

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH,
DISABILITIES AND ADDICTION

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October 23, 2025
Start: 10:17 a.m.
Recess: 1:08 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway -8th Floor- Hearing
Room 1

B E F O R E: Linda Lee,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Public Advocate Williams
- Shaun Abreu
- Erik D. Bottcher
- Tiffany Cabán
- Eric Dinowitz
- Shahana K. Hanif
- Farah N. Louis
- Christopher Marte
- Darlene Mealy

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

Abby Mayerhoff
Director of Programs, NYC: ATWORK

Emily Sweet
General Counsel, MOPD

Sara Rawshanara
Chief of Staff, MOPD

Rosalie Joseph
Reading testimony of Woody Harrelson

Paul Behrhorst
Consult Ability

James Caurey
Self

Sommer Carbuccia
Self

Rosalind Barbour
New York Shakespeare Festival

Alice Sheppard
Self

Christine Bruno
Self

Gregg Mozgala
Self

James Barniker
Self

Marilee Talkington
Self

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

Elizabeth Hay
Self

Danielle Pretsfelder Demchick
Self

Christopher Leon Johnson
Self

Emam Rimawi-Doster
Self

Anna Pakman
Self

Richie Siegel
Self

Joseph Kibler and Carey Cox
Self

Lawrence Carter-Long
Self

Ashley Eakin
Self

Kiah Amara
Self

David Caparelliotis
Self

Katy Sullivan
Self

Avery Roberts
Self

Samuel Gold
Self

CALL NAMES FOR RECORD

Marisa Jean Giachetti
Gregory Moomjy
Madison Tevlin
Alex Stein

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check for
3 the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and
4 Addiction, recorded on October 23, 2025, located in
5 Hearing Room 1 by Nazly Paytuvi.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning everyone and
7 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
8 the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and
9 Addiction. If you would like to testify, you must
10 fill out a witness slip with one of the Sergeant at
11 Arms even if you signed up online. You can submit
12 testimony at testimony@council.nyc.gov.

13 At this time, please silence all electronic
14 devices. Please silence all electronic devices. No
15 one may approach the dais at any time during this
16 hearing. Chair, we are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, [GAVEL]. Good morning
18 everyone, it's good to see you all. Thanks to those
19 who are on Zoom joining us and thank you to the
20 amazing staff at MOPD for being with us today. We
21 really appreciate you guys being here. My name is
22 Linda Lee, Chair of the city's Committee on Mental
23 Health, Disabilities and Addiction and before we
24 begin, I'd like to recognize we are joined by Council
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2 Members Christopher Marte and Council Member Eric
3 Dinowitz and no one on Zoom, okay.

4 So, today we will discuss the New York City at
5 work program, an employment program that recruits
6 prescreens and connects New Yorkers with disabilities
7 to jobs and internships opportunities with
8 established business partners across the public and
9 private sector, which I'm excited to hear about
10 because I heard it's going well, and we'll also be
11 hearing five pieces of legislation, Introduction 163
12 sponsored by Council Member Dinowitz, which would
13 establish accessibility guidelines for print
14 documents. Introduction 1004 sponsored by Council
15 Member Narcisse, which would require the Mayor's
16 Office for people with disabilities to provide
17 information on wheelchair repair providers and
18 related services.

19 Intro. 1307 sponsored by Council Member Marte,
20 which would establish a film, television, and theater
21 accessibility fund to promote the employment of
22 persons with disabilities.

23 Resolution 338 sponsored by the Public Advocate,
24 which calls on New York City DOE and the State
25 Education department to meet their obligations under

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state and federal law to provide impartial due process in a timely manner as they result to resolving complaints filed by families of students with disabilities. And also, my own Resolution 323, which calls on the MTA and NYCTA to adopt federally recommended measures to ensure that Access A Ride serves New Yorkers on time.

This October, yeah, I love how everyone laughs at that one. Although I did hear a positive story about Access A Ride yesterday from a constituent but yes, uhm, sorry Access A Ride folks. This October, we celebrate the 80th Anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month established by Congress in 1945 to honor the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities and to promote equal opportunities for all.

As we reflect on this important milestone, we also recognize that there is still progress to be made in advancing inclusion, accessibility, and accommodations for our neighbors and community members with disabilities.

Programs like New York City At Work play a vital role in empowering New Yorkers with disabilities to navigate the job market. Through individualized

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career assessments, job readiness training and one on one coaching, New York City at work helps align participants, skills, education and interests with available opportunities. The program also protects participants to internships, vocational training, and credentialling, enhancing their chances of securing meaningful employment. And in 2023, the Council did pass legislation codify New York City At Work requiring Department of Small Business Services, the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to jointly operate and expand the program, further strengthening employment opportunities for participants.

The program has also received widespread recognition for its innovative approach to disability employment. In 2023, New York City at Work was honored with the Zero project award for innovative policies and employment, one of just 66 international awardees in the employment category.

I look forward to learning more about New York City At Work's progress and exploring ways the Council can continue to support and strengthen this vital program.

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In closing, I want to thank the Administration for being here today as well as members of the public for taking the time to testify on this important topic and please give Commissioner Curry my hello and warm welcome. And I forgot to mention, I am an Asian American woman with long brown hair, really big bags under my eyes because I'm very tired and I'm wearing a white jacket and a black dress. And so, I'm very happy to be here with all of you today.

Oh, sorry and I would also like to thank - sorry guys, the Committee Staff who worked to prepare this hearing. Of course we have Sara Sucher, our Senior Legislative Counsel sitting next to me. On the end here, we have Justin Campos, our Policy Analyst, Danylo Orlov, Data Scientist, Amaan Mahadevan, Financial Analyst, and Valeria Lazaro-Rodriguez, Financial Analyst, as well as my own staff on the City Council.

And before I pass the mic to my colleagues, I am going to read a very brief statement on behalf of Council Member Narcisse on her bill because she could not be here today. Uhm, so let me just ahead and read this for the record.

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Thank you Chair Lee and Colleagues. I regret that I cannot be here today but I am truly proud to sponsor this bill alongside my colleagues. As a former nurse and the owner of a small durable medical equipment business. I have seen first-hand how often wheelchairs and other mobility devices fall into disrepair and how quickly that can leave someone stranded, isolated, or even in danger.

A broken wheelchair is an inconvenience that can quickly develop into a crisis that effects every part of daily life for many New Yorkers. Intro. 1004 takes an important step by ensuring that the Mayor's Office for people with disabilities maintain an easy define up to date website listing wheelchair repair providers and related resources that can be accessed across the city.

I believe this will go a long way in helping those in need and I thank the Committee for inventing this bill, and I will now pass the mic to Council Member Dinowitz for a brief statement on his bill.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you Chair Lee. I just - I got a hold of a few documents, some I got in the mail, some I got from different city websites. We have this from the fire department. I don't know

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1 if you can see this because I can barely see it. We
2 have identity theft. Again, very hard to read this.
3 This was a New York City Aging in place pocket guide.
4 Yeah, if you - and if you can't see Chair Lee's face,
5 it's one of I don't know surprise and disgust. She
6 can't see it. And this one, about mental health It's
7 from the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health
8 with low contrast to small font size and serif fonts
9 and today we're hearing a bill that I introduced with
10 Chair Lee, Intro. 163, which attempts to correct some
11 of these deficiencies for people in the disability
12 community accessing these important documents. While
13 often overlooked, print materials, when not visually
14 accessible create barriers to access for those with
15 visual impairments or cognitive disabilities like
16 dyslexia.

17
18 Many city agencies utilize print materials to
19 conduct outreach for programs and services or to
20 communicate safety information but not all of these
21 materials are visually accessible. Now, Intro. 163
22 would establish official accessibility guidelines for
23 print documents in New York City. This includes but
24 is not limited to guidance regarding formatting,
25 visual appearance and read ability. Print documents

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produced by a city agency for public circulation
would be required to adhere to these guidelines to
the extent practicable.

As I mentioned, this bill was inspired by this
mailer I got from the FDNY and it was sent to me and
countless New Yorkers but of course, it lead to
finding all these other documents that are not
visually accessible and this is really troubling
considering that when we talk about some of the - the
Fire Department or MDA and NYPD, this is about our
health and safety.

Text is often printed in sizes and fonts and
impose difficulties to those with visual processing
disorders, infographics rely on color to convey
meaning without accounting for color vision
deficiency and materials printed with low color
contrast, make interpretation near impossible for the
visually impaired. These are just a few examples of
the lack of accessibility in print materials that are
intended for all New Yorkers, which Intro. 163 aims
to address. No person should be unable to fill out
an application or receive crucial safety information
because of a disability or impairment, especially

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when a number of the advertised programs are tailored
to those communities.

It is passed due that we consider the entirety of
our constituencies in the production of public facing
print materials. And I want to once again thank my
friend Chair Lee for her partnership on this bill,
for the opportunity to speak today, and I urge all of
my colleagues to co-sponsor and to support Intro.
163.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great, thank you and now I'd
like to pass on the mic to Council Member Marte for a
brief statement on his bill.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Good morning. First of
all, I'd like to thank Chair Lee for holding this
important hearing. The Committee Staff, Sara and
Justin for their help putting this together and all
the advocates who are here today.

I also want to thank the Mayor's Office for
people with disabilities for joining us today. I'm
really disappointed that the Mayor's Office of media
and entertainment is not here today and you know this
bill mostly addresses their jurisdiction and their
job.

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New York City is the theater capital of the world and has the second largest TV and film industry in the country. And while we should be proud of how these industries have thrived in New York, we must also recognize their failures and these industries have been failing people with disabilities. When 28 percent of people in the US have a disability but less than five percent of the characters on SCRIE and less than one percent of the riders have disabilities. That is a failure.

When 30 percent of actors have to pay for their own accommodation, because productions refuse to make accessible. That's a failure. When disabled crew members are shamed for requesting reasonable accommodation. That is a failure. Time and time again, productions do not consider the needs of people with disabilities when creating a TV show, movie or play.

Making accommodation onset is not hard and on average, it costs one percent of the productions budget. Which is why I introduced Intro. 1307 to create an accessibility fund for film, TV, and theater to cover the cost of making productions

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accessible for actors, directors, writers, crew
members with disabilities.

With this bill, we're incentivizing productions
to do the right thing by allowing them to meet the
accessibility needs of their workers without
impacting their budget. I look forward to working
with my colleagues to pass Intro. 1307 to not just
make New York City a more equitable city but to
increase the accurate representation of people with
disabilities back stage, on stage and on the big
screen. Thank you for being here and thank you again
to the advocates and the 20 plus co-sponsors that we
already have on this bill. Thank you all.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you Council Member. Uhm
and we are going to wait - the Public Advocate is not
here, so we'll whenever he comes, we'll allow him to
speak on his Resolution.

And now I want to turn it over to Committee
Counsel to administer the oath to members of the
Administration.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi everyone, Sara, Committee
Counsel. I am a White woman in her 30's, brown hair
and brown eyes, wearing glasses, a black dress and a
white blazer.

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Now in accordance with the rules of the Council,
I will administer the affirmation to the witnesses
from the Mayoral Administration. Please raise your
right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
testimony before this Committee and to respond
honestly to Council Member questions?

Thank you. Prior to delivering your testimony,
please state your name and title for the record and
also a visual description and then you may begin.

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Good morning, Abby Mayerhoff,
Director of Programs for NYC: ATWORK at the Mayor's
Office for People with Disabilities. I'm a White
woman with straight brown hair, houndstooth jacket
and a black shirt.

Good morning Chair Lee and members of the
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and
Addiction. As I said, I'm Abby Mayerhoff, I serve as
the Director of Programs for NYC: ATWORK at the
Mayor's Office for people with Disabilities, MOPD or
MOPD as our friends call. Joining me are Emily
Sweet, General Counsel at MOPD and Sara Rawshanara,
Chief of Staff at MOPD.

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We appreciate this opportunity to testify about the work our office is doing to connect New Yorkers with disabilities to meaningful employment and to partner with employers across sectors to build a more inclusive workforce. I also want to thank City Council for passing Local Law 11 of 2023, which codified the NYC: ATWORK program.

For more than 50 years, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities has served as the City's liaison to the disability community, advancing equitable access to City programs, services, and opportunities. We collaborate closely with City agencies, the private sector, and community organizations to promote equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

MOPD also represents the City of New York on state, national, and international platforms to advance accessibility and inclusion in policy making and practice. Within that mission, NYC: ATWORK serves as MOPD's signature workforce development program.

Launched in 2017, NYC: ATWORK bridges both sides of the employment equation, connecting qualified jobseekers with disabilities to employers seeking

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2 diverse, capable talent. It's one of the first
3 programs of its kind, and MOPDs across the country
4 have looked to it as a model. We built the program
5 because we saw a gap. Employers wanted to hire
6 inclusively but didn't know how and many jobseekers
7 with disabilities needed access, opportunity, and
8 person centered support to compete in a system that
9 wasn't designed with them in mind. The program was
10 created to address both sides of that challenge,
11 empowering jobseekers while helping employers build
12 confidence and competency in disability inclusion in
13 the workplace.

14 To understand why the work is essential, we can
15 look at the broader landscape. According to the
16 American Community Services data, New York city is
17 home to nearly one million residents with a
18 disability. Just 40 percent of New Yorkers with
19 disabilities of working age are employed, compared to
20 73 percent of the city's overall working age
21 population. And for those who are in the labor
22 force, the unemployment rate is nearly double, 13
23 percent for people with disabilities compared to
24 about 7 percent citywide.

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More than half of working age New Yorkers with disabilities are not in the labor force, while only about one-fifth of the city overall is not. This large number of people with disabilities who are not in the labor force is attributable to many factors including: inaccessible workplaces, limited access to reliable and accessible transportation, attitudinal barriers among employers, and the potential loss of benefits while earning income.

Other space gap in education and training opportunities or have been discouraged by years of navigating the workforce system, not designed with their needs in mind.

These inequities persist not because of a lack of skill or motivation but because there are structural barriers, inaccessible hiring practices and limited awareness of available supports.

NYC responds to these challenges by providing a continuum of individualized services to jobseekers and employers. Our approach addresses both sides of that employment equation. For jobseekers, we offer career advisement, resume and interview preparation, guidance on disclosure and reasonable accommodation, retention services, and support for those applying to

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city government through the 55A program, which allows qualified people with disabilities to be hired into competitive civil service positions without having to take a civil service exam.

We've also expanded our services to include benefits counseling, digital literacy support, and specialized assistance for deaf and hard of hearing jobseekers.

Each jobseeker who comes to us is different. Some have advanced degrees, some are returning to work after long absences, and others are entering the workforce for the first time. Our goal is to meet them where they are and help them develop the confidence - to develop confidence and ensure that they have the tools and support needed to succeed.

On the employer side, we provide recruitment support, pre-screened candidate referrals, and personalized hiring events. We also offer technical assistance, retention assistance and disability etiquette and awareness trainings to help organizations build inclusive work places.

