

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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June 11, 2024
Start: 1:16 p.m.
Recess: 3:47 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm. 16th Fl

B E F O R E: Diana I. Ayala
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés
Chris Banks
Tiffany Cabán
Chi A. Ossé
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

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

Angela Cerda

Ninibeth Riuas

Joslyn Carter
DHS Administrator

Deborah Berkman
NYLAG

Dr. Xellex Z. Rivera
Housing Solutions of New York

Maya Jasinka
WIN

Will Watts
Coalition for the Homeless

Catherine Trepani
VGNY

Chloe Smith
Children's Health Fund

Juan Diaz
CCC

Ibrahim Xavier Johnson

Sharon Brown

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
4 the Committee on General Welfare. If you would like
5 to submit testimony, you may at
6 testimony@council.nyc.gov. At this time, please
7 silence all electronic devices. Just a reminder, no
8 one may approach the dais at any point during this
9 hearing. Chair Ayala, we are ready to begin.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Good
11 afternoon everyone, and welcome to today's hearing.
12 My name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy Speaker
13 of the New York City Council and the Chair of the
14 General Welfare Committee. Today, we are holding an
15 oversight hearing on families with children in DHS
16 shelter. We will also be hearing five bills. The
17 first, Intro 123 which I have sponsored, would
18 preclude DHS from requiring that every member of the
19 family be present at the PATH intake center when the
20 family seeks placement at a shelter. Currently, DHS
21 requires that children under the age of 21 be present
22 with their adult family members at PATH, the facility
23 that processes shelter applications. There is no
24 good reason for this policy which makes the shelter
25 application process unduly burdensome for families.

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2 The second bill Intro 124 which I also sponsored
3 would require DHS to provide process navigator
4 services to every family with children at an intake
5 shelter site. This process navigator would provide
6 assistance to shelter applicants in helping them to
7 understand the procedures, meetings, interviews, and
8 documents necessary to complete the shelter
9 application process and to answer any questions. The
10 next bill, Intro 440, sponsored by Council Member
11 Althea Stevens, would require DHS to ensure that
12 eligibility specialists are available at every
13 shelter to assist residents with determining
14 eligibility for public assistance benefits. Intro
15 453, sponsored by Council Member Sandra Ung, would
16 require DHS to establish additional intake centers
17 for families with children in boroughs other than the
18 Bronx. Finally, Intro 460, also sponsored by Council
19 Member Ung, would require DHS to report on the
20 feasibility of partnering with community-based
21 organizations to accept and process applications for
22 shelter intake for families and children. Onto our
23 oversight topic for today. The DHS shelter system is
24 designed to provide temporary emergency shelter to
25 families with no other housing options available to

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2 them. At a citywide level, the overall families of
3 families with children entering DHS shelters has
4 increased dramatically over the last few years. As
5 compared to the first four months of fiscal year 23,
6 the first four months of fiscal year 24 saw a 147
7 percent increase in entries to shelter for families
8 with children. While average lengths of stay have
9 decreased, this greater number of clients utilizing
10 families with children shelters have strained an
11 already overburdened system and we must start to
12 think outside of the box as to how we can better
13 support families in shelter transition into permanent
14 housing, freeing up vacancies to shelter other
15 families entering the system. We also know of the
16 inefficiencies in the shelter application process for
17 families with children. Families all across the City
18 must travel to PATH intake center located in the
19 Bronx. Upon doing so, they often have to endure
20 waiting in long lines with their children present
21 with limited resources and staff interactions while
22 waiting for hours. There are so many drivers of
23 homelessness for families with children, including a
24 lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment,
25 and domestic violence. Families with children

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2 experiencing homelessness have several unique needs
3 from childcare to educational support to employment
4 assistance to income support to mental health
5 counseling and trauma-informed care. We want to know
6 what the Administration is doing to meet these needs.
7 We also want to learn more about the specific ways
8 that DHS is responding to the needs of those families
9 who are asylum-seekers. We are particularly troubled
10 by reports that asylum-seeking families with children
11 have been receiving notices to transfer out of their
12 current shelters within 24 to 48 hours, despite the
13 Administration's assurance that these families are
14 not subject to the 60-day rule, limiting their stay
15 in city-operated shelters to 60 days. I look forward
16 to hearing from the Administration, providers, and
17 advocates in gathering feedback on this oversight
18 topic and of all of the relevant current issues, as
19 well as on the bills on our agenda. At this time
20 I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues who are here
21 today, Council Members Riley, Cabán, Ossé, and Ung.
22 I'd also like to thank the Committee Staff who worked
23 diligently to prepare this hearing, Aminta Kilawan,
24 our Senior Legislative Counsel, Nina Rosenberg,
25 Policy Analyst, Julia Haramis, Unit Head, Faria Raman

1 [sp?], Finance Analyst, and finally my staff, Elsie
2 Encarnacion, Chief of Staff. I will now turn it over
3 to our Public Advocate Jumaane Williams to deliver a
4 statement.
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6 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so
7 much. As mentioned, my name is Jumaane Williams,
8 Public Advocate, City of New York. Thank you Deputy
9 Speaker Ayala and the members of the Committee on
10 General Welfare for holding this hearing. In March
11 2024, 69 percent of those in shelter were members of
12 homeless families including 48,304 children. There
13 are families experiencing homelessness for a variety
14 of reasons in every neighborhood and community in our
15 city. They are our neighbors, friends, classmates,
16 colleagues, students, and loved ones. It is our
17 moral and legal duty to provide shelter to those
18 experiencing homelessness, and we should all
19 prioritize creating permanent, affordable, accessible
20 housing for everyone who needs it. The current time
21 limit set by this Administration violates the spirit
22 of our city's longstanding right to shelter. The
23 City cannot bear the cost of housing and providing
24 service to our newest New Yorkers alone, but evicting
25 them, including families with children, from shelter

