
12 you don't have the money, and you don't have this,
13 and, you know, all the things that you have to go to
14 to procure a lease and to, you know, actually get a
15 business, and I think stuff like this really helps
16 because, as I said, we're not living in Akron, Ohio.
17 We're not living in a different state. We live in New
18 York City, you know, and there's so much
19 representation of so many cultures, and that's what
20 makes our city so great, and I think we should just
21 continue to foster that, help that, and make that
22 accessible so everybody can have a voice in the game,
23 and it's not just, you know, the traditional standard
24 stuff, or it's not just the traditional, you know,
25 stuff that you see, you know, laying around. Oh, it's

2 Asian food. No, it's not. It's Korean food. Oh, it's
3 Mediterranean. No, it's Armenian food, you know, my
4 Iraqi food. I don't even see that much Iraqi food,
5 you know, outside of here. There's a few places in
6 Jersey that you can go to, and, you know, stuff like
7 that, but it sure would be nice to see, like, more
8 representation and give everybody a chance to survive
9 and, you know, do their thing in this great city of
10 ours where everybody can have a voice, and that's
11 what makes, as I said, it's what makes this city so
12 great is that everybody can have a voice and can be
13 represented, but, you know, to be underrepresented is
14 something that's, you know, doesn't help, you know,
15 when you are trying. So, you know, when I found out
16 about this, when I heard about this, it's like, yeah,
17 definitely, I would definitely support that as a
18 small minority business owner, not just minority
19 being that's just my restaurant by myself, but an
20 Armenian immigrant Iraqi, you know, business owner,
21 you know, that's like, yeah, that checks enough
22 boxes, you know, for me to want to come in and, you
23 know, just kind of stand up and, you know, do the
24 right thing, I think. So, it'd be just nice to see
25 better representation and, you know, put us in the

2 game, and that's kind of all we're asking, you know.
3 So, that's what I'm here on behalf of today, and I
4 hope this helps. I'm not sure, you know, but that's
5 my thoughts on it, and thank you for taking time.
6 Thank you for listening to me.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. You may
8 begin.

9 STEVEN BARI: So, I was here to give
10 testimony regarding insurance, but I did arrive here
11 late, so I'm not sure if that was pertinent to this
12 committee hearing.

13 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

14 STEVEN BARI: Okay. So, I was asked to
15 provide some testimony regarding insurance costs, and
16 I listed out three things that are the major factor
17 in terms of the rising costs in the last 20 years
18 that I've been doing property management. Our
19 portfolio is essentially small to mixed-use
20 properties and warehouses in Manhattan and Queens.
21 The three things that are a factor is the changing
22 policies that are offered by insurers. So, one year
23 we'll have one policy which will cover all the things
24 that we need to for essentially living and operating
25 a building in Manhattan, and that will no longer be

1 available in the next year. It will be repackaged,
2 and that policy will then be an additional percentage
3 more than it was the previous year. It will have a
4 different name, and it will not provide the same
5 amount of services, for example, boiler services. For
6 boiler coverage, you have to have an inspection by
7 the DOB as well as DEP. Suddenly, they no longer
8 provide that, but now it's twice as much. When I
9 first started doing this in 2007, that was about
10 2,000 dollars. As of this year, it's 18,000. So,
11 that's a huge jump, and that's to get the same amount
12 of service I was getting in 2007. The other two are
13 claims. Claims that are legitimate. Those are always
14 going to be occurring in Manhattan, but the major
15 problem is that's an albatross around your neck. If
16 you have a claim against your building, let's say
17 there's a fire, the insurer for that year will look
18 at that and say, okay, I'm not going to cover you.
19 Well, now I go to the next insurance provider.
20 They'll see that same issue and say, okay, well, now
21 we're going to raise your rate by X, and that occurs
22 throughout your cycle with owning a property, no
23 matter if it is a fire or as small as a trip and
24 fall. The last is bogus claims. As a property owner
25

2 with commercial tenants, I have experience not just
3 with them, but also running businesses in Manhattan
4 as restaurants, that there are those who will look at
5 ADA complaints against insurance as a gamble. Those,
6 you know that as... (TIMER CHIME) really quickly,
7 they're filed out of state. So, if those three things
8 could be addressed, that would lower costs. Thank
9 you.