Employer engagement isn't just about filling jobs; it's about creating an inclusive workplace culture. We work with partners across government,

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healthcare, and the arts to train HR teams,
supervisors, and managers on disability etiquette,
reasonable accommodations, and strategies for
retaining talent.

Our Career Services staff is currently embedded
at the Workforce 1 Center in Downtown Brooklyn, where
we engage 60 to 100 jobseekers and constituents each
week both virtually and in person. Our partnership
with small business services and Workforce 1 has
expanded our reach, strengthening coordination within
the city's workforce system and creating more
accessible pathways to employment. We've also helped
Workforce 1 staff become more confident and capable,
engaging jobseekers with disabilities through
training, technical assistance and onsite
collaboration ensuring that accessibility is build
into the city's workforce ecosystem, not added later
on. And this model has produced measurable results.

Our office testified before this Committee in
2022 that the pilot phase of NYC: ATWORK had already
successfully connected nearly 600 New Yorkers with
disabilities through employment. We've advised other
municipalities on how to replicate this model and
further, the program which had been launched as a

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public private partnership is now entirely funded by
the city.

In March 2022, Mayor Adams's Blueprint for
Economic Recovery tasked MOPD and the Office of
Talent and Workforce Development with developing a
comprehensive plan to increase the accessibility of
career training and employment opportunities and that
plan, which was released in July 2023 called for
scaling NYC: ATWORK by embedding our services into
the Department of Small Business Services Workforce
Career Centers, beginning with the hub center in
Downtown Brooklyn.

Despite the success of the model and the strong
interagency support, the team remains small. The
team is six people and resources have not yet matched
the growing demand.

When I became director in spring of 2024, half of
our team was new to MOPD. We reorganized to meet the
changing needs of both employers and jobseekers and
reintroduced in-person direct services for the first
time in 2020, all while integrating into a new
workforce system. This transition brought
challenges, but our team has acclimated successfully

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and continues to deliver results that far exceed what our size might suggest.

Since Fiscal Year 2024, NYC: ATWORK has connected more than 120 New Yorkers with disabilities to employment, cohosted ten hiring events across sectors such as health care, government and the arts. These include collaborations with partners like the Workforce 1 Health Care Career Center, the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services, a citywide diversity career fair with more than a dozen city agencies and a career exploration event with the Frick Collection, which all have directly resulted in hires and new partnerships.

Each of these events not only connect jobseekers to opportunities but change employer mindsets on what inclusive hiring can look like. Through closer coordination with DCAS and our partners, we've improved communication and clarity around the 55A onboarding process and expanded outreach to city agencies. However, approval timelines outside of our control still cause delays.

Together with SBS and their Workforce 1 Career Centers, NYC Talent, DCAS, and other city partners, we are on track to meet the city's goal of connecting

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2,500 New Yorkers with disabilities to employment opportunities by July 2026. While we're proud of this progress, sustaining and expanding it requires addressing several ongoing challenges. Our six person team performs work that would typically require a much larger staff balancing direct services, outreach, employer engagement and technical assistance. And although the 55A process has improved, administrative hurdles and lengthy approvals can still discourage jobseekers and hiring managers. And as our visibility grows, we receive more invitations to community events and job fairs, which is a positive sign for our success but often stretches our staffs capacity.

In addition, many jobseekers require digital literacy training or mental health support as they rebuild confidence and skills to reenter the workforce. These are not small needs; they're realities of creating an inclusive economy.

Looking ahead, NYC: ATWORK is focusing on building on this strong foundation to leverage success at the Brooklyn Workforce 1 Center. We'd like to have a presence at additional Workforce 1 centers, strengthen digital literacy and benefits

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counseling, particularly for deaf and hard of hearing
jobseekers and continuing partnering with DCAS to
modernize and expand the 55A program so that the city
government can remain a leader in inclusive hiring.
We also aim to increase sector based employer
engagement, provide ongoing technical assistance and
training, and work with agencies and community based
organizations to embed accessibility at every stage
of workforce development.

NYC: ATWORK demonstrates that when people with
disabilities have equitable access to opportunity,
they don't just find jobs, they build careers,
strengthen communities and contribute to New Yorks
City's economy. With continued partnership and
investment, we can scale what works and make
inclusive hiring the standard across our city.
Before turning to the legislative items on today's
agenda, I'll pass to my colleague Emily Sweet.
Thanks.

EMILY SWEET: Good morning Chair Lee and members
of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and
Addictions. My name is Emily Sweet. I'm a White
woman in her 50's with dark, shortish hair, a beige
jacket and a cream and black stripped shirt. I serve

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as General Counsel at the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. Regarding Introduction 163, thank you Council Member Dinowitz for introductions this bill. This bill as you said, would require the Mayor, a mayor's designee to establish accessibility guidelines for print documents. MOPD supports this bill which we believe would further inclusion for people with disabilities. However, we do suggest some minor changes just to the language of the bill. Specifically, we recommend the bill specify that applies to print documents, whether they are disseminated in hard copy or electronically with the intent that they be printed by someone else, right? And we also recommend that the effective date be 180 days after the bill is enacted, just to give city agencies sufficient time to comply.

Moving on to Introduction 1004, which would require MOPD to publish a list of wheelchair repair providers in New York City, we definitely support the goal of this bill, which is to make information about available options for wheelchair repair more readily available. However, at this time, we don't know what compliance with the bill would entail. We have begun some conversations with the State Department of

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Health to determine what lists of wheelchair repair providers they can pull, including from past Medicaid claims, but we understand there's a lot of nuances and complications there. So, with gratitude to this Committee for their effort to address and issue related to wheelchair repair in New York city, we do respectfully request that consideration of the bill be paused while we continue our conversations with the state.

Thank you so much for allowing us to testify before you today and we as a team would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much and we have been joined by our Public Advocate, so just wanted to say hello and also allow you time to make a statement.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so much Madam Chair for giving me the opportunity. Good morning. My name is Jumaane Williams. I'm the Public Advocate of the City of New York.

Again, thank you Chair Lee and the members of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction for holding this hearing today. Thank you Admin for being here as well. In New York City, over

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200,000 students are eligible for special education services. A population larger than most school districts around the country. The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, protects students with disabilities and ensure their right to a free and appropriate education.

If a parent or a guardian feels that they their child is not receiving an education, they are legally entitled to a due process hearing.

Reasons to request a hearing can include a child not receiving the services and supports required by the IEP, disagreeing with the schools ruling that a child is not eligible for special education or NYCPS is refusing to fund a requested independent educational evaluation.

At these hearings, both the parents and NYCPS can make opening and closing statements, present evidence and examine witnesses before an impartial hearing officer from Oath. The impartial hearing officer will then decide what remedies are appropriate.

Complaints that students with disabilities are not receiving their education to which they are entitled or required to be addressed within 75 days, starting on the day the parent files the complaint

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but New York City parents and guardians can't wait much longer. An average of eight and a half months according to a 2020 class action lawsuit. During this time, students may be deprived the support to services they need to attend schools, families may be paying out of pocket for services NYCPS should be providing, creating both financial and emotional burdens. Early this year, a judge settled the class action lawsuit brought against both NYCPS and the New York State Department of Education, requiring them to improve their hearing systems and to provide special protections for certain students whose hearing decisions are overdue, including immediate evaluations for some special services and make up services for children whose complaints were decided late.

Today, we are hearing Resolution 338, of which I am the prime sponsor, which calls on the NYCPS and the New York State DOE to meet their obligation on the state and federal law to provide these impartial due process hearings in a timely manner. All students, regardless of their disability status should have access to a barrier free education and the city and state must meet their legal mandates to

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support their students with disabilities. We must ensure that every student receives the support they need to succeed in school.

I'd like to express my support for Intro. 1307 sponsored by Council Member Marte, which would create a film, television and theater accessibility fund administered by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, MOME and award grants to film television and theater productions that commit to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities. MOME would provide support and resources to productions as well as collect and analyze data on disability appointment industry and post information about the funding on the website.

Representation of Disability Matters, that includes both those on screen and on stage as well as behind the scenes and with that I'll pass back and say thank you so much again.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much Public Advocate. Uhm, okay so I'm just going to dive into a few question and then we'll do a little bit of back and forth because I know my colleagues also have places they need to be. So, I'll just go really quickly into this.

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Uhm, I actually just wanted to start off with the budget. So, I don't know how many of you guys are aware that the New York City budget is about \$114-\$115 billion, \$116 billion with a B dollars and I remember talking to Commissioner Curry at MOPD because when I first started on the Council, I think their budget was maybe \$800 something thousand out of \$116 billion and it was cut in half actually. The previous year or two years ago. So, now the MOPD budget stands at about \$400 something thousand if I'm not mistaking or maybe it increased or there were increases there but I say all this to say that I am a huge advocate for you all receiving a much higher budget. I think we need to make sure that the Mayor does put more funding into MOPD and maybe you guys can't say it but I could say it, uhm he needs to put more money into the budget because there's no way that you guys can continue to serve all of the New Yorkers with disabilities on the shoestring budget that you have and you need more staffing, as clearly you mentioned in your testimony.

So, I just wanted to say that for the record because there are about one million people with disabilities in New York and we need to make sure

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1 that we're meeting them where they are and that they
2 have the resources that they need to receive the
3 services that they should have access to like
4 everybody else. So, I just wanted to say that at
5 first and thank you all for the work that you do
6 because I know it's not easy.
7

8 So, with that though, I had a few questions
9 around the ATWORK, NYC: ATWORK program. If you
10 could just go through really briefly uhm the
11 eligibility requirements as well as the process for
12 enrolling in the program, and also how to ensure that
13 the you know application process is accessible.

14 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure, so we primarily focus on
15 working with individuals who are job ready. Those
16 are individuals with a documented disability. They
17 must be New York City residents. They must be
18 eligible to work in the United States. They - we
19 expect that jobseekers come to us with an
20 understanding of the kind of work they are looking
21 for and uhm eligible for. Uh they uhm must have a
22 resume that they can edit themselves with or without
23 additional assistance and to be able to perform an
24 independent job search, again with or without
25 additional assistance and uhm, have a basic

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understanding of what the job market is like and how that matches with the kind of work that they're looking for.

Individuals are referred to us in a number of ways. Uhm, generally speaking they will either come to us looking for a broad amount of support and guidance in their job search. Generally, not connected to other services or looking for something more substantial. Additionally, people may come to us because of a specific position that we have available through one of our employer partners. Those are often referred to us by other providers or the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency but again, either way it could be both.

Candidates who are being referred for specific positions will be considered whether they are a match for the position and if their materials demonstrate that and if that's the case, then they'll be referred to the employer. If somebody is looking for us for more general ongoing support, uhm they will likely be placed on a waitlist because of our staff capacity. Uhm, and that can be for a period of time until we're able to take them on to consider their candidacy. We have an online job board, which is most of the way

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that people come to us but we accept referrals by email and at the Workforce 1 center, we also have walk in or roll in meeting and instructions.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome, you basically just answered like my next two or three questions. So, it's perfect. I know that you said that the waitlist can sometimes be substantial but do you know what the average time is for folks on the waitlist?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Generally, six to eight weeks. Uhm, we work really hard not to have it extend past eight weeks.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: That's actually not bad considering that applying for jobs in general at least at the city, it takes quite a while, so that's actually - that's actually pretty good. Oh, and we've been joined by Council Member Abreu.

Uhm and then in terms of the partner organizations that you work with to place folks in employment, could you go through the types of organizations? How many organizations and what sectors that includes? I know you touched upon it but I wanted to -

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure. Uhm, one of our lead employer partners or sectors is the City of New York.

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We work with a wide variety of agencies and a wide variety of opportunities connecting individuals to both competitive and noncompetitive roles and that certainly is a broad range of types of roles.

We work with employers in the arts, in Health and Human Services. Uhm tech and we respond to outreach when employers want to work with us, we want to work with them regardless of falling within a specific sector.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and the reason why I ask is because I know that uh, because I come from more of the nonprofit sector background and so, I know that a lot of them would also benefit from having the connections with this program to their employment opportunities. And so, just wanting to know how many, approximately how many nonprofit groups you partner with? Are there certain umbrella organizations that you work with as well in the community?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Do you mean uhm, as employer partners or just general partnerships?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: General - yeah, just general partnerships, yes.

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ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure, absolutely. Uhm, we work with some of the state entities Access VR, which is the state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency. We work with the New York State Commissioner for the blind. The New York State Workers Compensation Board and we work with 30- 60 or so I think nonprofit partners across the city, some of which are organizations that work specifically with individuals with disabilities. Some that are specifically workforce development. We work with a lot of educational institutions as well from the high school level through college.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: That's good to know. And we've been joined by Council Member Cabán. And I know that you spoke in your testimony briefly also about and we all know that there is interesting nuances and complications with the city versus state legislation and laws right and who has oversight over what. And so, I know that you had mentioned uhm that the approval times are outside of your control and still create delays. So, I just wanted to know more specifically if you could give an example?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure. So, the 55A program is a part of New York State Civil Service law that allows

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qualified New Yorkers with disabilities to be onboarded for competitive positions without taking a civil service exam, and it's real beneficial both to agencies and to jobseekers. There is an approval process for each application that requires coordination between the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the hiring agency, state - at least one state entity and that coordination can take a long time. Our office is helping to facilitate that communication so that it can move a little bit more quickly. That happens simultaneously with approval for that persons onboarding. It can happen simultaneously, sometimes it does not. And so that can result in somebody who may be have 55 A approval but not be clear to start their job or vice versa and most agencies would prefer for both of those pieces to be approved together from my understanding so that uhm, onboarded employees have the most job protection as possible when they're starting.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and is that wait time usually longer for those that are trying to get onboarded through the 55A program?

2 ABBY MAYERHOFF: From my understanding, it can be
3 but I don't know exactly.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Uhm and I know that the
5 staffing and going back to the budget for a second.
6 I know that the staffing has been challenging because
7 you are a team of six as you said. Uhm, so ideally
8 speaking to meet the number of folks that are either
9 on the waitlist or interest in the program as well as
10 folks to be able to go into the community and do
11 outreach. How many staffing would you say is
12 necessary and the budget amount, if you could put a
13 ballpark figure?

14 ABBY MAYERHOFF: I would defer to my colleague
15 Sara regarding the budget or we'd need to look into
16 that but I think a number of staff - ideally at least
17 another five to seven people would be I think
18 appropriate.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and that would be enough
20 to support the current waitlist as well as to do more
21 outreach and then absorb more applications, correct?

22 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes and I also think that a
23 piece of it is expanding our business outreach and
24 development because we can bring in more - we can
25 increase the capacity of the career services team to

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bring on an advised jobseekers but without that
working in coordination with expanded business
development, we wouldn't have more job opportunities
to be able to connect people to.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, perfect. Uhm, I'm going
to pause for a second because I do want my colleagues
to ask questions on their bills and then I'll come
back and circle with more questions.