1 is not the solution, particularly when there's no
2 real case work for many of these families, and not
3 without timely communication. While the
4 Administration said that the 30 and 60-day shelter
5 limits for migrants have contributed to a cost
6 reduction, the consequences of that decision do not
7 outweigh the benefits. Children displaced from their
8 schools and communities just when they are settling
9 into normalcy, people lined up overnight on the
10 streets in the freezing temperature, anxiety,
11 confusion is particularly unacceptable. I also want
12 to mention, an administration that prides itself on
13 diversity, to have this new policy affect primarily
14 Black migrants is particularly disturbing. In
15 October of last year, Mayor Adams announced that the
16 60-day shelter limit would be extend to migrant
17 families with children who represent about 75 percent
18 of the migrant shelter population. In the time
19 since, thousands of families have been given notice
20 or evicted. This policy has been a catastrophe for
21 these families and especially the children. Nearly
22 one in five migrant children evicted from the
23 shelters had their schooling interrupted, two-thirds
24 of those students are no longer enrolled in New York
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1 City public schools at all. In addition, many
2 migrant children who have moved far from the schools
3 are now spending a large portion of their days on
4 transportation if their buses arrive at all. For
5 children who have already experienced massive
6 disruption in their lives leaving their countries and
7 coming to a new city on top of the trauma they may
8 have endured, this is particularly devastating.
9 Students become attached to their schools, teachers,
10 and classmates, and interrupting the consistency is
11 stressful-- interrupting that consistency is
12 stressful, potentially re-traumatizing. The process
13 for seeking shelter for families even for non-migrant
14 families is onerous with multiple hoops that families
15 must jump through. The entire family including minor
16 children must travel to the Prevention Assistant and
17 Temporary Housing, PATH, center in the Bronx. This
18 is the only office which a family can apply for
19 temporary housing. This means that children will
20 likely not be able to attend school that day, instead
21 spending their day in transit and in waiting rooms.
22 Families often wait hours for their appointments, and
23 they are not allowed to bring in outside food. Many
24 families receive temporary overnight placement and
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1 must return the next day in the hopes of being placed
2 in a long-term shelter. Some families are deemed
3 ineligible for shelter and must start the process
4 over again. While families can receive a temporary
5 conditional placement while they reapply, they do not
6 become eligible for DHS specific rental vouchers
7 until they have a formal placement. For all, but
8 especially children, experiencing homelessness is
9 stressful and traumatic. Many children enter shelter
10 after fleeing abusive or violent environments.

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12 Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of
13 homelessness in New York City. In April, Mayor Adams
14 announced a pilot program called Project Home to
15 connect domestic violence survivors with permanent
16 housing beginning with 100 families with children.
17 Those staying in HRA domestic violence shelters will
18 be eligible for HPD housing, affordable housing,
19 which was previously limited to those in DHS
20 shelters. I applaud the Mayor for this effort and I
21 hope to see more like it in the future. We also want
22 to make sure that we're clear with this policy we're
23 affecting primarily Black migrants. We're also not
24 keeping track of where they're going. We've seen
25 overcrowding in places like mosques and other spaces.

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2 They are trying their best to fill the gap, so it's
3 hard for us to see how we are viewing this as a
4 success. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Before we
6 have testimony from members of the Administration,
7 we'll start with a public panel comprised of impacted
8 individuals. [speaking Spanish] We will call Angela
9 Cerda and Ninibeth Riuas. There's an interpreter?
10 [speaking Spanish]

11 INTERPRETER: [speaking Spanish]

12 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

13 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon. My name is
14 Angela Cerda, and I'm from Ecuador.

15 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

16 INTERPRETER: So, I came to United States
17 on December 3rd, 2022, and initially everything
18 seemed to be going fine. We were placed at the
19 shelter, the WIN shelter in Rosa Parks in South Park
20 Slope, Brooklyn. However, days passed and we started
21 to get a little confused. We were not getting enough
22 orientation. We were not given enough information in
23 terms of how to apply for our immigration papers.

24 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

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2 INTERPRETER: So, we were never assigned
3 a case, like a regular case manager. They were
4 different every time, so I wasn't able to follow up
5 on my case. I had to go by myself and do my
6 immigration papers myself, and then I was supposed to
7 receive my mail regarding my paperwork at the
8 shelter, but I never had access to that. My case
9 manager never actually helped me with the correct
10 information. So, therefore, as of now, I do not have
11 a working permit and I'm not able to support myself.

12 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

13 INTERPRETER: So, her case manager kept--
14 she was worried she wasn't advancing enough with her
15 immigration papers, but the case manager keep telling
16 her don't worry about it. Everything will be okay.
17 You will be-- you'll be okay. Nobody's going to
18 throw you away from here. But unfortunately, one day
19 she was coming back from the hospital with her child
20 that was sick, and she was very overwhelmed and when
21 she got to the building, security or a staff member
22 from WIN shelter tells her that she needs to sign
23 this paper, that it was in English. She wasn't even
24 understanding what was there. And they were just--
25 they just pressure her to sign and because she was so

1 overwhelmed she did. Then after that she was given a
2 bunch of trash bags, and they told her you need to--
3 you're leaving. You need to put your belongings here.
4 You are being transferred.
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6 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

7 INTERPRETER: So, this paper that she
8 was-- that she signed, it turns out it was a notice
9 of transfer. It was given to her with less than 24
10 hours, and then they just told her you're being
11 transferred to a hotel, and then this person-- her
12 case manager tells her don't worry about it. Things
13 are going to be a lot better for you there. But it
14 turns out it wasn't. She's been living a nightmare.
15 The conditions that she's now living in this hotel
16 room is-- they're just so degrading. But the thing
17 that she's worried the most is how her kids have been
18 impacted emotionally, because they-- her kids loved
19 their school. They have been now traveling a long
20 distance just to go to their school which is the
21 place that Angela is referring. They did tell her
22 mommy is-- I don't want to leave my school. I love
23 this place and all my friends are there. So, she's
24 really living a hard time.