10 DONNATELLA CRAIG: Council Member Farrah,
11 Chair, Committee, thank you. My name is Donnatella
12 C., a founder and CEO of My Hungry World, Inc., a
13 minority and woman-owned small business based in
14 District 43, proudly serving entrepreneurs, families,
15 and emerging enterprises across Brooklyn and the
16 entire city. I'm grateful for the opportunity to
17 testify today in full support of strengthening the
18 M/WBE program in strong alignment with Resolution
19 281.

20 Why am I here? I'm here today as a Black
21 woman business owner, a survivor of domestic violence
22 rebuilding her life through entrepreneurship, a small
23 business advocate who helped more than 70,000
24 families facing housing instability, a consultant who
25 has helped generate 4.3 million dollars in funding

1 for small businesses nationwide, and a proud
2 participant in New York's economic ecosystem who
3 believes deeply in the promise of the M/WBE program.
4 I'm also here because, like thousands of women of
5 color in New York City, I have personally experienced
6 the very barriers that today's hearing seeks to
7 address. The disparities are real, and the data
8 proves it. The Committee Report for today's hearing
9 confirms what many of us have lived. Women of color
10 remain the least likely to obtain, sustain, and scale
11 through public contracts. Some of the most striking
12 data, which was mentioned earlier, only 1.03 percent
13 of contract value member M/WBE participants went to
14 women of color. Black women-owned firms received just
15 0.39 percent. Hispanic women-owned firms 0.11
16 percent. Only 20 percent of certified M/WBEs received
17 any contracts in FY24. The average M/WBE contract is
18 valued at just 11 percent of non-certified firms'
19 contract value. Emergency procurement excluded M/WBEs
20 almost entirely with less than 4 percent of emergency
21 dollars reaching us. The statistics are not abstract.
22 They translate to real consequences for my clients,
23 my community, and my own business. My M/WBE journey...

25 (TIMER CHIME)

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: If you could wrap
3 it up in 60 seconds.

4 DONNATELLA CRAIG: Okay. For years, I've
5 supported the M/WBE. I've been to Albany. I recently
6 had the pleasure of meeting Francilia Wilkins Rahim
7 and Melba Wilson. They're in the top 1 percent of
8 M/WBE-certified businesses. Wilkins has 900 million
9 dollars on her platform. For me, this is really
10 imperative, the disparities that we're facing. To
11 speak to your point earlier today, I have my contract
12 along with nine others in the process. Part of the
13 problem is, if you go to the portal, the links that
14 are in the actual program, which requires 34 to 37
15 documents to answer your question from earlier, you
16 are given two months to complete the process. I'm
17 currently, with my small businesses, averaging a
18 little less than a week to complete, but the minute
19 you submit, it is a 90 to 120-day delay, it says,
20 before someone reaches out to you. The links between
21 City, State, which most people don't understand that
22 M/WBE is a City certification and a State
23 certification, is different. You also have the
24 ability to do the addendums for New York, New Jersey,
25 Port Authority, and the Small Business Services,

2 which is the City. The various support desks, which
3 they do have, they don't know anything about each
4 other, and they don't communicate. Thank you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: You may begin.