And so, I'm going first toss it over to Council
Member Dinowitz to ask questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you Madam Chair.
I just want to start by saying first, I 100 percent
agree that your staff should be bigger and your
budget should be bigger. I mean, it's almost
astounding the amount of work you do and the
importance of your work as well with six people. I
think my staff is bigger than six people. That's
amazing and I mean the importance of your work, I
think we all know I'd like to share for the
nondisabled community that your work and the work for
the disabled community often pays dividends to people
who don't consider themselves as having a disability,
whether it's like when I had my twin boys and I was
lugging around a giant stroller, I was very grateful

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1
2 for all the years of work people in the community did
3 to get ramps throughout my community, right and
4 that's just one little element. You know the
5 elevators and train stations and those are just for
6 visible disabilities. But today, you know I'm here
7 to talk about my bill 163 and I want to thank you for
8 your recommendations.

9 To clarify, yes, the point is even PDF's that are
10 online that are meant to be printed out are to be
11 considered and in fact many of the documents that I
12 showed uhm during my introduction were printed out
13 but importantly, I appreciate the recommendation
14 because those are the documents that our offices
15 print out or that we are pointed to when agencies
16 direct us somewhere and we print them out for our
17 constituents. And as I mentioned things like the
18 font sizes, the serif's, the contrast, the color
19 contrast in many cases are not accessible, but you
20 are the experts in this and I'm wondering what steps
21 your agency currently takes to make print accessible
22 to people with disabilities throughout not just your
23 agency but with other agencies.

24 EMILY STREET: So, as you know this Committee
25 championed the Council enacted local law 12 of 2023,

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1 which we greatly appreciate, which required every
2 agency to develop a five year accessibility plan.
3 So, MOPD has been working very hard with city
4 agencies and those plans address all elements of
5 accessibility. So, we have provided trainings about
6 it's usually in the context of when we do trainings
7 on digital accessibility. We do uhm, there are some
8 aspects of where we do provide guidance on print
9 documents and we have an accessible events guide and
10 in there is information about print documents as
11 well. So, it's incorporated in a lot of our guidance
12 but it would certainly be helpful to have actual you
13 know the official city standard that's backed up by a
14 local law would be helpful, as was the local law 12,
15 which was extremely helpful.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, there's a
18 difference between best practice and then you know a
19 requirement for agencies to do best practices. Uhm,
20 what a kind chair and just in terms of this training,
21 is this every city agency that is trained and they're
22 required to trained or are there still agencies or
23 members of agencies that have not undergone this
24 training?

25

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EMILY SWEET: I would have to get back to you on that. Uhm, I mean we definitely have offered the training to all city agencies. Uhm, I would have to get back to you on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes and just again, that distinction between creating the availability of something and then the requirement that it be done. I mean, it's wonderful that you do that work. It's wonderful that that law has been passed but it needs to help a lot more people and the way to do that is to make sure the agencies are required - more importantly that there are these codified best practices that agencies are required to comply by. And just lastly, is there any other feedback that you've received from community members with disabilities about the accessibility or usefulness of printed materials?

EMILY SWEET: Off the top of my head, uhm, I can't think of any. So, it's not an issue that we hear about a lot but it doesn't surprise me.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, it's an issue I hear about a lot but again, your work pays dividends to other communities and I would just add, I often hear about it from older adults who throughout their

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entire lives have not had a disability and then suddenly they engage, they have visual impairment and suddenly they realize man, like I wish these laws were in place. I wish your budget were larger so that you could have engaged in more of those work because that's a reality of having a disability or not currently having a disability. You don't know when you're going to have at any point in your life a disability, so we should really always be preparing for that to make sure we're engaging every member of our community now to make sure we don't have to worry about it in the future.

Madam Chair, MOPD, thank you so much for your time and thank you for your support of this legislation.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. Uhm, actually, so we had an intern from Visions join our team a couple years ago and one of the things that I learned also and I think this is why it's so great to have interns as well as staff who have disabilities is because we learned or I learned that you know when you're posting a social media post online, whether you do it as a jpeg versus a pdf makes a huge difference for someone who's blind. And so, things

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1 like that - little things like that really make a big
2 difference and matter in terms of making sure that
3 everything is becoming accessible. So, I really, you
4 know wanted to thank you for this bill Chair - I mean
5 Chair - Council Member Dinowitz.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'm Chair of something.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: You're Chair of something, yes.
9 And I want to recognize we've been joined by Council
10 Member Louis as well as Council Member Hanif.

11 Uhm, okay and let me just turn over really
12 quickly - are you - okay, to Council Member Marte to
13 ask questions and then I'll circle back at the end.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you Chair. I also,
15 I forgot to say this in my opening but I'm a Brown
16 man with a navy suit, brown curly hair and wearing a
17 white shirt and a blue tie.

18 Just a few quick questions. Does your office
19 support the goals of my bill Intro. 1307, which will
20 establish a film, television and theater
21 accessibility fund to promote inclusionary hiring?

22 EMILY SWEET: We certainly support the goal of
23 promoting inclusive hiring in any industry but defer
24 to MOME on the details of that bill.
25

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COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: And from your personal experience, have you worked with MOME in this industry specifically to promote or work with private partners to help facilitate the hiring of people with disabilities?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: We have not partnered with MOME.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Have you partnered with other agencies in a similar manner for potentially like a similar agency? It doesn't have to be production and how do you work with other agencies to make that happen?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: So, Council Member, I'm hoping I'm understanding your question correctly. There are some agencies who I think is a result of the five year accessibility plan and the increased hiring of individuals with disabilities across the city have realized the benefit of extending this idea or inclusivity and accessibility in all of their programs as well. So, there are uhm I can think of at least two agencies off hand that have reached out to us to help them ensure that their workforce development programs are more - and other partnerships are more accessible and inclusive. Uhm, we work with many agencies and units to partner with

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for helping them fulfill their hiring needs. Uhm,
and that you know the type of partnership and the
type of roles you know really vary depending on the
agency.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Okay, no I thank you for
being here. I'm disappointment that MOME is not here
and MOME hasn't reached out specifically to this
topic. It's really concerning and it's something
that we'll follow up after this hearing with them to
make sure that they proactively start doing this and
hopefully we could get this bill to move forward.
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay great, thank you. We've
also been joined by Council Member Bottcher. And
just shifting back over to the ATWORK program
because one of the things that I remember we looked
at was - well, actually before I go into that
question. Can you describe the disability etiquette
and awareness training offered to local businesses
and government agencies?

EMILY SWEET: Absolutely, the disability etiquette
and awareness training is run by the NYC WORK team
and includes members of our office who have a lived
experience with disability. They provide about an

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hour to an hour of a half of training that gives an overview of and understanding of disability, some of the history of disability rights. They also review some specific disabilities and what they may mean in terms of accommodations or how to interact with those individuals. It's a really uhm, safe space. The intention is to create a baseline of understanding and ensure that there's a place to ask questions regardless of what they are.

Uhm, we've also started to tailor them depending on the audience or the intention of the training. So, for example, we always offer that in advance of a hiring event and we've incorporated some very specific uhm like interaction examples to play out how in a setting of like a job fair, that individual with a disability would you know - if something happens, then how that person can handle it and feel comfortable and confident. You know like the example that I use is that you know individuals with limited dexterity drops a bunch of papers in front of you, what do you do? Do you stare at them? Do you turn away? Do you help them out? Do you offer to help them out and helping the audience kind of understand in the moment what the most appropriate way to

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respond is and then we often follow those up with more specific trainings or technical assistance.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay no, and that's a very good example of what would or could happen and how to handle it so thank you.

And do - does the program conduct follow ups with participants after they've secured employment and for how long because I know at my former nonprofit when we had workforce training programs, once they secured a job, we followed with them maybe six months, one year, two years out even after they received employment so just wanted to know if you could speak to that.

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure. So, we provide retention, support and services for about a year following employment. Uhm, depending on the individual, that may fluctuate a little bit but our standard is for one year and if somebody after that point is looking for employment again, we would reconsider enrollment as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, thank you. And then are there barriers that you've identified that prevent participants from securing or keeping jobs? And so,

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when you go through that process, what are like the
top few reasons that you've seen?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: That's a good question. Uhm, I
think sometimes there are reasons why it may not work
out because it's ultimately not the right job match
and that's true for an individual with or without a
disability. Uhm, sometimes a person may have
something related to their disability that causes
them to resign. Sometimes there have been situations
where an individual has the hard skills and
competencies to succeed in the job but the office
culture or environment is not a good fit or they may
struggle with the kind of soft skills and kind of
like underlying components of a workplace, culture.
That's not uncommon among individuals who are
neurodiverse.

Uhm, sometimes it's that the skills required for
the job ultimately is something that the individual
doesn't have and is not able to be trained on.
Although in all of those examples, we - when either
an employer or the jobseeker or both will reach out
to us, we'll work with them to try to do what we can
to advise them and address whatever that challenge
may be.

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CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay yeah, that was actually going to be my next follow up question. So, if it's not something that is - if it's something that has to do with the organization itself and the culture of the organization and that feedback comes back to you then at that point, would you do another training or what are the steps that you would take after that?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: It may warrant a broader training. It could be something that's more one on one technical assistance with that employer. So, working with them to make environmental changes. It may be working with the individual so that they can navigate the existing culture or environment. It may be assisting that job seeker with requesting a reasonable accommodation that will make the workplace more appropriate for them. We work closely with Access VR because they have a little bit more capacity to handle some of those challenges from a resource perspective, and so that's a piece of it too.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and uhm once participants are enrolled at the ATWORK program, they conduct their own job searches with support from relationship

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managers and so, can you describe the role of the
managers and how they assist participants?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure, so the career advisors
will help the candidates identify positions that they
are fit for. If the person refers themselves for a
position that we're recruiting for at a given time,
they'll make sure that that person is actually a fit
for the position. They'll collaborate on application
materials. The career advisors will uhm share
opportunities for workshops or trainings that are
part of our office or partners that they think would
be appropriate for that individual. They provide a
lot of support and guidance when it comes to
preparing for an interview, navigating an offer,
navigating onboarding and as I mentioned, retention.
Uhm, some of that may include reasonable
accommodation and disclosure. Some of that may
include a 55A application. Uhm, and then all of the
weird and surprising things that come up as part of a
job search uhm they're available to at least hear out
and try to provide direction on. They are also -
provide guidance on what happens if the individual is
receiving benefits and what will happen to those
benefits when they start working.

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CHAIRPERSON LEE: Sorry, that's good. So, there is some case management built into that?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes, I mean I think that the real intention and role of the career advisors is to be - provide guidance and support but there are certainly needs that may come up where either we will try to address that or connect that person with a more appropriate resource to address that.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Uhm and I know that you know you partner with a bunch of city agencies and nonprofit organizations as well as for profit and so just wondering how you are increasing the visibility and awareness, given the budget constraints that you all have and so, do you all ask them if they have events to blast out your information or how does that - how have you guys approached it?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Uhm, we try to say yes to everything. Uhm, we go to a lot of community engagement events, job fairs, resource fairs and not only provide resources to attendees but also take time to meet with other attendees. Uhm, we do ask for introductions through our partners, if there's other organizations that they want us to be introduced to. We often have multiple team members

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at multiple events at the same time. Those are usually the only times that we say no is when we're all somewhere else already.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it and then how do you collect a news participant feedback to improve the program? Is there like a review usually once they finished?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: So sure, generally after somebody starts work, there's some ongoing - there's kind of more uhm qualitative communication between the relationship, manager and the jobseeker. If somebody decides not to continue to participate in the program, you know if they're willing to speak with us about why that may be. That's helpful feedback. We have uhm a survey process that we utilize as part of our recruitment events because that is the way we find that we're able to get the most consistent and reliable feedback. Because as soon as people leave an event, they're willing to share that and that feedback is for both employer partners and jobseekers and it's understanding the general event experience but also for both did they feel prepared for the event? Did they feel like the jobs they were being recommended to apply for,

2 interview for were fit for their skills and goals and
3 things like that and then asking the same similar
4 questions to employers too.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: That's good and then also, what
6 data metrics or other measures are used to evaluate
7 the effectiveness of the program and its
8 implementation? And does the program collect data on
9 job retention long term? Which I think you touched
10 upon before and if so, can you share the most recent
11 data available?

12 ABBY MAYERHOFF: So, our program in its pilot
13 phase was using a database that was pretty
14 rudimentary developed by the Mayor's Office of
15 Operations at a time when our program is in its pilot
16 phase and we didn't necessarily know exactly the kind
17 of information we were going to each collect. Uhm,
18 earlier this year, our team transitioned over to
19 utilizing the Work Source 1 database that SBS
20 manages. So, we're still figuring out the best ways
21 to uhm, analyze some of that more long term data.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Did you say Work Source or
23 Workforce 1?

24 ABBY MAYERHOFF: It's Work Source 1 is the name
25 of the database.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, Work Source 1 okay. I just
3 wanted to make sure.

4 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Who is by the Workforce 1.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right, okay.

6 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes, I think it's their little
7 play on words.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and the Work Source 1
9 collects what type of metrics usually?

10 ABBY MAYERHOFF: I don't know off hand, I'd have
11 to look into it.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, yeah if you can let us
13 know that would be great. Uhm, okay I'm going to
14 pause there for a sec and have my colleagues ask
15 questions. So, Council Member Hanif.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you and good
17 morning. I'd like to first just thank you all for
18 the work that you're doing, especially at a time when
19 people, New Yorkers with disabilities are being
20 targeted by our federal administration and I know
21 that you all are a small but mighty team and I thank
22 you for that.

23 So, I'd like to know since the program's
24 inception, how many total individuals have been hired
25

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to full time positions and part time, paid
internships or apprenticeships?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: The vast majority of the job
seekers who we've connected to employment have been
connected to full time employment.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Do you mind bringing the
mic a little closer?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Most people come to us are
looking for full time employment and we prioritize
employer partnerships where the employers are
generally looking for to fill fulltime roles.

We do have a number of opportunities for
internships to be able to connect people to
opportunities to build more skills and experiences to
be able to be better qualified for full time
positions as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What's like the number or
range?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Uhm, so since 2023 to present,
we've connected about 120 people to employment and I
would say about 80 percent is full time.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And is that a goal that
you are trying to achieve or is that like can you

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share like if 100 or so folks being connected to
jobs, full time jobs?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes because that's reflective of
the need of the community. People are coming to us
because they are looking for full time work and they
need full time work. Most people who are looking for
employment are not receiving SSI or SSDI benefits, so
their income is very, very limited. And so, and
people want to work. All the reason why everybody
wants and needs employment, the same is true for
individuals with disabilities. So, the vast majority
are looking for full time employment so it's
incumbent on us to meet that need.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then what's the
current average starting salary for ATWORK
participants to get hired to full time positions?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: I think - so I think the median
salary is probably around \$50,000 but we've had
individuals who are connected to positions that are
significantly higher than that. We won't refer
people to employment that is below minimum wage.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And what are some of the
sectors folks are being hired for?