25 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

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2 INTERPRETER: So, this new place that
3 Angela is now, she's just saying how they're a lot of
4 mistreatment that she receives by the staff-- by the
5 staff of the hotel. The cleaning staff, they insult
6 them all the time. They tell them that they're
7 stupid, that they're not clean people. They just use
8 a lot of abusive words with her, and again, she's so
9 worried mainly about her children. They get sick all
10 the time because of the food. The food is just
11 really horrible, and they don't have-- they have to
12 be all the time inside the room. There's nothing for
13 them to do, and-- sorry. And she's-- she also said
14 that if it wasn't because of the lack of, you know,
15 the fact that the case manager didn't give her enough
16 orientation in terms of her paperwork, she would now
17 be able to have a working permit and maybe be able to
18 be a little more independent and have a job and be
19 able to support her kids and maybe get some temporary
20 permanent housing.

21 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

22 INTERPRETER: So, she's saying that she
23 came-- basically, she came here to get a better
24 future for her children. Her dad was killed back in
25 her country. Her mom died as a consequence of his

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2 dad death, and they just came here to provide a
3 better life for their children, and the impact that
4 the children have emotionally worries her a lot, and
5 she's sees that when her small kid tells her, "Mommy,
6 I know today you don't have money to buy me food.
7 It's okay. It's okay. I'll-- we don't have to eat
8 today."

9 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: So, thank you very much for
11 listening to me today, says Angela, and-- sorry. She
12 said that she's grateful for all of you for listening
13 to her. She understands that she's not supposed to
14 get free things here. She didn't came here to get
15 free food or free housing or anything like that, but
16 she thinks that it's just unfair the way they are
17 treated, the way they were just transfer from, you
18 know, one day to the other to this place that they're
19 now. Really the conditions are not every optimal for
20 her, especially for her children.

21 NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

22 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon. My name is
23 Ninibeth Riuas. I'm from Venezuela and I have two
24 children and I'm here with my two children and my
25 mom.

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NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

INTERPRETER: I was also one of the families that was transferred from WIN shelter in south Park Slope, and-- it's been very difficult for us. The conditions at the hotel are really bad, and-- she's saying that her mom is sick and there are-- that conditions in the hotel room are just horrible. There are bugs.

NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

INTERPRETER: so, I have a lot of difficulties also from my kids commuting to school now that we're a lot far away from the school. I'm not able to work because they will not allow me to leave my children by themselves in the hotel room--

NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

INTERPRETER: until they are 16 and 13 years old. So I can't work. They will not allow me-- they can't stay by themselves. They treat us like basically like we're criminals. They search us. We-- everything, every time we came into the room they search our belongings. They just treat us as we were criminals.

NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

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2 INTERPRETER: I just want to be able to
3 thrive, to be independent. Again, we don't-- we
4 didn't come here to get anything free from anybody.
5 We just want to be able to work and provide the best
6 for our children.

7 NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

8 INTERPRETER: So, we just want to have
9 stability, and again, back in WIN shelter they told
10 us that things were going to actually be better for
11 us once we were transferred to the hotel, that things
12 were going to improve for us, but it's not true. We
13 have not even been assigned a case manager there. We
14 have nobody to ask questions with regards of
15 anything, you know, with anything that has to do with
16 our case, our paperwork, immigration paperwork,
17 anything. We are-- we feel completely lost there.

18 NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

19 INTERPRETER: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [speaking Spanish]

21 I'm going to ask questions in English, and then you
22 can help translate. So, have-- since they've been at
23 this new facility, have they been connected to legal
24 services to start the paperwork for their working
25 papers?

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INTERPRETER: No.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And how long have they been at this site?

INTERPRETER: United States?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, no, no. At the site where they're staying now.

INTERPRETER: A little bit over a month now.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Has anybody told them that they would have to leave after 60 days?

INTERPRETER: they just-- they don't-- they don't receive any information with regards with-- to anything basically.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, that I understand, there's absolutely no social worker on-site?

NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

INTERPRETER: So, in Angela's case, she's saying that there's-- sometimes there is somebody there that is called a case manager, but there is no access, no real accessibility to this person. Like, it's not there all the time. And Ninibeth's case

1 she's saying nothing at all. There's nobody there.
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3 There's just supervisors there. That's all.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Where are they
5 located now, what borough?

6 NINIBETH RIUAS: Brooklyn.

7 INTERPRETER: Still Brooklyn.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They're still in
9 Brooklyn. When you say that they search you at the
10 shelter, that they go through your bags and the
11 children's bags, is that why you're-- at the point of
12 entry when you're coming into the shelter, or is that
13 in your room?

14 NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

15 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [speaking Spanish]

17 INTERPRETER: Yeah, but she's saying that
18 they didn't have to go through that when they were in
19 WIN.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, I was explaining
21 that, you know, unfortunately that's procedural,
22 right, that we have security in the front entrances
23 to ensure that no weapons are coming into the
24 facilities and for everybody's safety.

25 INTERPRETER: Also-- sorry.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I also understand
3 that it feels, you know, dehumanizing, and so they're
4 saying that while they were at the WIN shelter they
5 were not subject to that, but at the HERRCs they are.

6 INTERPRETER: Also, Angela clarified that
7 she does get the searches in the room, not only when
8 she's--

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing]
10 [speaking Spanish]

11 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. [speaking
13 Spanish]

14 INTERPRETER: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry. [speaking
16 Spanish] Council Member Hanif, did you have a
17 question?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I did. Thank you
19 so much, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and thank you for
20 joining us this afternoon. I represent the shelters
21 or used to represent the shelters now that WIN
22 manages in South Slope, which is now represented by
23 Council Member Alexa Avilés. I have a few questions.
24 Could you share what information you received as you
25 were instructed to leave the WIN shelter? And then

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2 my second question is, are you still in a DHS,
3 Department of Homeless Services, operated shelter?
4 And can you discuss how it's been to-- how your
5 child's education has been either interrupted or what
6 are the challenges now since you don't live near
7 PS124?