6 MOUSA NAJI: Good morning. My name is
7 Mousa Najji. I'm the Director of Advocacy and
8 Community Relations at YAMA, the Yemeni American
9 Merchant Association. It is an organization dedicated
10 to uplifting Middle Eastern and North African voices
11 and ensuring our communities are recognized, both in
12 civic and economic life. Right now, MENA New Yorkers
13 are not recognized in City data. We are grouped into
14 the broad White category, which erases the unique
15 challenges our small businesses face. Specifically
16 for the Yemeni American community, it is a community
17 that is almost impossible for any New Yorker to
18 avoid, owning more than nearly 10,000 small
19 businesses in New York City, predominantly delis or
20 bodegas. But despite providing essential services and
21 employing local residents, we are excluded from the
22 minority and women-owned business enterprise program,
23 simply because MENA businesses are not recognized.
24 This is not unique to just Yemeni Americans, but all
25 members of the MENA community, Middle East and North

1 African community. It just reflects the systemic
2 barriers faced by many in our community. We are here
3 in strong support of Intro. 1076, which offers a
4 straightforward solution, which is simply to direct
5 the next disparity study to examine whether MENA
6 businesses experience discrimination or
7 underrepresentation. Based on what we have seen and
8 heard earlier from the First Deputy, I think it is
9 crucial for this Intro. 1076 to pass, because there
10 is a lack of communication from the Administration on
11 what is being done and how exactly they are
12 collecting the data from the MENA communities, which
13 is why an Intro. 1076 needs to pass to ensure that
14 the next disparity study is actually taking these
15 examinations from MENA communities and not just
16 claiming that they're doing it without any results or
17 proof of where they're collecting this information,
18 mentions of smaller communities across the city.

19 (TIMER CHIME) So, thank you, and we are urging the
20 Council to pass Intro. 1076.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much. I
22 want to acknowledge Council Member Lynn Schulman, who
23 has joined us on Zoom.
24
25

1
2 And our last in-person panelist is
3 Christopher Leon-Johnson.

4 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Good
5 afternoon. My name is Christopher Leon-Johnson.
6 Thanks for having this hearing today. I'm here to
7 show my support for all M/WBE businesses. I just want
8 to say this, right? Today, I think we all saw today
9 that the agency, the Commissioner didn't show up, and
10 I think the reason she didn't show up is because she
11 knows she's out the door. She knows that in the next
12 about month and change, there's going to be a
13 transition. Now, I know that we're still in the Adams
14 Administration, but we have to look forward, and I
15 believe that this Committee itself should be working
16 with the Mamdani Administration Transition Committee,
17 to preserve Adams' vision of making sure that Black
18 businesses still have the same amount of volume of
19 contracts in his Administration, because this is my
20 feeling. I know I can't, I'm not trying to get banned
21 for 30 days. I have a big feeling that the Black
22 businesses will be excluded from the Mamdani
23 Administration, and it'll be prioritized to the, I
24 like to call it the MENA businesses, like Arab and
25 Yemeni businesses. So I'm calling the City Council to

1 really make sure that the Black businesses are
2 preserved in the Mamdani Administration, while we
3 have to make sure that the Muslims and the Arabs'
4 businesses are preserved. I understand that, but
5 Black businesses should be prioritized too. They
6 should get the same fair share. They should get
7 treated correctly. There should be no nepotism going
8 on with Mamdani's Administration prioritizing Arab
9 Muslim businesses and downplaying and excluding all
10 the Black businesses, and we make sure, by the way,
11 about domestic violence. I know you cut the lady off.
12 We need to make sure in that Administration that
13 people that are victims of domestic violence who have
14 small businesses are protected in the Mamdani
15 Administration. That's what we got to make sure. So
16 thank you so much, and like I said, protect Black
17 business, protect women businesses, and let's keep it
18 like Adams, what he did. Thank you so much.

19
20 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

21 We're now going to move on to online
22 testimony. We are going to hear from Anita Pierce,
23 Geri Stengel, Abdessamad Elysjouri. I'm sorry if I
24 butchered your name, but you may unmute to speak.