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ABBY MAYERHOFF: Everything. Arts and culture,
uh IT, uhm city government and all the things that
happen in city government. Uhm Health and Human
Services, health care, those are probably the primary
ones.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And this is by the
interest of the participants?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes, we try to find - uh, we
work with employers to understand what their hiring
needs are and those are the kinds of opportunities
that we try to promote to our jobseekers. Uhm and
uhm our jobseekers - you know we try to find matches
within that. You know sometimes individuals may come
to us who are looking for some specific kinds of
roles that we just have not necessarily seen a lot of
opportunities for and in that case, we would either
work with them to find something that is similar
within kind of the scope of our partnerships or
connect them to other organizations or programs that
are working in other areas. That's one of the things
that's been a real benefit of our partnership with
Workforce 1. They work in a lot of different sectors
then we do and so, it's a really great way to find a

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balance of the opportunities that they have and the
jobseekers that we do.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then are you seeing
any trends of there not being employment available or
a difficult time to get someone employed because of
the employment status and would love to know the
durations it takes for a participant to get
partnered.

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Sure, so I can answer the first
question first. It's a little challenging to measure
how long somebody is participating in the program
because there's a lot of reasons why that length of
time varies. Individuals may no longer maintain
engagement with our program and always let us know
that they are disconnecting and that may be because
of something personally, health, disability related.
They may find other employment or they may be working
with other providers and not necessarily notifying us
and the kinds of jobs that people are looking for and
the availability of those jobs may you know
definitely vary quite a bit and the kind of uhm, the
volume and scope of services that an individual needs
varies considerably and so all of those factors come
into play.

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Uhm, generally speaking and especially in the last few years as the job market has been becoming increasingly more challenging, there is a little bit of a mismatch of there being higher skilled opportunities available and individuals who would benefit from skills training or upscaling to be able to better qualify for those positions and so, that could be a challenge.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it and how are you all responding to jobs going robotic?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: That's a really good question. Generally speaking, you know we want to be able to consider ways of finding upscaling and transitional opportunities so that individuals can be better qualified for the changing job market.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And are you all sort of planning for that or is that just something that's out there?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: We're aware that it is happening and figuring out what the most appropriate ways to respond will be.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, looking forward more information on that and I'd like to know if

2 participants report back to MOPD or after they get
3 the job they're independent MOPD.

4 ABBY MAYERHOFF: We love to find out when people
5 get hired both because it helps us be able to share
6 successes about the program but it's also real
7 exciting for the career advisor when we hear someone
8 just got a job offer.

9 We provide retention support for a year after
10 somebody starts and that can fluctuate. Sometimes
11 people come back to us because they're looking for
12 another job because they're not staying. It could be
13 because they're looking to move up in their career,
14 so uhm, you know when those situations come up, we
15 try to do our best to help that person navigate that
16 next step and that's always real exciting.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But there's like a
18 mandated like every quarter needing to report
19 something or evaluate or -

20 ABBY MAYERHOFF: In that year period, we try to
21 check in at the beginning, once a week, then to about
22 once a month and then quarterly through the end of
23 that year but we don't - we require that they submit
24 proof of employment when they start but we don't

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require them to continue to submit pay stubs or any
other sort of documentation later on.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it, thank you. And
final question, can you share how immigrants with
disabilities are impacted right now in the job market
and just again because of the federal targeting?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: That's a really good question.
Uhm, we have definitely been approached by other city
entities as well as individuals who have been
impacted by that. Unless someone is authorized to
work in the United States, our program can't
necessarily assist that person outright with finding
employment but we've done our best to provide those
individuals with direction and guidance and resources
to other entities that can do that, as well as
supporting those entities to navigate the disability,
if they need that and then similarly with any other
partners to navigate that as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And are immigrants
participating or applying for the program?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: I don't know peoples - we don't
collect information on immigration status, so really
couldn't say.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. Okay back to you
Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you and next we have
Council Member Bottcher.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you Chair and I
also want to thank you for your good work in your
office. You testified that your team is small and
that the team of six people and the resources you
have have not yet matched the growing demand. How
big should your team be? What level of resources
would meet the growing demand, particularly with the
employment efforts for people with disabilities and
have you requested those resources in the budget?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes. When Chairperson Lee asked
that question, I said five but I was thinking about
it - I think it's more like ten to twelve. Uhm, yeah
maybe fifteen. Right now, there are three
individuals who -

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: I knew she would be
ahead of me on that one.

ABBY MAYERHOFF: I have a team that provides
direct services out of the Workforce 1 in downtown
Brooklyn and there are three people that there's
specific role. If we were going to be able to expand

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that presence across the hubs in the five boroughs,
uhm, at least two people in each of the hubs and as I
mentioned, we also would need additional support for
a business development in the public and private
sector so that it's not just about bringing people
into the program and enrolling them but we also need
to be able to the jobs coming in to match that demand
as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: You testified that the
program began as a public private partnership and now
it's being entirely funded by the city. Why not
pursue additional private industry support for
helping folks with disabilities get employment?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Uhm, when we were a public
private partnership, the public part of that
partnership was actually the state. Just to clarify,
uhm and for us it was really important that the city
provide support for New Yorkers with disabilities.
Not something that we're really proud of. Uhm, we
are considering private funding to support the
program and to help us with that expansion. Over the
last 18 months or so, we've been undergoing some
pretty significant transitions as part of moving into
the Workforce 1 system, adapting to that system.

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Uhm, and so, you know at that time it wasn't appropriate for us to be pursuing that but it is something that we would like to be able to do and have started to begin some of those communications.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: That's great and I think it's entirely appropriate and good that the city has stepped up to fund this program. We should never be relying on the private sector to what government should be doing.

At the same time, we're in the wealthiest city and the wealthiest country on earth and we have so many companies in New York with so much resources. They should be invested in this and they should be contributing to this to make sure that we have the headcount on your team to get jobs for people with disabilities.

Have the hiring freezes at the city level - have they stymied your efforts to get folks with disabilities in the workforce?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: they basically just put a freeze on everything, right?

ABBY MAYERHOFF: We are seeing - uh there was a period of time when there was a hiring freeze across

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1 most of the city. At that time, there were some
2 agencies that were exempt from that. For example, we
3 worked really closely with the Department of Health
4 and Mental Hygiene at that time and we partnered with
5 them to have a recruitment specifically for that
6 agency to be able to bring on people who were exempt
7 from that freeze and that - I think that was in the
8 end of 2023 and I think we had about 15 people who
9 were hired through that, about maybe between 10 and
10 15.
11

12 Uhm, as the hiring freezes have changed, we have
13 been able to expand our partnerships with other
14 agencies.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Are there any agencies
16 that have really stood out as really shiny examples
17 when it comes to hiring people with disabilities?

18 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Yes, although uhm, I'll clarify
19 that there's not a fully comprehensive understanding
20 of how many individuals of disabilities are working
21 with - at every agency because that's not data that's
22 collected or shared. But in terms of our
23 partnerships, uhm, DOHMH has been a fantastic
24 partner. The Department of Citywide Administrative
25 Services has been known especially notable partner.

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2 I'm sure I'm forgetting a few that have been really
3 great and I would feel badly missing them but I would
4 say -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Those two had gold
6 stars.

7 ABBY MAYERHOFF: I would say those are the two
8 most recent and in long term, HRA also has hired a
9 high number of individuals with the 55A program.
10 They also work really closely with our shared partner
11 with Good Temps, which brings in people in temp
12 positions and we've been partnering with them to help
13 individuals develop more experience so that they're
14 better qualified for permanent city positions.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Any agencies whose name
16 should go on the board for not doing a great job?

17 ABBY MAYERHOFF: Probably.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Alright.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And she's going to leave it at
20 that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And thank you Council Member
23 Bottcher. You're going to find us at Corporate
24 funding, right? Get us that money.

25 ABBY MAYERHOFF: You let me know.

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CHAIRPERSON LEE: Uhm, okay, so I think actually we are good with the questions and we are going to move into the public testimony section but I would love to encourage you all; I know everyone is busy but if folks from MOPD could stay and hear the feedback from the public, that would be really awesome. And so, we're just going to really quickly into public testimony. Thank you so much.

Okay, so while we're getting situated. I just wanted to read a few ground rules for today. So, now I'm opening up the hearing for public testimony. I want to remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times.

As such, members of the public shall remain silent. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please make sure you fill out the appearance card in the back with the Sergeant at Arms

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and wait to be recognized. And when recognized, you will have three minutes to speak on today's oversight topic and legislation.

If you have a written statement or additional written statement, testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. And I have to say, our staff on the Council really do - trust me when I say they read every single word of your testimonies and actually take that into consideration when thinking through how to improve some of these bills and pieces of legislation. So, they really work hard and just want to commend them on that, so make sure you submit it.

So, the first panel in person, feel free to come up. We have Rosalie Joseph, Paul Behrhorst, James Caurey and Sommer Cabuccia. And you guys can go in any order you want. You can start from this side if you want, so go ahead and then make sure the mic is on. Thank you.

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ROSALIE JOSEPH: Hello, my name is Rosalie Joseph
and I'm reading testimony from Actor Producer Woody
Harrelson.

I'm going to take a moment to share my
experiences working on the Film Champions, a project
that has profoundly impacted my life and perspective.
For those who may not be familiar with Champions, it
features a cast entirely of actors with disabilities.
Collaborating with this incredible group was truly
one of the highlights of my career. Alongside our
Director Bobby Farrelly, I felt the experience was
nothing short of magical. Working on this film led
me to a significant change in my perspective.
Initially I perched the project with some trepidation
but it quickly developed a deep appreciation for the
talent, humanity and spirit of my fellow cast
members.

The performance of my costars were not refreshing
but also deeply honest. I learned so much from them,
their talent and authenticity taught me more than I
could ever in part. Together, we hope this film will
inspire others to create more roles for actors with
disabilities and to provide opportunities behind the
camera as well.

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Also, that the film will encourage individuals with disabilities to pursue their dreams of being in the film industry. Now, the budget of Champions had to account for the unique needs of the disability community, which can often make it challenging for filmmakers to consider additional line items for access, coordinators, or accommodations.

This reality contributes to the unfortunate scarcity of both actors and crew members with disabilities in the industry. From my experience on Champions, it is clear that the film industry is missing out on a wealth of talent, creativity and experience that would enrich our stories.

I firmly believe that working on the set should be accessible to all qualified individuals regardless of the associated costs. This proposed bill aims to address this issue by facilitating more consistent hiring practices for people with disabilities, which could lead to a more inclusive and diverse film industry. I am hopeful that together we can advocate for change and create a more inclusive environment in the film industry. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

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JAMES CAUREY: Good afternoon everyone. Council Members, colleagues and advocates, I'm James Curey and I'm a disabled artist working in television, film, and theater.

I'm more widely known for my work in only mergence in the building but I've built my career on both sides of the camera, as a performer, a story teller, and an advocate. I am here today to voice my support for Intro. 1307. New York City is home to the best artists in the world but it must also be home to the most accessible industry in the world and right now, it isn't.

Too many productions still treat accessibility like a last minute prop. Added late, underfunded, and only if someone fights for it. So, let me be clear, Access is not an upgrade. It is infrastructure and when access isn't built in, the cost is paid by us, disabled artists. Time after time, we are asked to perform and educate to create and justify to work and troubleshoot our own barriers.

We become unpaid consultants in environments that were never designed for us by funding accessibility from day one, this bill ensures every production has

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the tools to hire, support, and retain disabled talent on screen, off screen, and of course every department. When you budget for access, you budget for dignity. You budget for possibility and the payoff is enormous because when disabled artists are in the room, the story of humanity gets bigger, richer and more honest. We don't just belong in the audience. We belong in the writers rooms, the rehearsal hall, the edit bay, and the spotlight.

New York has always led and we can lead again, not with statements but with structure. Not with slogans but with systems. Let's build an industry where disabled artists are not exceptions but expectations. I urge the Council to pass Intro. 1307 and in doing so, set a standard that reaches far beyond the entertainment industry. One that can influence every sector from education to corporate workplaces and ultimately inspire national change. Let the city say loudly and without hesitation, "we all deserve a place in the story." Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Amen to that.

PAUL BEHRHORST: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Paul Behrhorst; I'm the Cofounder of Consult Ability. A

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consulting organization that helps performing arts centers across the country create accessible and inclusive experiences for audiences, artists and staff with disabilities and I also serve as the Accessibility Manager at the Perelman Performing Arts Center here in New York City. Every day I see the tremendous talent, creativity and leadership that disabled artists and professionals bring to the performing arts. And I also see the barriers that keep them from being hired, retained or fully supported. Too often, productions want to be inclusive but simply lack the resources or guidance to do so effectively.

Intro. 1307 changes that by providing grants to productions that hire disabled actors, crews and creatives and by funding the accommodations and production access coordinators needed to make the inclusion sustainable. This bill doesn't just open doors, it keeps them open. It also recognizes that data and accountability are essential by tracking disability employment and building a shared knowledge base, the city can help the entertainment industry move beyond good intentions to measurable progress.

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New York City has long been a cultural leader.

Passing Intro. 1307 ensures we also lead in
accessibility and equity, making our stages and sets
reflect the diversity of the city they represent.

Thank you for considering this vital step towards
a more inclusive and creative future.

SOMMER CARBUCCIA: Hello, hello. Hello everyone.
My name is Sommer Carbuccia, I am a White Latino male
with a shaved bald head, a full black beard and I'm
wearing a black long sleeve shirt with a dark blue
collared one peaking out from underneath it.

I'm here to speak in support of Intro. 1307
sponsored by Council Member Marte and I wanted to
start with an earnest thank you to all of you for
your notice and support for our community. I'm an
actor and performer of both stage and screen and as
you could see if I was standing through my choice of
attire today, I'm a right leg amputee and thus, a
performer with a disability.

I lost my leg in a subway accident in 2014 while
attending NYU TISCH and while this of course
presented many challenges, both personal and
professional, I managed to push through, get my
degree and establish what I consider a very lucky

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1 career in the industry that I love but almost none of
2 that work has been able to be in New York City. It
3 is no secret that the recent state of the
4 entertainment industry has been both very difficult
5 and in a state of great change.

6 While Intro. 1307 cannot address those trends,
7 what it does do is ensure that the production is
8 coming back to and starting in NYC can do their due
9 diligence in hiring from a community that makes up
10 about 20 to 25 percent of our city's population. By
11 providing grants to productions hiring actors, crew
12 members and creative professionals with disabilities,
13 you would guarantee these endeavors could budget for
14 necessary accommodations for these workers and allow
15 them to engage with production access coordinators
16 who I have found to be invaluable resources for
17 maintaining accessible, productive work environments,
18 not only for people with disabilities but for
19 productions as a whole, and there is hope on the
20 horizon for production in New York City.