8 INTERPRETER: They don't know about if
9 the hotel is also DHS shelter.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I just wanted to
11 get at that, because I'm curious, because where they
12 were was not under the 60-day rule, and I'm wondering
13 if where they are right now is within the purview of
14 the 60-day rule.

15 INTERPRETER: Yeah.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Do they know that?

17 INTERPRETER: They're not aware of.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: You don't know if
19 that 60 days--

20 INTERPRETER: No.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay.

22 INTERPRETER: Sorry, could you say the
23 first question again?
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: The information
3 they had received when they were instructed to leave
4 their first shelter.

5 NINIBETH RIUAS: [speaking Spanish]

6 INTERPRETER: So, she was coming from
7 work and there was security people waiting for her at
8 the entrance of the shelter, and they just gave her a
9 paper which was not in her native language, and they
10 just told her you need to sign this. You're leaving
11 tomorrow, and let me know if you need trash bags for
12 you to put your stuff.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Oh, they made that
14 ask of trash bags. And then, so no-- no translated
15 materials about the exit plan. And my understanding
16 is that there was-- there were more families that
17 were supposed to have exited that shelter. Could you
18 share what that process and advocacy was like?
19 Because I know that there was, including WIN
20 involved, in trying to decrease the number of
21 families exiting that shelter. What kind of advocacy
22 did you have to do to try to stay, and why did you
23 leave?

24 INTERPRETER: [speaking Spanish]

25 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

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2 INTERPRETER: So, in Angela's case it was
3 about the same. She was-- she had mentioned before
4 that she was coming from a doctor's appointment with
5 her child. They just gave her this paper, no
6 translation whatsoever. Then she just-- they made
7 her sign the paper without explaining anything, and
8 then 15 minutes later they were just in her room, in
9 her apartment with the trash bags telling her that
10 she needed to get the stuff. In terms of what they
11 did, she's just referring to what they always do.
12 They just-- it's the community comes in their
13 defense, and we have a great group of parents that
14 supports the community at PS 124, and that's who they
15 reach out to, and then from there we just started
16 reaching out to your office and Ms. Avilés office and
17 whoever could provide any support to stop the
18 transfer of these families.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I won't be here
20 for when the Administration testifies, but I would
21 like for them to respond to what the protocol is for
22 when these transfers are taking place, and why is it
23 that these individuals, parents of children in a
24 school community, were forced without an explanation
25 to sign a paper that they didn't not understand and

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2 then offered trash bags. I think that is adding to
3 the dehumanization that these newcomers are already
4 experiencing because of the wider rhetoric that our
5 mayor has enforced. But I'd like to make sure that
6 that question is responded to. And then finally, if
7 you could just respond to the schooling of your
8 children right now. What is that looking like?

9 ANGELA CERDA: [speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: So, it's been very, very
11 hard. They were-- one of my kids, it was literally
12 the school was just across the street, and for my
13 other child it was just a couple blocks away. Now,
14 we have to wake up like very, very early. The
15 commute is now around 40 minutes she was telling me
16 from the new place they're living in, and sometimes
17 they make it on time, sometimes they don't. And
18 they-- she's just not going to transfer her kids from
19 the school because it's the-- what they-- it's a
20 request specifically from the children. They tell
21 her, mommy please do not change my school. I love my
22 school. It's basically-- it's become their second
23 home. They have received so much support. They're
24 just not willing to give up the benefits that they
25 received there, yeah.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I'm
3 just grateful to hear about the work that PS124 has
4 done since the very, very beginning, and that these
5 children are seeing a part of our city that is truly
6 humanizing and valuing them for what they're bringing
7 in the classrooms and that their peers also are
8 demonstrating what inclusivity and care and
9 compassion look like in this city. Thank you. Thank
10 you, Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [speaking Spanish]

12 INTERPRETER: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright, I would now
14 like to turn it over to our Policy Analyst to swear
15 in members of the Administration. Sorry, I haven't
16 acknowledged that we were also joined by Council
17 Member Banks, Hanif, Restler, and Stevens.

18 POLICY ANALYST: I will now administer
19 the oath. Administrator Carter, will you please
20 raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the
21 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
22 before this committee and to respond honestly to
23 Council Member questions?

24 : I do.

25 POLICY ANALYST: Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Good afternoon.

My name is Joslyn Carter, and I serve as Administrator of the New York City Department of Homeless Services. I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the members of the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's hearing on Families with Children in DHS Shelters. I also want to acknowledge the two moms who testified here this afternoon. It's very brave to share their stories, and we'll follow up with them after this hearing to get more information from them. At the outset, I want to reassure the Council that at DHS we recognize the vulnerability of the families we serve and understand that families experience trauma from housing instability. Our objective is to carefully and compassionately meet the full needs of the people we serve while they are in our care. That includes serving as the bridge towards connections with the resources to meet the very real psychosocial, and socio-emotional needs, of families experiencing homelessness. We understand housing is a critical part of wellbeing and the dangers families face in these vulnerable moments. That is precisely why we aim to craft an intake process that meets our clients