25 Anita Pierce.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

3 ABDESSAMAD ELYSJOURI: Okay. Thank you
4 very much. Good morning, City Members, and thank you
5 for the opportunity to speak. My name is Abdessamad.
6 I am a Moroccan American from Morocco, founder and
7 Executive Director of Elysjouri Association, a non-
8 profit that serves immigrants including Middle
9 Easterners and North Africans and many other
10 communities through education, economic opportunity,
11 and language excellence programs, and we strongly
12 support Intro. 1076. Today, MENA New Yorkers are
13 still classified as White due to outdated federal
14 standards, even though our communities are
15 linguistically, ethically, and culturally distinct.
16 Because of the misclassification, MENA-owned non-
17 profits and business like ours cannot qualify for the
18 City M/WBE program, despite facing real barriers to
19 capital, contracting, discrimination, and economic
20 mobility. As a non-profit founded, run and serving
21 MENA and immigrant families, we see daily how
22 exclusion from M/WBE limits access to resources and
23 restricts the ability of our community to compete
24 fairly. MENA-owned interpretation services, child
25 care providers, small contractors, community

2 programs, and social service organizations are
3 naturally fit for the City contracts, but remain
4 locked out simply because the City has no accurate
5 category for them. Intro. 1076 is urgent. We urge the
6 Council to pass it by December 18th Stated Meeting so
7 the MENA New Yorkers can finally be recognized and
8 included in economic opportunities that already
9 support so many others. Thank you for your time and
10 listening, and my full written testimony has been
11 submitted for the record.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

13 Our next online testimony is by Geri
14 Stengel.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Geri, you can go off
17 mute.

18 GERI STENGEL: Thank you for the
19 opportunity to testify today. My name is Geri
20 Stengel. I'm CEO and President of Ventureneer and the
21 author of The Impact of Women-Owned Businesses, and
22 it's a national survey, and I don't know that it's as
23 relevant as the testimony that has preceded me so I'm
24 going to give back my time. You have the written
25

2 notes so that if you want to see and read about the
3 national numbers, you have that available to you.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

5 Next, we're going to hear from Anita
6 Pierce.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 ANITA PIERCE: I am a proud Brooklyn
9 Brownsville native and the founder of Eleven3seven5.
10 As a certified New York City and New York State
11 M/WBE, for more than a decade, I have supported
12 specifically small and micro businesses under 250,000
13 dollars, and my journey is rooted in community. I
14 began as a client of the LDC Corporation of East New
15 York and currently serve as a business advisor within
16 their Women's Business Center and also the EAC
17 Center, supporting entrepreneurs as they navigate the
18 very system that I once struggled with. As an alum of
19 the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business and a coach
20 of Columbia University's CU Grow program, across the
21 work, I have supported specific businesses to help
22 them to navigate through this specific process. And
23 throughout the work, we consider ourselves
24 specifically in supporting businesses, entrepreneurs,
25 and to help them to win contracts. And so, in support

2 of Resolution 281, some of the key outcomes that we
3 are currently focusing on is the important step that
4 will address the disparities faced by women business
5 owners, and I respectfully recommend the following
6 specific outcomes.

7 The first deals with creating the right
8 size contracting opportunities for micro businesses
9 and defining micro businesses or scopes under 250,000
10 dollars that will allow them to be able to take
11 advantage of the opportunity to be able to grow and
12 scale.

13 The other thing deals specifically with
14 establishing a standardized post-certification
15 support system. A lot of the work that we are engaged
16 in at the LDC deals just with that, not just the
17 onboarding process, but the post-certification, which
18 provides...

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
20 testimony. Your time has expired.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Thank you so much.

22 ANITA PIERCE: Thank you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON WON: Is there anyone else
24 on Zoom that has not testified that wants to testify?
25

COMMITTEE ON CONTRACTS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY JOINTLY WITH
1 COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS 89

2 Otherwise, we are going to adjourn this
3 hearing, and thank you, everyone, for coming.

4 This hearing is now adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date December 8, 2025