21 For instance, in early 2026, we will see the
22 grand opening of Sunset Pier 94 studios. Manhattan's
23 first purpose built Hollywood grade studio ever. And
24 with city officials estimating this project will
25

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1 generate \$6 billion for our city's economy. I
2 believe with legislation like Intro. 1307, you would
3 help to ensure the disability community has the tools
4 necessary to be a part of and evolve with what I see
5 as a very promising future for the business we call
6 show in NYC. Thank you Council Members for your
7 time.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I know Council
10 Member Marte has a couple questions as well as I do
11 as well.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you all for being
13 here. My question is for Rosalie. I know you read
14 us that statement from Woody Harrelson but I also
15 know that you have played an important role in
16 bringing this idea to my office and you have
17 contributed in your career in helping people with
18 disabilities have the opportunity in the media sector
19 and I just want you to briefly talk about what you
20 done, who you are and what you seek to do.

21 ROSALIE JOSEPH: Well, I was a casting director
22 for over four decades and I was also a board member
23 of the Casting Society of America for many decades
24 and uhm - oh sorry. In about say 2015 or 2016, I
25 started the performers- well I with my fellow board

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members of the Casting Society. We started initiatives for performers with disabilities. Because it was so clear that there was not enough representation. I mean, as bad as it is now, you can only imagine in 2015. Uhm, but so years we did open calls etc., but I came to CBS my last two years before my retirement and along with two of my colleagues and my west coast colleagues. One of them is here, Alex Muhawi-Ho and Eric Goldberg who's on vacation.

We established a performance with disability initiative. Again, to promote more work for actors with disabilities on CBS and one of the things that we tried for, we worked hard for, was to create a line item in budgets, so this would just automatically encourage people to hire people with disabilities.

It didn't happen there. So, since I've been out of the business for a couple years, it's still been on my mind and I've worked with Council Member Marte on any downtown initiatives. So, I thought maybe this is a way to go. So, I'm so grateful that he took it up and we've been working on it together but there is so much more besides people on stage. You

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1 know we're the location managers and I've called the
2 teamsters to find out you know - do we have people
3 identifying with disability? Working on either
4 locations or several things that the teamsters cover
5 and there aren't many and people have the dreams of
6 being in this industry and don't see an opening.
7 This bill, I think would allow, I hope will allow -
8 our hope is that it would say hey, there's an
9 opportunity here for you. Come, get trained, learn
10 about being and this is what your dream is. You
11 should have an opportunity to do so. So, I think
12 that's it.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Uhm, I also had a question
15 for the panel and feel free for any of you to respond
16 but and please forgive my ignorance of the
17 entertainment industry. Although at one point, I
18 really was looking into it but uhm, I still have
19 dreams of being an extra on Saturday Night Live, just
20 a tree in the background, it would be good.

21 But I wanted to know, I mean do production
22 companies have budgets already baked in to
23 accommodate and okay, I see a lot of heads shaking
24 no. Because my concern is that you know in order to
25 do this right, I think we need to make sure that

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1 there is extra funding in the budgets and a lot of
2 these productions I'm assuming are you know millions
3 and millions of dollars' worth. And so, has there
4 been any movement in the community to urge a lot of
5 the production companies to put this in their budget
6 as well as making the accommodations and doing the
7 outreach to the community? Has there been any
8 effort?
9

10 SOMMER CARBUCCIA: Yeah, as far as production
11 companies there has been a movement for accessibility
12 budgets. At least I know in film and TV, as well as
13 on the casting end of things as well. I know theater
14 specifically has been a big hurdle too just because
15 of the infrastructure of a lot of these theaters.
16 Anecdotally, I went to go see a little shop of
17 horrors yesterday and there were only staircases to
18 go up to the theater. So, for an audience or
19 employee, that would not be very accessible. So,
20 while this does address one end, on the other end,
21 there is just kind of the longstanding
22 infrastructure, physically as well as you know
23 structurally of the industry.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, thank you for that and I
25 just wanted to recognize uhm, James your comment

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about being in the room because I can't emphasize enough how important it is to have a seat at the table, and Commissioner Curry always says to me, you know nothing about us without us, right? And I do believe that having a seat at the table even in just my one small example of how we hired the uhm, you know we had the intern who was with us, who is blind, taught me some very simple facts about how to make our social media platforms and our communications more accessible, right? And so, I think it only helps to enrich and improve everything all around for everyone to increase accessibility. So, I just wanted to get a sense of you know how it has been sort of in the room once you are there and what the reception is or what sort of the willingness of directors and writers are to incorporate, not just the stories but folks with disabilities into the story telling and the writing piece of it as well. And feel free for anyone to respond.

JAMES CAUREY: Yeah so I would like to say it's been a long history of marginalization of the deaf community, deaf artists and just the industry in general and often we have boundaries at every level from birth to education systems not designed for deaf

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people, through home life, not really accommodating deaf children and their needs and then you know as they grow up in age and levels.

So, you know there's only a few people that are able to have the skill and the intelligence enough to really navigate this industry like myself. You know but we have to take a lot of things on the chin and it's really related to funding. Like, we don't have resources to provide interpreters for example, we don't have resources to provide what's called accessibility coordinators who are there to you know be responsible for providing interpreters and making sure that the environment is safe and accessible for people with disabilities. That's just one example but by not having these things, it means that you know it's another layer of boundaries on top of boundaries for me and it's a thing that I have to brush up against all the time. And you know, there should be a list of resources and resources available to people who are navigating this world. So that their boundaries are easy to overcome so that they can provide their stories. So, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you for that. Go ahead, sorry.

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SOMMER CARBUCCIA: Thanks, and I do think uh you mentioned the story telling of it. I do think on the creative side, so casting directors, directors, writers, we do often find a lot of support. The lack of maybe input usually comes from the predatorial end because that is line items, that's money, that's budgets. So, uhm kind of taking away that barrier is often the only barrier they would see for a production having this kind of advocacy. So, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you and just so you all know because I said this - when did I say this? Did I say this at the last hearing? I said this somewhere where I was speaking recently where I wanted to sort of demystify for everyone in the room here, how we can introduce ideas for legislation and bills, right? If you were to reach out to me and say - or you know Council Member Marte or Sara over here and say, hey we have an idea for an accessibility bill. Here's just like a few sentences of an idea, is it something you can look into and then what we do on our end is we have an amazing team of attorneys as well as folks on the legislative division who then look into things like, do we as a City Council have jurisdiction over this? If not, can we create a

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Resolution to go to the state, which signals that we want them to act and respond or the federal government. And so, I say this to say because when I was on the nonprofit side, one of the things I didn't realize was wow, we can actually give legislatures these ideas and then they can sort of look into it and there's actually some bills we had at our previous hearing about uhm related to mental health and child care and a criminal justice system that you know stemmed from just having people testify. And so, I just really wanted to encourage you all to really reach out. It doesn't have to be me but to your local Council Members and to folks in government if you have these kind of ideas. Because already just based on your testimonies here, I'm already thinking of certain bills. Sorry Sara. That we want to look into and so, please, please, uhm keep us in mind for that as well. So, I just want to thank you all for being here.

Oh right, next panel and I just want to say, I'm so sorry if I'm mispronouncing folks names. I'm sorry. So, the next panel is Rosalind Barbour, Alice Sheppard, Christine Bruno, Lisa Dennett(SP?) and Gregg Mozgala.

2 Sorry, what was your name? I'm sorry. Yeah, sit
3 wherever you're comfortable and feel free - you could
4 start on this side, this side, whatever, whichever
5 way you guys want to go.

6 CHRISTINE BRUNO: Is it on? Okay. Yes, I'm
7 going to start because I think my testimony is more
8 of a little bit of a birds eye view. Uhm, okay just
9 give me one second. Good morning everyone. My name
10 is Christine Bruno, I am a proud disabled New Yorker,
11 union actor, educator and disability equity
12 consultant specifically for the entertainment
13 industry.

14 Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak in
15 support of Intro. 1307. Deaf and disabled creatives
16 and audiences like me and many of my colleagues here
17 today along with our nondisabled allies have been
18 fighting for decades to see ourselves on stage and
19 back stage, on screen and behind the camera, not only
20 accurately but authentically.

21 For decades, we have met with resistance from
22 decision makers at every turn in every sector of our
23 field, despite being America's largest minority at 28
24 percent. The most common argument we hear is the
25 money is simply not there to provide the

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accommodations. We may need to do our best work.

This bill makes a bold and enduring statement, not only about who we are as a city but who we aspire to be. If we want to live up to Linwell Miranda's vision of us as the greatest city in the world, it is incumbent upon us to lead the way and provide a model for equity and inclusion across the country.

Enacting legislation that supports deaf and disabled creatives by eliminating financial barriers to funding and providing research for productions to enable us to participate fully in the work place is more than a groundbreaking achievement toward equity for disabled artists. It will strengthen the cultural health of this city by fully representing our diverse and rich cultural and creative landscape, one that includes nearly one million disabled New Yorkers, which has been reiterated by others. To help us achieve that goal, I know my union Sag Aftra is working directly with the sponsors of this bill to make it even more attractive and to ensure critical protections for the community it serves. This bill could not have come at a more important moment. At a time when disabled people's civil rights and very lives are on the line, we are being, we are under

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1
2 attack and we as disabled artists have always been
3 under attack and artists without disabilities have
4 always been under attack from those who wish to
5 control or silence our voices, especially because we
6 are truth tellers. Through our work, we illuminate
7 the best and worse in ourselves and of humanity. We
8 have a responsibility to our art, to ourselves, and
9 most importantly to one another to forge ahead
10 unafraid. Thank you so much for your time and
11 support and to close I will paraphrase one of my
12 favorite lyrics from Hamilton. New Yorkers, we get
13 the job done and I should say a little description of
14 myself visually, I am a petite, White woman with
15 short brown hair, I am wearing brown glasses today
16 and a blue long sleeve top.

17 ROSALIND BARBOUR: Hi, I'm Rosalind Barbour and I
18 am here today on behalf of the New York Shakespeare
19 Festival doing business as the public theater and I
20 am also a petite, white woman with long brown and
21 grey hair and I'm wearing a black jacket. Thank you
22 so much for the opportunity to submit testimony in
23 strong support of Intro. 1307 today. The
24 accessibility entertainment bill.

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The public is proud to join advocates across New York City in advancing a more inclusive and accessible cultural landscape and I want to particularly recognize Christine and Elizabeth and my colleagues who I've worked with for a number of years because it is truly an effort that takes all of us together working to make this a more accessible New York.

Founded by Joe Pap, the public operates on the belief that theaters and essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. This belief guides every aspect of our work on stage, in parks, in community centers and behind the scenes. Accessibility and inclusion are not special initiatives at the public; they are integral to our mission.

In recent years we have made deliberate and sustained efforts to ensure that our programs, facilities and employment practices reflect that commitment and we know that is not enough and that we are on a journey together with our colleagues to always be evaluating these practices and strengthening them and understanding where we are not achieving our stated goal.

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Our 2023 production of Ryan Haddad Dark Disabled Stories was a landmark example of disability led storytelling, created in centering a disabled artist. The production deepened our understanding of accessibility, not only as an artistic practice but as an institutional responsibility.

Building on that foundation, the public continues to explore new ways to employ and support artists and cultural workers with disabilities. This includes our work on a forthcoming musical that will engage disabled artists and creatives across disciplines and opportunities that underscore both the potential and the challenges of sustaining disability, inclusion and production. Our commitment to accessibility also extends to our physical spaces and the public has made significant capital investments to ensure our facilities are welcoming for artists, audiences and staff with disabilities.

The recent renovation of the Delacorte Theater, which we worked on with Christine, which was actually extremely helpful to have a person who is a practitioner of cultural work. Working with us as a person who could say yes, this technically is ADA

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accessible but you know what, how am I going to make
my entrance if this lift breaks?

So, I would definitely recommend that type of
inclusion in the process is so key. Not only to
building a theatre but also in thinking before we get
to the show about how we're going to make sure that
this is a sustainable practice. So, as the panel
mentioned earlier that it's not - we're starting the
show and it's oh, no, what are we going to do? We
need more money for that. Oh, are we going to cut
this thing go make more money for that? It should be
built in to the practice. So, for all these reasons,
we strongly support this proposed legislation and we
really appreciate your thoughtfulness in identifying
this issue and hearing from advocates about what
could make more sustainable and accessible New York
particularly in this field. Thank you.

GREG MOZGALA: Hello, my name is Greg Mozgala.
I'm an actor, theater professional born with a
disability. I have cerebral palsy. I am a cisgender
white male, mid 40's. I have salt and pepper hair.
I'm wearing maroon pants, a grey shirt and a grey
jacket. I did provide prepared testimony but since

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sitting in the back, I just thought I would come and
speak a little off the cuff here, so bear with me.

Years ago, I was speaking to a producer of a
major theater here who said, you know Greg, whenever
I have to consider hiring someone like you, meaning a
person with a disability, that's when the problems
for me start. And upon further interrogation, the
major issue around that was cost was economics. So,
I cannot say enough how important an initiative like
this is and how essential it is for the cultural
success of New York City.

I later worked with that theater company on
Broadway and one of my good friends was in that
higher number production. She is a wheelchair user.
The dressing rooms were inaccessible. They had to
retrofit and build a dressing room on stage. I know
the cost of that was \$60,000. That information was
shared with us, which was unfortunate. We had
finally been given the opportunity to perform on
Broadway, which as an actor is the world series of
theater. Knowing that, you just want to show up and
do your job. That your participation in that cost
that theater tens of thousands of dollars.

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I'm glad to see that the public is here. Thank you very much. I just finished a residency with them; my company and I was fortunate enough to perform in a production the third prerenovation a few years ago at the Delacorte Theater.

During the production there was no lift to the stage at that time. Ali Stroker was in that production playing Lady Ann if you're familiar with the play. Again, was informed that the production had to incur a cost of \$125,000 just to make a lift so Ali could enter the stage and participate to do her job.

Again, so imagine not having the dignity of being able to participate in your job or having the dignity to not being able to change, right your costume, right? And the incurred cost, we're getting to really granule stuff. Culture work is work. Work is dignity. It benefits this city and this society greatly.

So again, I just think it is absolutely essential and again, it wasn't the public; no offense that said we need this. It was because the disabled body entered that space was hired that drove the access. So, I believe that is actually the artistry that

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drives the access not the other way around. So, we

need the art to happen for the access to follow.

Thank you and sorry I would be remiss; I did not know

that Resolution 338 was on the docket today. My son,

who is seven, was just diagnosed as neurodivergent.