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2 where they are and nurtures onward connections so
3 that DHS can serve as an onramp to further social
4 services. Our trauma-informed approach aims to treat
5 each client with dignity that they deserve. Families
6 come to us in a moment of crisis, and we work to
7 stabilize them and quickly move them towards
8 permanent housing. I would like to take the
9 opportunity to give the council and the public
10 listening some insight into how our intake systems
11 have developed over time and share our reasoning as
12 why our systems are as they are. I will also offer a
13 review of the legislative proposals, with attention
14 to fiscal, operational, staffing, and service process
15 flow impacts. DHS' Prevention Assistance and
16 Temporary Housing, PATH, intake center is a front
17 door to our services that is sized, staffed, and
18 designed to meet the needs of families with children.
19 As a last resort, families that have fallen on hard
20 times come to PATH, located at 151 E. 151st Street in
21 the Bronx. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a
22 week, 365 days a year. Prior to the establishment of
23 PATH, we had multiple intake centers and we found
24 that families were spending an average of 20 hours in
25 the intake process. Today, on average families spend

1
2 six to seven hours at PATH. That is a dramatic
3 decrease in the amount of time families are spending
4 at intake. PATH allows us to realize economies of
5 scale, offer wraparound services, and serve as a
6 critical node in diversion, screening, and assessment
7 required for placing families in shelters. We have
8 staff at the front door and at reception that greet
9 families as they enter the building and inquire about
10 the family's reason for coming to PATH. Families are
11 then directed to the intake area where we have staff
12 prepared to begin the application for shelter.
13 During this time, discussions with clients also
14 focuses on the needs of children within the
15 household, including school enrollment. We explain
16 next steps and offer families an opportunity to ask
17 questions. When new applicants and those families
18 reapplying after more than 30 days apply at PATH,
19 they're engaged by PATH social service workers.
20 These workers provide crisis counseling, mediation
21 services, and referrals to community-based resources
22 as an alternative to shelter. For those families with
23 housing options still available in the community,
24 PATH social service workers elaborate with HRA
25 Homeless Diversion Unit caseworkers, and Homebase

1
2 offices throughout the five boroughs to put services
3 in place to help families retain or secure
4 independent housing without having to enter shelter.
5 All families reapplying for shelters following a
6 break in shelter services of less than 30 days,
7 except for those who have experienced domestic
8 violence, are also referred to meet with a Resource
9 Room social service worker who then collaborates with
10 our HDU team to further explore ways to avoid shelter
11 entry through family mediation, legal services, HRA
12 emergency grants, and rental assistance. There is no
13 one-size-fits-all solution for families. Their
14 circumstances are all unique, their needs are unique,
15 and we need to take the time to listen, learn, and
16 connect them to the resources that best serve. For
17 instance, a family may have had a non-physical
18 argument that could benefit from family mediation.
19 For that family, mediation could be the course to
20 avoid shelter altogether. We find that approximately
21 13 percent of families are diverted from shelter. If
22 families have no alternate options immediately
23 available such that they would qualify for homeless
24 prevention services, they are interviewed by a DHS
25 family worker who obtains the family's two-year

1 housing history. This serves as the basis for
2 determining shelter eligibility. During the interview
3 process, families may be assigned a conditional
4 shelter placement while DHS investigates and assesses
5 the family's individual needs. Conditional placements
6 last for 15 days on average. During this time, field
7 specialists visit the homes of family and friends
8 with whom the family previously resided to verify
9 information provided during the interview. During
10 this conditional placement, social services staff and
11 social workers from DHS arrange in-person meetings,
12 whenever possible, with families applying for shelter
13 and family or friends they lived with previously to
14 further pursue mediation and explain in greater
15 detail available housing preventive services and
16 rental assistance programs to return to the
17 community. Once the investigation is completed, an
18 eligibility determination concerning the completeness
19 of the application and the availability of other
20 housing is written, reviewed, and provided to the
21 family in the shelter placement. We conduct the
22 eligibility assessment in accordance with New York
23 State social services law and regulations from our
24 oversight agency, the New York State Office of
25

1
2 Temporary and Disability Assistance, OTDA. PATH
3 benefits from our co-located sister agencies who
4 partner in delivering their insights and services.
5 The Department of Education is represented at PATH in
6 the form of family assistance staff who serve as a
7 critical point of linkage with NYC schools, offering
8 an opportunity to discuss transportation and
9 educational needs. Administration for Children's
10 Services staff provide collaboration and consultation
11 as related to abuse or neglect cases. Our partners
12 from the Human Resources Administration No Violence
13 Again does safety assessments for families who
14 indicate domestic violence, have a domestic violence
15 history, or there is a suspicion of DV while at Path.
16 Additionally, HRA's Homebase team serve as a link to
17 further homeless preventive services and aftercare
18 services. There is also a medical provider on site,
19 the floating hospital, and they are there to conduct
20 health screens and other health education as
21 necessary. With that larger context in mind, I will
22 now turn to the legislation being heard today.
23 Intro. 123 would preclude DHS from requiring that
24 every member of a family be present at its intake
25 center when that family seeks placement in shelter.

1 We have made accommodation for the logistical
2 challenge of having all children under 18 present at
3 intake. Currently, all adults in the family are
4 required to appear. However, children under the age
5 of 18 can appear remotely for the initial visit.
6 They are not required for any subsequent visits. We
7 believe the system we have in place maintains the
8 appropriate balance between the necessity of having
9 children on screen to assess for real potential
10 needs, while also offering the flexibility and
11 recognition of the potential challenge posed to a
12 family. For families that choose to bring their
13 children to PATH, we have a Child Wait Space on site
14 with educational activities and fun games. Initially
15 it was designed to accommodate children whose parents
16 were being interviewed by the NoVa Social Workers to
17 avoid re-traumatization, we have since expanded to
18 serve all children. Intro. 124 would require the DHS
19 to provide process navigator services to every family
20 with children at an intake center. Intro. 440 would
21 require DHS to ensure that eligibility specialists
22 are available at every shelter to assist residents
23 with determining eligibility for PA benefits, public
24 assistance benefits. Intro 124 and 440 focuses on
25