I just want to echo my full support for that

Resolution. That process is incredibly stressful as

a parent, incredibly byzantine and I just want to

throw my full support behind that Resolution. So,

thank you very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

ALICE SHEPPARD: Hello, my name is Alice Sheppard

and I'm a multiracial Black woman with pink dyed

hair, a maroon jacket, black pants, and I'm seated in

a manual wheelchair and I'm wearing a dusty rose N95

mask. I'm killing the professional look today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of

the Intro. 1327. It's been said but I'm going to say

it again, New York is the capital city for cultural

production and performance. It is also the capital

city for disabled cultural production and

performance. Disabled people work in every, every

aspect of this industry and I know this because I'm

also the artistic director for Kinetic Light, which

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is a New York City based not for profit dance
company.

We make accessible film. We make accessible
performances and we enjoy sold out performances in
New York City. I employ around 30 to 45 disabled
people for every production and we are known
nationally and internationally as leaders in the
creation of accessible performances.

I believe that we are here because we know that
hiring disabled people is the right thing to do.
Yeah, they are actors, artists, filmmakers, writers,
directors, editors, designers of costumes, sound,
composers, producers, coders, lighting designers,
administrators. Yeah, we're here. But hiring
disabled people is not just about who is in front of
the camera. Putting down a ramp, hiring an
interpreter, you should do that. However, I have
been in this field for 20 years and I urge you now to
accept this bill in order to make a shift. It is
critical that we seize to make access the problem of
the individual artist and think about access of way
of making work itself accessible.

This bill will help create funds to people in
productions to do that. It is a fundamental act of

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1 justice with deep, practical impact. And you know
2 what? It isn't the first time this idea has come
3 before the city. 2016, UCLA cultural plan asked you
4 to do this and outlined the benefits are such a find.
5 So, because New York's New York. Let me put you to
6 some people who can help move this forward. There is
7 already a robust echo system of workers who know how
8 to make the entertainment industry accessible. There
9 are disabled access workers, intimacy coordinators,
10 production access managers, production access
11 organizers. It's a double whammy you all. Hire a
12 disabled worker, hire a disabled access worker. We
13 know how to get it done and leaders like Alison
14 Copa(SP?) and Madison Zalepeni(SP?) are at the center
15 of a community of access workers who can help create
16 legal, equitable and functional access for
17 productions.
18

19 When you invest in the ecosystem of disability,
20 access and art making, you support employment for
21 disabled people, which is the legally correct thing
22 to do. It is also the just thing to do. And if
23 you're thinking more about capitalism then justice,
24 access and disabled people will help New York do what
25 we do best, make damn good art. Thank you very much.

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CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right on the buzzer. I have to say, you guys have been extremely amazing at staying - sticking to time. That usually never happens so I actually had a question for this panel or for others that may know the answer to this because you know when I was in the nonprofit sector as an example, we would get these laws changed and they would say, "just figure it out and do it." And I'm like, "well, where's the money?" And there is no money, so I would have to do extra fund raising events and you know have my staff work all hours so that we could raise money for this. And so, I guess my question is, have the unions or anyone done research in terms of what the appropriate cost would be? And the reason why I ask that is because - and just to keep in mind also that on the City Council, we control less than \$1 billion of the entire city budget. Our leverage comes from negotiating with the Mayor because in order to get the budget, we have to approve it and vote yes, right? So, you have 51 Council Members that need to vote to approve the city budget and so, I'm wondering a couple things. Number one, has there been any movement in terms of getting

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more funding into the budget to support this, either
on the Council side or the Mayor's side?

And then the second thing I would ask is, are
there may be some opportunities, as Council Member
Bottcher mentioned before for public, private
partnerships? Are there corporations that understand
this that have expressed interest? How can we on the
government side maybe partner with them to think
through pilot projects?

Like there's ideas that we can do. For example,
we can do a pilot project, which we have done in the
past with a private partner. So, these are all
things that I would say maybe we should explore and
look into but I'm just curious about if there's been
research done as an industry in New York City and if
you want to answer that go ahead because yeah.

GREG MOZGALA: I think the initial question is
right now there isn't a vehicle for the money to go
and by passing this bill will create the
establishment of a fund so then eventually we can
advocate for the amount of money that needs to be put
in here. I think the initial fiscal impact analysis
- so I expect how much money will go in the initial
fund, if we're able to move forward with it. It's

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actually quite small compared to the city budget.

It's only \$430,000 that would be there in the initial fund every single year but I think for us and the important part of this hearing is to create that fund so then the advocacy can come after and we can ask for the right amount that's needed for the amount of production that's happening here in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay and not that I'm trying to give myself more work or my team but uhm, I would be curious also to maybe see if there's a way to do a pilot project of some sort to get a better sense of what the actual cost would be because that's sounds low to me, you should aim higher.

No, it just sounds a little lower, on the lower side but obviously anything we can do is a start and we've had projects that we want and new initiatives that we've started on the Council where we did start with much, much smaller dollar amounts just to sort of test to see what the success was and we've been able to your point build it out from there but yeah.

CHRISTINE BRUNO: I think just to sort of answer your question, just I'm thinking about uhm, the fact that this is so individual, it like depends on in some cases it's project dependent, right. So, I

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1 think Councilman Marte, I think starting with an
2 initial amount because you know building the fund up
3 to I don't think that there's any sort of max that we
4 would need to build the fund up because the need is
5 always going to be there and I think the dollar
6 amount is going to differ depending on the type of
7 project it is.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah, I'm just thinking through
10 in my mind, uhm also potential corporate sponsors for
11 this but yes, okay. Yes, go ahead, sorry.

12 GREGG MOZGALA: I just - one thing that I've
13 noticed in my endeavors and efforts in this space is
14 that uhm this is a citywide, fieldwide issue right?
15 It effects everybody trying to do this work, yet
16 organizations don't talk to each other. So, if
17 there's anything that could be built in, again, I
18 think it's like - make sure that organizations are
19 communicating with one another where that information
20 is being disseminated so that they understand oh, if
21 I need captioning, I can get it from here or there or
22 what do you do or make that information uh
23 disseminate that information and make it available
24 and make sure that people are sharing what their
25 issues are. And I would just promote and in gender

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1 conversation within the sector because I feel like
2 everyone is operating from a scarcity model and we
3 have to hold on to what we have. Whereas if you make
4 it available to every cultural organization in the
5 city, then they know oh, if we can just open up and
6 that - I just don't understand why people don't want
7 more butts in the seats period, right?
8

9 As an example, I think you know every opera
10 performance at the MET is captioned. That's just
11 what opera does, so what do they do? How can the
12 public or MTC or Broadway theaters and whomever learn
13 from MET? Has anyone thought to ask them? You know
14 things like that. It seems so simple and obvious but
15 that kind of connectivity is not happening with
16 institution to institution across discipline.

17 ALICE SHEPPARD: I think it's important to
18 distinguish between capital projects. The two
19 examples that have been forth on capital renovations
20 and it's not capital, it is not- absolutely not
21 necessary. It fundamentally is and the things I
22 could tell you about working in New York as a dancer
23 but there's a way to think about capital renovation
24 and access separately.
25

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And so, part of what the job will be is to balance requests for capital with requests for other kinds of access that can be made along the way and part of the trick is that everyone goes to capital you know the environment as moments of reflective thought and while that is significant, I urge you in your budgeting and in aspirations to think beyond the ramp, even though there isn't a ramp - I'm going to be seriously unhappy.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you and we have our budget cycle coming up starting again in January because our fiscal year ends in June, June 30th. So, it will be interesting to see how we have these conversations moving forward. Given that our budgets may actually be significantly cut. And so, I think these are things that we're all trying to think through on the City Council as well. So, I appreciate you all coming out to testify. Thank you.

Uhm, okay, next panel and this is our last in person panel. We have James Barniker, Marilee Talkington, Elizabeth Hay, Danielle Pretsfelder Demchick and Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, go ahead.

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2 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah hello.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh sorry, hold on one sec.,
4 yeah two chairs. Okay, go ahead.

5 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, my name is
6 Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm a Black man, black
7 top, kilos in my ear, back top, cracked teeth, purple
8 shirt, blue pants, blue ACG Nike boots with a it's
9 called Korean American Family Service Center.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Service Center, yup, that's my
11 friendly nonprofit.

12 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: And a black shirt under
13 me and yeah, basically in a nutshell. Okay, so I'm
14 here to show support for Chris Marte's bill and I
15 want to make this clear that I think that the Council
16 Members should start calling out the President of
17 AFLCIO Brendan Griffith because I understand that
18 Zach Atheris helping out with this bill but the
19 President of the AFLCIO needs to come here and show
20 his support or make a written statement showing his
21 support for the bill. I have a big feeling that the
22 reason this might have a little push back in the City
23 Council is because of the fact that the many unions
24 as under AFLCIO like the actor like boys and all
25 those youths that - that's totally responsible for

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1 setting up the carpentry to accommodate these guys
2 and gals and I support that, the deaf, the blind, the
3 people that are physically immobilized. They don't
4 want to do the work. They don't want to do the job.
5 So, you might have push back from those unions
6 themselves when it comes to this bill because they're
7 lazy. They just want to cut the paycheck but they
8 cry all the way to the City Council when they want a
9 pay increase.
10

11 Okay, you want your pay increase fine, I support
12 a pay increase but you got to put your butt to the
13 pay increase and a part of this is really
14 accommodating to the disabled community.

15 I'm calling on the City Council to really start
16 calling on Hollywood, calling on Hollywood more and
17 make them put their fair share into this, put their
18 investments into this stuff when it comes to setting
19 everything up to really accommodate the disabled.
20 Uhm, the problem I see here is that Hollywood, they
21 feel they could do what they want in this city. Why
22 is where like we can't walk down - if you are
23 disabled and you only walk down a certain street, why
24 they have their security people or blocking a whole
25 street knowing that they can't do this or having

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1 people that get paid \$50 to \$100 a day to talk about
2 you can't walk down this street because we're doing
3 production. I think the City Council needs to start
4 stopping - you need to make it aware that if you're a
5 disabled person and they're in a situation, they have
6 the right to sue these studios for allowing that
7 because there's certain places where if you're a
8 disabled person, you can only walk that way.

10 So, uhm, I support this bill. I think that we
11 need more investments to this and we need to make
12 sure that any person that's disabled that know that
13 they're disabled and they've been discriminated by
14 these studios, even these productions on the street
15 will be able to sue them. And I believe that the
16 City Council, like I said, they need to put the
17 President of AFLCIO foot to the fire, Brendan
18 Griffith's feet to the fire.

19 And I want to make - I have three seconds left,
20 that I support the Resolution for the Access A Ride.
21 There's a lot of issues with that, so thank you so
22 much. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

24 MARILEE TALKINGTON: Do I have it? Is it on?
25 Okay, hi, I actually oh, my name is Marilee

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1 Talkington. Hello everyone. I did prepare something
2 but I'd actually like to respond more to what I've
3 heard and to one of your questions. Let me just say
4 that I'm blind, which is why I'm wearing sunglasses.
5 It's not just because I want to look cool, which I do
6 but uhm, I'm a blind actor, writer, director,
7 producer. I also founded the organization AC3,
8 Access Acting Academy, which is an organization that
9 s specifically for blind and low vision actors and we
10 created a pedagogy that removed the visual bias from
11 actor training, high caliber actor training. I have
12 partnered with corporations, so what's happening now
13 with partnering with corporations is that let me just
14 give one big example, I will not use their name but
15 they are one of the largest streaming companies out
16 there right now.

18 I got a \$750,000 budget passed with them and just
19 about three years to actually develop more blind and
20 low vision talent to actually create a whole
21 infrastructure and this was based on another program
22 or pilot program that I did that was extremely
23 successful and they were very excited to actually
24 move forward with this.

25

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Three years later, a few months ago, I finally talked to them and they said, we're actually pulling the money to people that supported this are no longer here and in fact, we're actually taking that money and putting it into other diversity projects that is no longer useful and related.

So, one of the things that we have to think about when we're looking for corporate sponsors is that they believe that diversity, that they have siloed diversity into specific groups and disability is the last one on the list. Rather than everything working together in an intersectional way.

So, uhm, yes, it would great to get people onboard but I think the money that comes from New York City for disabled people is so critical for disabled people, not to be pulled because this money is going to go into another camp, diversity camp.

One of the other things that I just wanted to say in terms of being a blind artist and increasing my own access costs. Uhm because of the position that I'm in, I get to mentor a lot of blind actors, people who are just starting out and people who are working. There's no money right now even with Department of Rehab to actually pay for the things that we need on

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1 set. So, for me for example, I have had to buy very
2 specific technology so that I could do a staged
3 reading. I've had to buy certain iPads that have
4 certain screen reader capability. Thank you very
5 much and I could go on and on. Let me just say that
6 it would be great not to have to pay for my own
7 access needs. So, I am very much in support of this
8 bill. Thank you.
9

10 JAMES BARNIKER: Hello, my name is James
11 Barniker. I'm a neurodiverse actor or playwright;
12 entertainer and I am in full support of Christopher
13 Marte's bill. It would be great to have this bill.
14 A, let me speak off the cuff, I do have some - I did
15 have some prepared statements but this is going
16 better. That it would be great to have this bill,
17 one, so we don't have to pay for access needs. Two,
18 because of the fact that we actually need it.

19 I'm also on the Board of Co-op Theater Companies
20 Leadership Board and uh we facilitate various and
21 sundry off Broadway and Broadway shows, one of them
22 being How to Dance in Ohio. That was a hit amongst
23 the disabled community, right? Right? Yes, yes,
24 okay good. Just making sure of that. Because that
25 was such a success, a lot of their - the producers

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took on a lot of the technology needs and the actor's needs. It should be fair for all in terms of SIAFTRA(SP?), same thing. In terms of any - you know diversity hire.

I was also a product of the Job Force initiative. I am also in Cusack and there is a barrier for a lot of us. So, this would - I'm in fully support of this bill and uhm would actually love it if I didn't have to pay for all of my stuff. Like currently I am operating off of 2005 MacBook. Yes, I am ashamed to say that but I know it's vintage. That's what you call vintage but also it would be great to not have to pay for that.

I'm also for my own production company, so it would be great to have my staff, who are going to be fully disabled. We would obviously want to take on those needs but it would be great to have the assistance. Thank you very much.

ELIZABETH HAY: Hi, good morning Council Members. Oh, hi, good morning Council Members. My name is Elizabeth Hay. I'm actually a constituent, District 1 of Christopher Marte, so I was really excited when this came up.

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I'm a New York City base casting director and casting professional so I go between a lot of hats but I am also one of the only people in my field that identifies disabled. I have cerebral palsy and I'm here because I love this industry and I know it could do better if everyone has a shot.

My mission is simple, elevate as many places as possible. When people see themselves in screen and behind the scenes, the possibility expands for audiences, for artists, for the city.

My casting partner and I Danielle, we cast our own projects and help a lot of our colleagues across the industry and she'll speak to this a bit more but we often do this work without pay, not because it lacks value but because most productions will not and don't have the budget for authentic casting or accessibility.

Here's the truth, even on prestige projects, they talk about inclusionary practices. They talk about inclusion but there is no line item for access or the expertise that would make inclusion and reality. This is exactly the gap that they're Teen 07 is trying to close and yes, access is a cost but the idea that it's too expensive is a myth. It actually

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1 keeps doors shut and it puts the burden on the
2 artists and advocates to be disabled - to be disabled
3 advocates but also it puts them as unpaid volunteers
4 in a sector that they just want to do their job.
5 They just want to act. They just want to write.
6 They just want to put on that one hat and there's no
7 additional compensation for what they have to do in
8 extension to be their own accessibility advocates.
9 This is personal for me. Since 2017, I've worked at
10 Amplify underrepresented voices in New York's casting
11 community.
12

13 I've watched what happens when a ramp is there
14 one day. When ASL interpretation is booked in
15 advance. When sensory friendly sets are standard and
16 not special favors. Telling flourishes, stories
17 deepen, teams get stronger. This bill puts the
18 infrastructure in that we're missing, great side to
19 hiring and accommodating disabled professionals,
20 production access coordinators, who know how to
21 implement solutions and data and best practices, so
22 success isn't accidental, it's repeatable.

23 With a dedicated fund, more disabled creatives
24 will lead. More stories will be told accurately and
25

2 more New Yorkers will see themselves reflected with
3 dignity and pride.

4 Thank you for your time and championing inclusion
5 that isn't symbolic but structural, sustainable, and
6 overdue.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

8 DANIELLE PRETSFELDER DEMCHICK: Hi, my name is
9 Danielle Pretsfelder Demchick, I am a White woman
10 with long brown hair, wearing a black shirt. I am a
11 casting director and I serve as the Vice President of
12 Advocacy for the casting society. Rosalie was a
13 partner of mine for a long time. I've been doing
14 that work since 2015 along her side. I'm also a
15 disabilities study master's degree student at the
16 City University of New York. I provide support for
17 over 1,200 casting directors worldwide, free of
18 charge to ensure authentic casting.

19 Casting directors, producers, writers, directors,
20 etc., come to me when searching for a disabled actor
21 for a specific role or to consult on language use and
22 a breakdown with casting an actor with a disability.

23 Due to nondisclosure agreements and
24 confidentiality, I can't say all the projects I've
25 supported since I began this work about ten years

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ago, but despite the amount of prestigious projects my work has touched, I can tell you that much of the work I do is on a volunteer basis.

Elizabeth Hay is my partner. I put my money where my mouth is and I say that we should be employing the best people for every job and this is the best person for the job with me and she just happens to be a killer disabled casting professional and she supports these projects with me. We work like I said for free. This is directly due to the lack of resources designated to authentic casting and accessibility accommodations, even when accessible casting - I'm sorry, authentic casting is a priority as it was in one of the biggest movies of the last year uhm that has a feature that is coming out again this year, a sequel. There was no specific money that was allocated to authentic casting. True inclusion is not solely casting disabled actors for disabled roles or hiring disabled writers to write disabled stories or disabled directors to direct disabled stories. True inclusion is hiring the best person for every job and the only way for there to be another playing field is if accessibility, which can sometimes cost money, is not a barrier.

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1 Disabled people as you all know, are nearly twice
2 as likely to be unemployed as their nondisabled peers
3 and even in media, according to a recent study by the
4 Geena Davis Institute, disabled people are more
5 likely than their nondisabled peers to be shown as
6 unemployed in media. That's something we need to
7 change. A fund like this can and will change that
8 and it will put more creatives that are disabled at
9 the helm of the industry.
10

11 This will organically foster more accurate
12 portrayals of disabled characters and unconsciously
13 increase positive value to the one and four people
14 who have been vastly undervalued, which is who we're
15 all here advocating for today, the disabled
16 community.

17 Thank you all for hearing more about Intro. 1307.
18 We are very passionate about it and I'm so thrilled
19 to have Elizabeth by my side to chat about this with
20 you guys today.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, right on time too. Uhm, so
22 basically we need to clone you guys and then just
23 create more of you all across the nation.

24 JAMES BARNIKER: You can clone us if we're paid.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah, yes.

2 MARILEE TALKINGTON: I have a twin.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, you have an okay.

4 JAMES BARNIKER: Yeah, I sometimes get recognized
5 as uh like Dominic, uhm the guy from history course.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Nice, thank you all so much for
7 being here in person and we're actually going to move
8 over to our Zoom participants to testify. So, so,
9 please wait for your name to be called to testify and
10 then select unmute when prompted for those on Zoom.
11 And the first couple of speakers, the few speakers we
12 have, Emam Rimawi-Doster, Anna Pakman, and Richie
13 Siegal. So, Emam whenever you're ready.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 EMAM RIMAWI-DOSTER: Hi, good afternoon. Thank
16 you so much. My name is Emam Rimawi-Doster, I'll be
17 sharing some testimony about Access A Ride but I also
18 want to share that I'm so happy that so many people
19 shared about the importance of making the arts,
20 whether it's acting, whether it's modeling, whether
21 it's behind the scenes, work more accessible for
22 folks with physical and all kinds of disabilities.

23 I've worked on a few shows myself and they were
24 not accessible at all, even though they were looking
25 for disabled actors. So, thank you so much and I'll

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1 be submitting that testimony separately. So, again,
2 my name is Emam Rimawi-Doster; I am the Senior
3 Community Organizer with New York Lawyers for the
4 Public Interest. I am also an Access A Ride
5 customer. I want to express my support for
6 Resolution 323, which calls on the MTA and New York
7 City Transfer Authority to adopt federally
8 recommended measures to ensure that Access A Ride
9 serves New Yorkers on time.
10

11 Access A Ride, the transit service, which is run
12 by the MTA, is a service that gives me freedom as
13 someone with a physical disability who also has a
14 chronic illness but that freedom is limited and
15 unreliable? How many of you need to book your trips
16 24 hours in advance to go anywhere in New York City?

17 I'd like to take the train but nearly three
18 quarters of the stations aren't accessible for
19 someone who's a double amputee who uses a walker.
20 There is a bit of hope though in the form of the on
21 demand program, which NYLPI helped to get started in
22 2017 but because we only have 40 rides a month, I
23 still need to use traditional rides for the rest of
24 my trips because I am that busy. I use Access A Ride
25 six maybe seven times during the week and sometimes I

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1 have several trips throughout the day, like I did
2 yesterday.
3

4 This week, my on demand decided to stop working
5 and I only had to use traditional rides, which wasn't
6 easy to do but I had no choice. I had work meetings,
7 I had a panel, I had a doctor's appointment and I had
8 a class. I had plans with my friends. I have a
9 life. There are over 180,000 Access A Ride customers
10 and about one percent of us have access to on demand.
11 It would help people to get and keep jobs if they had
12 on demand. It would help people's quality of life if
13 they had on demand. It would give them the same
14 freedoms I enjoy and need if they also had on demand.
15 It would also help the MTA to address the problems
16 identified by the DOJ in the report for Access A Ride
17 on time performance.

18 NYLPI supports Resolution 323 and also calls on
19 the expansion of the Access A Ride On Demand program.
20 Thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great, thank you. And then
22 next, we have Anna Pakman.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

24 ANNA PAKMAN: Alright, thank you so much. Thank
25 you so much Council Members for this hearing and for

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1 Intro. 1307. I am here - I have say my personal
2 capacity. In my professional capacity real quick, I
3 work in state government specifically in economic
4 development, so I know first hand the power of
5 economic incentives and I will tell you right now and
6 I've worked in the entertainment industry on the
7 business side. No business will do anything because
8 it's the nice thing to do. They will do it because
9 they're incentivized to do it, so this is absolutely
10 the right direction.
11

12 I'm here as I said, in my personal capacity in
13 addition you know to my job. I'm also an independent
14 filmmaker and I hope in considering this bill, that
15 you will also consider those of us who are putting
16 our own resources into creating this work, which I'm
17 incredibly passionate about because like others have
18 said, the industry, Hollywood in particular, is not
19 doing a good job of telling disabled stories. So,
20 often it falls to us to do it ourselves and I create
21 the work I do because that's the only way to get
22 authentic stories out into the market and my work has
23 screened at festivals around the world. It's had
24 hundreds of thousands of views online and the
25 feedback has been incredible. Audiences really do

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1 value authenticity and the actors and mostly who are
2 also disabled that I work with have gone on to get
3 projects to get agents to get projects in Sony. So,
4 those of us on a grassroots level, we're often that
5 pipeline to help people get work, to get that resume
6 that will allow them to get work in bigger
7 productions, which you know also all of those steps
8 along the way, accessibility is a cost and often we
9 like others have said, are fronting that ourselves.
10 Oh, and also, we definitely need on demand Access A
11 Ride, please and thank you.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, definitely for sure. I
14 second that. Uhm, and Richie Siegel.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 RICHIE SIEGEL: Thank you. Hi everyone. My name
17 is Richie Siegel. I am the Cofounder of Inevitable
18 Foundation. A nonprofit that makes transformative
19 investments in disabled writers and filmmakers.

20 Back in 2022, we released the cost of
21 accommodations report, the largest known study on
22 disability accommodations in film and television that
23 congress Marte generously cited earlier in his
24 introduction. We survey disabled writers, directors,
25 crew who worked on over 617 projects. They needed

accommodations on more than half of those projects and 30 percent of respondents had to pay out of pocket for basic access needs like transportation and some interpreters as you've heard from many of the testimonies today.

Lower level disabled professionals who are really the next generation of this industry, were the least likely to request accommodations and the least likely to receive them. Many fear disclosure or stigma as one respondent shared, "when it was not possible to hide my disability, I lost a lot of jobs."

A major misconception is that accessibilities prohibitively expensive. In reality, our data shows that accommodations typically increase budgets by only single digit percentages, yet in today's cost conscious entertainment environment even modest expenses can deter producers from hiring disabled professionals, especially on independent or lower budget productions.

This bill helps solve that disconnect. By offsetting the minimal cost of access, the fund will unlock a significant pool of creative talent to be over 11 percent of New Yorkers for disabled with less than one percent of them working behind the camera.

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The creation of a film television and theater accessibility fund would provide critical financial support to productions that commit to inclusive hiring and accessibility. It would incentivize studios and producers to bring disabled talent into projects from the beginning.

New York City has the opportunity to lead the nation with this forward thinking industry strengthening policy. Supporting this bill is not only the right thing to do for disabled people, it's a win for the creative economy for equity and for New York's leadership and entertainment and just to say we have an immense amount of data available so if the Committee Council, the City Council needs anything, there's a lot out there that we can absolutely provide and thank you for having me.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you and we may follow up with you on the data part. Uhm, okay, next we have Joseph Kibler followed by Lawrence Carter-Long.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JOSEPH KIBLER: Hi, thank you.

KARI COX: Hi, this is Joseph Kibler and Kari Cox. We're a married couple and we work together, so we've written our testimony together.

2 JOSEPH KIBLER: And we're both disabled.

3 KARI COX: Yeah, disabled actor, writer,
4 director, producers.

5 Stories are more than entertainment. Stories are
6 meant to reflect the world arounds us, to warn us of
7 what the world shouldn't be and to inspire us to
8 dream of what the world could become. We learn about
9 each other through our stories. Stories open our
10 hearts and minds to the other while allowing us to
11 see ourselves. The inclusion of disabled people in
12 entertainment is vital for the acceptance of disabled
13 people in the world. Disabled entertainers are just
14 as creative, talented and innovative as anyone else
15 though our stories are unique, yet we remain
16 artistically and societally marginalized. Visibility
17 in entertainment would lead to a public that is more
18 educated about disability, more empathetic to
19 disabled people, more willing to hire us, more
20 willing to meet our needs and more willing to see our
21 worth.

22 Disabled people make up roughly a quarter of the
23 US population, however, currently the total share of
24 screen time for people with visible disabilities is
25 only 0.4 percent across all media channels according

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to Neilson in 2022. Disabled people face increasing discrimination and barriers to inclusion as well as actual physical barriers to work places.

JOSEPH KIBLER: As actors, writers, directors, and producers who both have access needs and have hired workers with access needs, we know that money is often used as a counter argument to inclusion suggesting that disabled workers carry a greater financial burden than other workers, which creates an unequal playing field.

We both know specific instances when disabled actors who productions intended to hire were passed over for opportunities because of their access needs. In an industry filled in financial waste and as producers and microbudgets, we see the financial argument against accessibility as an excuse to further discriminate against disabled people. We want to remove any excuse to exclude us and dismantle any argument against our inclusion. We deserve equal opportunity. Disabled audiences deserve to see themselves on screen and the world deserves to learn more about itself as it actually exists across all identities and intersections. And as parents to a hard of hearing child, we want him to build

2 confidence from seeing himself represented. This
3 bill supports our goals and dreams for a long
4 marginalized community of change makers and
5 innovators. Thank you so much for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much and cute cat.

7 JOSEPH KIBLER: Thank you. That's our child
8 right there.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Ah got it. Lawrence Carter-
10 Long followed by Ashley Eakin.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 LAWRENCE CARTER-LONG: Thank you. I'm supposed
13 to be here with you this morning. As was said, my
14 name is Lawrence Carter-Long and I'm speaking here
15 today on behalf of Intro. 1307. I'm a skinny white
16 guy wearing a burgundy shirt and a black sports coat.
17 I'm also a lifelong disability advocate and to
18 director of engagement for Real Abilities
19 International, a New York based nonprofit behind the
20 city's annual disability phone festival and a year
21 around advocacy organization for authentic disability
22 representation in media and in culture.

23 For nearly 20 years we've seen how access changes
24 what gets made, who gets hired, and ultimately whose
25 stories get told. We appreciate the opportunity to

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share the insights we've gained with you today.

Look, it's still the wild west out there. People in production companies are in different places on their journeys. One thing I know for certain though and this comes from working on policy in New York City and on the federal level for nearly ten years. If it isn't the law, if it isn't in the budget, if you don't have the right disabled staff, inclusion efforts don't happen. Lets review the numbers.

According to the Center for Disease Control, disabled people make up over 28.7 percent of the US population but less than one percent of the entertainment workforce according to our friends at the Inevitable Foundation. A recent survey of more than 1,300 top films founded only 2.3 percent of speaking characters had a disability and just 40 percent of disabled adults served by Easter Seals earlier this year said they'd seen any disabled person on screen in the past three months. That's the lowest figure in four years. We're not talking just about inequity here; we're talking about lost opportunity.

According to a valuable 500 white paper published in 2024, the global disability community commands 13

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trillion, that's trillion dollars in spending power.

A 2025 UCLA study shows that films with authentic disability representation earn up to \$32 million more on those all important make or break opening weekends, then those without. In other words, inclusion pays. With Intro. 1307, New York City can help close that gap by turning accommodations from an after thought into a creative baseline replacing obstacles with opportunity and excuses with equity.