1 roles and functions that already exist in our system.
2 Our intake staff is trained to guide families through
3 this process. We offer an explanation to every family
4 that comes to us with multiple touchpoints,
5 immediately at the front door with greeters, at the
6 window where registration occurs, as they exit
7 elevators, and throughout their time in the waiting
8 areas. Our managers, case managers, social workers,
9 family workers, or medical providers have been
10 charged with explaining the process and offering
11 families the opportunity to ask questions. We
12 structure this system of touchpoints to make sure
13 families feel safe, secure, and deliver a consistent,
14 supportive message in the intake process. Prior to
15 becoming DHS Administrator, I had the privilege of
16 directly overseeing PATH. I understand the intent of
17 Intro 124 and the idea of adding process navigators,
18 but I believe we are already providing that
19 navigation over the intake process itself and I do
20 not believe adding another navigation layer would be
21 advisable. With regard to the eligibility specialist
22 in Intro. 440, at intake we have a host of staff on
23 site who are responsible for ensuring that family
24 needs are met. This begins with the leadership and
25

1
2 staff at PATH, followed by the shelter directors,
3 directors of social services, case workers, housing
4 specialists, social workers, and operations staff at
5 shelter who all play a constructive role in
6 fulfilling the responsibilities of guiding clients to
7 resources and services. We understand that shelter
8 is temporary, and we are aiming towards housing
9 stability, in-community where our clients can attain
10 their goals. Assessing exit to permanency is part of
11 our process. One key to ensuring that this happens
12 is ensuring that Public Assistance Cases are open.
13 We have staff both at the front door and at the
14 shelter level who are already doing this work. We
15 want to make sure applications for public assistance
16 occur and work towards clients putting appropriate
17 applications in. At intake, we have staff onsite,
18 helping open these cases; furthermore, Independent
19 Living Plans include eligibility and applications as
20 part of the toolkit in driving towards exit and
21 permanent housing. Once at shelters, families meet
22 with staff-- [background interruption] We're good.
23 Thanks. I needed water anyway, so that's good. Once
24 at shelters, families meet with staff to complete an
25 Independent Living Plan. There are then biweekly

1 meetings with staff to update these ILPs. They can
2 include procuring entitlements of families that they
3 may be eligible for, referrals for mental health,
4 educational, or job preparation opportunities, or
5 referrals for other services that best needs meet for
6 clients. In addition to being a component of ILPs,
7 Access HRA is a tool in this process. All providers
8 have been trained in Access HRA. Serving as our
9 online benefits portal, Access HRA allows clients to
10 gain information on and apply for government programs
11 including Cash Assistance, SNAP, which are Food
12 Stamps, Fair Fares, the Home Energy Assistance
13 Program, Medicaid, CityFHEPS, and Child Support.
14 Because we have this layered system in place,
15 including contact with case managers, Access HRA,
16 ILPs, we do not believe legislating a specific title
17 and accompanying ratios to be appropriate. Intros 453
18 and 460 focus on expanding families with children
19 intake, through an additional intake center in the
20 Bronx or Queens, and through producing a feasibility
21 report on community-based organizations viability for
22 accepting and processing intake. There are manifold
23 advantages of centralized intake. Those advantages
24 include consistent screening of critical factors and
25

1
2 assessment for conditions related to medical needs,
3 mental health needs, substance use, adult and child
4 protective services, and domestic violence.

5 Moreover, centralization fosters continuity of
6 service by taking advantage of co-located interagency
7 links: DOE, ACS, HRA NoVA and HRA Homebase, as well
8 as medical. Centralization also allows us to benefit
9 from economies of scale in addition to cost concerns.

10 Intake is a complex process with a host of regulatory
11 compliance requirements, example: client privacy.

12 Accordingly, centralization allows us to deliver
13 services with consistency and clear monitoring for
14 deviations from best practice. Those advantages mean
15 there are significant drawbacks to the proposals
16 envisaged by Introductions 453 and 460. As we

17 discussed in 2023, we believe a feasibility study is
18 a prerequisite to considering an additional PATH

19 site, therefore we would be supportive of moving

20 forward with a feasibility study that encompasses the
21 design requirements that went into PATH, and that

22 takes into account the capital cost of building a new
23 facility, location considerations, staffing

24 requirements, and obligations to meet our federal and
25 state legal and regulatory mandates. We are working

1 to exit families. In January, The Adams
2 Administration launched "Women Forward NYC: An Action
3 Plan for Gender Equity," an investment aimed at
4 making New York City a national leader on gender
5 equity. Supported through city dollars, private and
6 public partnerships, academic institutions, and
7 federal grant funding, this living action plan is a
8 framework for all of the Administration's efforts
9 addressing gender disparities going forward and takes
10 immediate action to connect women to professional
11 development and higher-paying jobs; dismantle
12 barriers to sexual, reproductive, and chronic health
13 care; reduce gender-based violence against women; and
14 provide holistic housing services, including for
15 formerly incarcerated women and domestic and gender-
16 based violence survivors. Through Women Forward, the
17 Administration committed to increase families exiting
18 shelter into permanent housing by 25 percent by 2030.
19 As part of the Administration's comprehensive efforts
20 to connect New Yorkers to safe, affordable homes we
21 are aiding New Yorkers from intake, to exit, to
22 transition into permanency. We continue to focus our
23 efforts on moving families and individuals from
24 shelter into permanent housing as quickly as
25

1 possible. This is challenging work. Our frontline
2 staff, our sister agency partners, and the community
3 of providers are focused on aiding families through
4 crisis towards permanency. I would like to take this
5 opportunity to thank them and acknowledge their
6 successes. While we acknowledge we have further work
7 to do in delivering the highest quality social
8 services to our fellow New Yorkers, we can also
9 recognize the meaningful difference our hardworking
10 staff and network of providers makes in the lives of
11 children and families on a daily basis. I thank you
12 for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward
13 to your questions.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I'm going
16 to pass it over to Council Member Ung for questions
17 first.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you, Chair.
19 Thank you for your testimony today. I just have a
20 couple of questions. As far as the PATH intake
21 center for families, is there a practical reason why
22 there's only one in the entire New York City?

23 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you for that
24 question, Council Member. So, one of the things
25 that's important to us is really thinking about when

1 families come to us and the consistency of messages--
2 messaging that we give them. Prior to this
3 Administration and historically, we have had-- we did
4 have intake in all the boroughs, and we found that
5 families were spending up to 20, you know, 20 hours
6 waiting for intake. And we really thought about
7 intentionality as we were thinking about how do we do
8 intake. And so, the Bronx, we own that land in the
9 Bronx. It was easier to site that, but not only
10 that, families who come to us primarily came from the
11 Bronx, right? And so we really wanted to think about
12 what would we need if I was coming-- you know, as a
13 person coming into shelter. What were the drivers of
14 homelessness for families? We knew that we needed to
15 have support and wrap around services. And so we
16 needed to be sure that we had a space that would have
17 all the services in once place, and that would be
18 able to have that service provided to every family in
19 the same way, and so we would need, you know, support
20 services from ACS on site. We'd have medical on
21 site. We would have children services on site. We
22 would have domestic violence, you know, safety on
23 site. We also really looked at the cost factor. You
24 know, it really was-- back in-- it started in 25

1 [sic] 2011, you know, over \$65 million back then to
2 open the site. But we also really think about how do
3 we centralize it so that the message that families
4 get was consistent throughout and that the
5 efficiencies, economies of scale. But we do know
6 that most families come from this neighborhood.
7 Siting also [inaudible] and somebody-- [inaudible]
8 that says homeless shelters, it might even list
9 intake. We know what happens, but the message that
10 we give is that this is the place you're going to get
11 wrap-around services when you come through the doors
12 to get your needs met at our front door.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: No, thank you. And
15 I actually have been to the PATH center in the Bronx.

16 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you. I'm
17 glad--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: And it is a
19 [inaudible] center.

20 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: So, I do understand
22 what you're saying, but for families that are not
23 from the area, like you were saying-- I understand
24 people that are from that area will be there, but for
25 the people in further boroughs who also experience

1
2 homelessness, do you think the City could benefit
3 from having a site somewhere else?

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Well, one of the
5 things that's important is that, you know, we are a
6 on a-- people can get to us, right? We're--
7 certainly on transportation you can get to us, and
8 when you come into our front doors, there's a service
9 that you've seen. You have seen the service that we
10 do. You see that we are really looking at the entire
11 family, the needs that they have, and we're meeting
12 those needs. So, getting to us, you know, we're in
13 the Bronx, but you know, it's not-- you know, you can
14 get to where we are, and the service that you're
15 going to get every family, as you saw Council Member,
16 getting the same information, this wrap around. You
17 come through our doors, there's a medical provider
18 there. So it would not behoove us to try to do the
19 same service in a space that's retrofitted. I want
20 to come to a building that's, right, made for the
21 service. We built it for intentionally to say when
22 you come through we respect you, right? And I don't
23 want to go back to retrofitting buildings for this
24 service. We want to be able to have wrap-around

1
2 services for families that says, you know, this is a
3 space for you when you come to us.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: No, no, I
5 understand. So, I think-- you know, I read the
6 testimony. I heard you. so, you would be open to a
7 feasibility study of having another site where it
8 could have all the services as what you were just
9 saying, because you do want someone to go there and
10 also have the same services, the wrap-around services
11 that right now the Bronx intake--

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] We'd
13 be open to that, absolutely.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Okay, thank you.
15 And then my other question about working with not-
16 for-profit, has DHS ever partnered with not-for-
17 profits to access shelter?

18 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Well, I think it's
19 important to recognize that what we also want to be
20 able to do is that we, DHS, you know, City, that we
21 do this work with consistency. When we have-- and we
22 do have not-for-profits in our single, you know, kind
23 of doing that work, and we find it is-- there's
24 disparity when one, you know, in Brooklyn and one in
25 Bronx, it's not done consistency. Again, I do

1
2 believe that we have to kind of make sure that
3 families get the same, and I would-- you know, I
4 don't want families if you went to one-- certain one
5 and another one that is different. Again, I do
6 believe that we have to make sure that families are
7 getting the same services that come through our
8 doors.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: No, consistency is
10 great, but is there a role? And this is why, you
11 know, I'm asking this question. Is there a role that
12 you think not-for-profits can have in helping
13 families' access services? Just because there are
14 just some communities out there that work more for
15 the not-for-profits, that trust their not-for-profits
16 more, and those not-for-profits do speak a language
17 of that community. Back to-- going back to-- you
18 know, going up to the Bronx might be difficult for
19 some communities living somewhere else. So, is there
20 a path-- and I recognize there needs to be some
21 coordination, you know obviously, between DHS and the
22 not-for-profits. But do you see a path of where that
23 could happen, where there can be partnerships with
24 not-for-profits, making sure that all the families

1
2 would have as much consistent, you know, services as
3 possible.

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I mean, I think I
5 go back to the same thing about, you know, wrap
6 around services. I think we always and to make sure
7 that there's the wrap around services that we put in
8 place. I'm concerned about client privacy. I'm
9 concerned about clients having to wait. I'm
10 concerned about, right-- you know, if I went to a
11 particular place. I think, again, I think
12 feasibility study is important for us to really look
13 at, you know, before we say yes, I'll do this or no,
14 I'll do that. I would love to be able to do a
15 feasibility study.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Okay, so it would be
17 the same like if the feasibility is seen, maybe like
18 what not-for-profits-- obviously, probably people
19 with experience in this, that DHS and these not-for-
20 profits to work together.