As a nonprofit with our roots proudly embedded in New York City, Real Abilities is more than ready and publicly commits to help this Council, MOPD, MOME, and all stakeholders make the number of participants in New York City's entertainment landscape more reflective of reality. If implemented correctly, Intro. 1307 can apply the skills that disabled have naturally, innovation, improvisation, and imagination. Those things we build without support because we're navigating a world not built with us in mind. Now, I ask you to imagine what can be done when we support and harness this expertise. Together, we can create a more equitable New York City that not only screens the best and inclusive

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programming but also creates an infrastructure to
make those projects here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great thank you and next we
have Ashley Eakin and then Kiah Amara.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ASHLEY EAKIN: Great, so I'm speaking today on
behalf of Intro. 1307. My name is Ashley Eakin. I'm
a disabled white woman in my late 30's with light
brown hair and wearing a green jacket. So, I worked
in the industry for about 15 years. I rose through
the assistant track but for the past 8 years, I have
worked primarily as a writer, director and in 2022, I
became part of the group who founded the DJA
Disability Committee and I currently serve as a Co-
Chair after we became official in 2024. It was very
exciting when it happened but it was long overdue
because disabled directors have always been around,
many of us just hiding in plain site or masking.
Something I'm incredibly passionate about is
advocating for a position called the Production
Accessibility Coordinator, which this new bill could
help fund.

I directed two episodes of a show on Apple TV
called best foot forward and when I got hired, this

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position already existed because the show had a disabled lead, which is where? I'd never heard of this position before and was excited to learn and utilize this role. It was below the line crew member who didn't have any stake in our job efficacy, like a studio exec who could see us as a liability. It was a person who maintained complete confidentiality and could advocate for accessibility needs. Not only was it about access for the crew members and cast, it also served as an intermediary. When nondisabled and disabled people could ask questions to inquire about each other's abilities instead of people just whispering on set. I always find that not only are disabled people fighting against basic human - basic hiring discrimination, but in addition, we are also having to fight for access, which is basically a point against us because the people in charge always equate our needs with more money.

When you have someone like a production accessibility coordinator advocating on your behalf it takes away that stigma. They are a safe space for people to do their jobs with their best abilities being maximized. When we started our show, we had about six or seven openly identified disabled people.

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1 By the end, we had over 20 who asked for access
2 needs. It goes to show that people are hiding their
3 needs due to fear, which is a valid concern. If this
4 were an incentive like this grant program, it could
5 take away that fear so accessibility is the standard
6 not a privilege when it's given. I would really - it
7 will relieve any stigma on having disabled people on
8 sets. In fact, it could actually ignite them to get
9 hired.
10

11 So many of my projects with disabled folks don't
12 move to green light because studios are too scared of
13 the implication of cost. So, I really appreciate you
14 considering this bill and thank you for your time.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. So, next we have
16 Kiah Amara followed by David Caparelliotis and then
17 Katy Sullivan and then finally Avery Roberts.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

19 KIAH AMARA: Hi all. My name is Kiah Amara. I
20 am a white person with brown hair and a brown sweater
21 on a background that shows the logo for my production
22 company Indivisible Entertainment but my side name is
23 Kiah. It's a K tapped by your I and it was given to
24 me as an access support because I work in access
25 specifically. So, my production company which was

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1 founded in 2018 in NYC specifically works in
2 production accessibility. I am also a disabled
3 person, so my roles coming into this space are both
4 as disabled founder and business owner, as an
5 employer of disabled folks, as a producer who works
6 in the industry in all genres from unscripted to
7 commercials to narrative and TV. I am in fact the
8 production accessibility coordinator who was on the
9 production that Ashley Eakin just mentioned. That
10 was our production company and myself personally.
11 So, we have a lot of understanding of sort of every
12 angle of this bill and know first hand from years of
13 experience just how many holes this bill fills.
14

15 So, for us again, yes we see disabled folks as
16 essential in leading production accessibility in this
17 space. Again, we've been doing this since 2018 in
18 major spaces and specifically with those disabled
19 hires. This allows us to build pipeline space that
20 we really, really need and although I can also speak
21 to so many of those aspects of inclusion and
22 representation and the importance of those aspects, I
23 also really want to speak to this bill from the
24 business owner perspective. Being a disabled
25 business owner and being a producer, although you

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know there are so many factors, I think thinking about this bill as well from the perspective of being something that can bring production back to New York. Of course, all of us in the industry have seen how much production has fled to other locations. It's not just about productions knowing that this is something that they should be budgeting for, that production accessibility is something they should be including. It's about having those incentives to have production be in your area, knowing that productions are financially supported. Producers are looking for those assistances, those spaces where they know they can be supported in building out a framework that's going to make their project successful. I also think the research aspect as folks have already spoken to, you know we have data internally as Indivisible but we are not allowed to share any of that data because this data is all under NDA. It is not disclosable because it is on production and it is very rare that any production is going to voice a challenge, let alone a failure to provide accessibility. So, that's something that is really important for us to see and again, just having

2 this space where we can also reach into a pool of
3 money to accommodate. Every single year we -

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 KIAH AMARA: Oh, thank you so much.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh wait - oh sorry, just finish
7 up the last few couple sentences.

8 KIAH AMARA: Yup, every single year we have this
9 experience of productions that reach out to us
10 because of accessibility emergencies and those can be
11 life and death situations of things that have been
12 built in space. Accessibility is not expensive when
13 we build it right the first time. But if we built it
14 poorly, it can be very expensive and preventative to
15 actually fix those issues. So, knowing that there's
16 resources at the top, allow us to do those cost
17 saving measures, which build accessibility in from
18 the beginning, which don't underpay disabled folks,
19 which don't underpay accessibility workers and again,
20 there's so many holes and I could speak forever on it
21 but I really think this bill addresses a lot of them,
22 so I'm very much in support. Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. And apologies for
24 pronouncing your name incorrectly Kiah.

25 KIAH AMARA: That's okay.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEE: And yes, wouldn't it be great
3 if we could build it right in the beginning? That
4 would be awesome.

5 KIAH AMARA: It's much cheaper to do it this way,
6 so.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, I know. Yeah, that's what
8 we say in the Mental Health sector too is that it
9 costs less for the city and state to keep people
10 healthy and in their homes and this is all things
11 that we know and I think the same is true for this as
12 well. So, thank you for highlighting that.

13 Okay, so we have David Caparelliotis, Katy
14 Sullivan, and Avery Roberts.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS: Thank you so much. Thank
17 you and you redeemed yourself by pronouncing my last
18 name perfectly, so thank you so much for that.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yay.

20 DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS: I did want to mention too
21 that Director Sam Gold is also on deck here on Zoom.
22 I didn't hear you mention his name but he is wanting
23 to speak.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, now we see him. Thank
25 you.

2 DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS: Okay, great.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, does he need a Zoom link
4 because I think he needs to log in?

5 DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS: Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, he does.

7 DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS: I think he does, yeah.

8 Thank you. I want to thank the City Council for
9 allowing us time to speak and for all the work that's
10 been done already to put this bill on the table. My
11 name is David Caparelliotis and I'm a casting
12 director here in New York City for TV, theater and
13 film. For me and for my casting colleagues, members
14 of the persons with disabilities community are not
15 just names or numbers. As you can see today from
16 these glorious people who have already spoken on
17 their own behalfs and for their community that they
18 are part of, they are living, breathing, talented
19 human beings and artists with a breath of skills and
20 knowledge that are vital in telling stories in
21 whatever medium with authenticity and lived
22 experience.

23 Too often, we as casting directors come up
24 against limitations within the industry be it fiscal,
25 perceived, or actual, ill equipped spaces and or

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facilities and sometimes outright bias that deny actors in this community access to vital opportunities often time germane to their own experiences and talents. Too often, these actors are told no, the industry does not have room for you. It is too complicated. You are too expensive and this hugely important bill would constitute a huge yes to members of this community. A vital and timely yes that in specific, Actor John Christopher Jones heard when we cast him on the NBC Medical all along show New Amsterdam. John had been acting successfully since 1971, mostly giving his life to theater. In 2003, John was diagnosed with Parkinsons. In 2009 John came to a meeting organized by casting directors with the PWD community and shared that he felt he had been rendered vestigial, remaindered and unvalued despite the huge breath and quality of his life's work due to his physical situation and despite feeling so vital and with so much left to share. And because NBC Universal and show creators David Shulner and Peter Horton saw John not as a disabled actor with limitations or with mitigative money signs over his head, but instead as a human being that they chose to assign currency and value to and to what he

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brought to the show. Currency and value which you
cannot quantify because it is priceless.

They said yes and it was a beautiful hour of
television and a fitting caper for John's amazing
career and John is one of many to whom we need to
say, he is representative of those that we need to
also say yes to. That we need to value. This bill
will go such a long way in doing so. I thank
everyone involved for bringing it this far. I thank
Rosalie Joseph, the incomparable Rosalie Joseph for
inviting me to speak putting this on my radar and to
all the amazing actors and artists that have spoken
before me. Thanks so much for the time.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Next is Katy
Sullivan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KATY SULLIVAN: Hi, thank you so much for having
me today and including me in this very important
conversation. I just so everybody knows, I am a
cisgender white woman. I have red hair. I have a
beige sweater on and I'm sitting in my dining room.

So much of what has already been said has been
sup onia and so perfect. I want to acknowledge so
many of the people in that room and on Zoom that are

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not only my colleagues but my friends. I am an actress and I was born a bilateral, above the knee amputee. All I've ever wanted to be in my entire life is an actor and growing up that was not something that seemed like it was even a realistic goal for me because the first time I ever saw anyone that looked like me in a television or on film was uhm, Gary Sonise and Forest Gump and uhm, when I found out that that was just an able bodied man wearing green socks, I was devastated and it felt like it was not a career path that was even possible for me. But it's through the fight of the people that are part of this conversation that we've started making noise in this industry and we've started to show up and be identified and being a part, a voice in this industry.

I've worked a lot in TV and early on in my career, I spent a lot of time kind of having to do like the leg reveal and that actually has not happened to me in quite a little while and I feel like that is actually a good sign in this industry, is that things are starting to change. I asked my show runner on Dexter why he wrote the character that I was playing as disabled and he said, "oh, well I

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just wanted the world to - the town that we were
shooting in to look like the real world."

So, I feel like we are making tiny steps in the
right direction but it's about normalizing seeing the
people that are in our environments and in our
communities and moving forward with this fund can
help push that needle towards true inclusion for our
community and not having to worry about missing out
on opportunities, just based on their individual
access needs. You've heard many people say that
they've had to buy their own supplies in their own
ways to make sure that this community is a community
of people who adapt to a world that is not designed
for them and this could help open doors so that there
are more opportunities for people in the
entertainment industry, which will make it a more
rich tapestry of our story telling. Make it more
authentic and more compelling.

Thank you so much for your time and your
consideration for this.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much and next, we
have Avery Roberts.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

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2 AVERY ROBERTS: Good morning. Thank you for the
3 opportunity to speak today in support of Intro. 1307.
4 My name is Avery Roberts. A woman with light brown
5 hair wearing a grey top. I'm a professional dancer,
6 a wheelchair user, and a rare disease and disability
7 advocate. I'm passionate about access and authentic
8 disability representation in our entertainment
9 industry. Dance is where I feel free, it's a
10 language beyond words. My wheelchair isn't a
11 limitation, it's part of my artistry but the
12 entertainment world isn't built for artists like me,
13 let alone people like me. Too often, accessibility
14 in entertainment is treated as an afterthought or
15 worse, a burden or a box to check.

16 One of the most meaningful moments was become -
17 one of my most meaningful moments was becoming the
18 first wheelchair user to dance on the stage at Radio
19 City Music Hall. It was historic but it also
20 revealed how far we still have to go. The rehearsal
21 space wasn't accessible. My 400 pound power chair
22 [INAUDIBLE 02:46:08-02:46:11] multiple flights of
23 [INAUDIBLE 02:46:12]. It was unsafe for everyone and
24 it should happen in a city that prides itself on
25 being a leader in arts.

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Intro. 1307 is an opportunity to change that.

This bill would establish an accessibility fund so productions and film, television and theater could hire the best talent on camera, behind the camera, on stage, back stage and in the writers room without worrying about the cost of accommodations.

Accessibility isn't special treatment; it's professional equity and opportunity for everyone.

It's what allows artists to show up and do their best work.

When we remove barriers, we expand what's possible for our artists, our audiences and our city. Please pass Intro. 1307 and make New York City's entertainment industry a model for inclusion, innovation, and authenticity. A place where every story and everybody belongs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much Avery and there were parts of your testimony where you were cutting out because the connection wasn't great, so can you make sure to - if you haven't already, we would love for you to submit your testimony online via email. And last but not least we have Samuel Gold who I believe is on.

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SAMUEL GOLD: Alright thank you so much. I'm Sam Gold, I'm a nondisabled middle aged bearded Jewish man with a black sweater on. Uhm, you've heard a lot of amazing testimony from disabled artists and disabled access coordinators saying the obvious about what they - what would make the world of art better off in this city in ways that are extremely obvious and they shouldn't need to explain. As a nondisabled director and producer, I can tell you that the city would be so much richer for the participation that can only come with this money.

I have spent many, many, many productions in theater and television trying to create enough access to hire disabled artists and have failed many times over small amounts of money that must come from the city. The studios and the producers of Broadway can choose to hire nondisabled artists and did not fund this. It's up to the city to find the money. Broadway brings in billions of dollars to the city and every Broadway theater is inaccessible. The spaces in which we make the work that brings billions of dollars into the city are spaces that I think the term is grandfathered in. They are spaces that do not need to meet accessibility requirements. I

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1 directed a play in a Broadway theater in which
2 audience members who used wheelchairs needed to go to
3 the Italian restaurant across the street and ask to
4 use their bathroom because there was no bathroom for
5 them to use at the theater. The spaces are not
6 accessible and the burden cannot be on the artists to
7 make them so the city must provide funding so that
8 these productions can have access needs met for the
9 artist so that the artists can show up and do their
10 jobs as everyone so eloquently explained at this
11 meeting that they - their vital participation in this
12 community requires their access needs be met.
13

14 I think this bill is thrilling. I will use it
15 the second it gets passed to make Broadway more -
16 look more like the real world and make the art
17 better. It will immediately effect this city. I
18 will use it all the time and all of my colleagues
19 will be dying to use it to make access more possible
20 for us. All of us want to meet this goal and we need
21 this money to do it. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Right on time. And
23 so, I'm just going to call out names for the record,
24 folks who signed up but we do not see online. Marisa
25 Jean Giachetti, Gregory Moomjy, Madison Tevlin, and

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Alex Stein. If any of you are on, please let us know and I apologize also for the lack of the captioning towards the end of the hearing. I don't know what happened. I'm sorry about that but yes.

Okay, so seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by Committee Staff maybe submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. And I just want to thank you all again for being here and for sharing your morning with us and just really educating us as well. So, I appreciate all of you and we're getting kicked out. So, I will see you soon. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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 November 11, 2025