21 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I mean, I think
22 one of the things is to be important to think though
23 how is there a feasibility of--

24

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Absolutely.
3 Absolutely. Okay, thank you. Thank you so much for
4 your testimony.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I want to
6 piggy back on the questions regarding the PATH site
7 in the Bronx. Can you tell us-- you mentioned that
8 large portion, a significant portion of individuals
9 that are coming through PATH are coming from the
10 Bronx. Do you what the percentage of those folks
11 are?

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, Council
13 Member, I actually don't have that with me this
14 morning, this afternoon. I have to get back to you
15 with that.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, could you--
17 could you also-- could you provide a breakdown by
18 borough?

19 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I can. I can--

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] How
21 many people are coming and--

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing]
23 Yeah, I--

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] I agree
25 with Council Member Ung. You know, it's very

1
2 difficult, and I don't understand why-- I'm not
3 understanding how having more sites equates to more
4 time spent.

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, can I--

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Yeah.

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: give you some
8 background that-- one of the things is what we found,
9 kind of what happened. So, intake there's a lot of
10 information that needs to happen, but there's also
11 trying to find places, and there's competition for
12 that also. And so we want to make sure that A,
13 information is shared the same, but B, we also need
14 to make sure that if we need to find spaces that
15 would happen for the families to go to. So, for us,
16 it is not something that we want to be able to have
17 families spend so many more hours waiting for
18 placement. That's something that we have to really
19 look at and think thorough. So, that's not, you
20 know, top of mind for us at this point. So, once we
21 do a feasibility study we'll come back with that
22 information.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, yeah. I just--
24 I'm confused about that. Assuming, you know, and I
25 don't know what the rates are, you'll get those

1 numbers to us, but that it is true that it is true
2 that, you know, a large percentage of folks that are
3 coming into PATH are from the Bronx. Is DHS being
4 proactive in terms of maybe working with the
5 Administration then to create some sort of, I don't
6 know, public campaign to help offset the driving
7 forces behind this placement of families? Like, are
8 we adding tenant support clinics? You know, do we
9 have Know Your Rights posters everywhere? What are--
10 what if anything, right, has DHS been advocating for
11 to help? You know, because you have all of the data.
12 You have all of the information. What are the
13 driving forces, right? People are coming in for
14 domestic violence. People are coming in because, you
15 know, maybe they're getting displaced. People are
16 coming in because they have no jobs and they can't
17 afford to pay rent. Are those things that you are
18 then tasked with bringing to the Administration and
19 saying, like, look, we're seeing that in the
20 specific-- these specific zip codes, we have a higher
21 need for workforce development. We have a higher
22 work-- you know, a need for tenant support services.
23 Like, this is where we would prioritize, right, the
24 bulk of our attention. So, you know, I mean, I would
25

1 think that that's something that we would do. We've
2 already truly intentional about driving down the
3 numbers.
4

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, I can tell you
6 that our staff at PATH have been making inroads with
7 the schools through some education with the school
8 staff. We're having them come to make visits at PATH
9 so they could talk with families around just kind of
10 prevention of homelessness. We're having them do
11 some tours. You know, we found just the other day
12 one of the schools, and I won't tell you which one,
13 came and the principal himself had been homeless, and
14 just to really talk about us being there and to go
15 and talk with families about-- you know, there was a
16 family there, and to talk about how you push upstream
17 to not having to come to intake, but how do you
18 connect to, you know, prevention in the community.
19 And so we're reaching out to schools to do that work
20 in DHS. So we're doing that with our connections in
21 PATH, and that work is happening now through our
22 intake site and the schools in the Bronx.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, but if we
24 don't-- and I know specifically in my part of the
25 Bronx that we have very limited resources in terms of

1
2 tenant support and legal services. If DHS has the
3 data, right, that proves that certain neighborhoods
4 are more impacted than others, then I would think
5 that that's information that the Administration could
6 use to help identify new funding streams and new
7 programs for these communities to help with those
8 issues, right? So that we're not seeing such large
9 number of folks coming into the shelter system
10 unnecessarily. We're addressing it. You know, I
11 have a tenant support clinic in my East Harlem
12 office, and I started probably-- I don't know-- 2016-
13 ish. Yeah, about 2016. And I used to have the
14 Constituent Services Division and most of my cases
15 were driven by folks that were being pushed out, you
16 know, were losing their NYCHA apartment. They were,
17 you know, being threatened by their landlord, and
18 that kind of support clinic has really been a game-
19 changer in my district. Those are no longer, right?
20 The concerns that I'm hearing, not that they don't--
21 that they don't continue to exist, but not at the
22 volume that I was witnessing before that clinic, you
23 know, was put in the district.

24 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, and thank
25 you, Council Member. I'd love to talk with you more

1 about that, but we will work with the local CBOs.
2 We'll use our area in DSS to work with the CBOs to
3 get the information out. I'd love to talk with you
4 more about that also.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I mean,
6 because this is kind of like the mental health debate
7 that we have, right? People are like, well, you
8 know, we need to have-- we need to send people to,
9 you know, their community-based clinic, and there are
10 no clinics. When there are clinics we have no
11 psychiatrists, right? So, it-- you know, there has
12 to be more-- this has to be very intentional, right,
13 very purposeful. We have to, you know, be able to
14 identify. And again, because you're the driving
15 force behind all of the data, then-- and it's
16 centralized within you, you know, your agency, then
17 it makes sense to me that that information that
18 trickle into the budget cycle and conversations
19 around policy and expanding. You know, it's very
20 difficult when you're, like-- you know, I get folks
21 that come into my office, because apparently there's
22 an office at 105. It's 105 East 16th Street. I'm at
23 105 East 116th Street. That I think is a SNAP
24 office.
25

1 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: 109 East 16th.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 109, yeah. And so
3 people for years since I've worked at this office
4 have come to our office accidentally. At first I
5 thought maybe the information was wrong on the paper,
6 but I've since concluded that people just read really
7 quickly, and they-- you know, they don't realize that
8 it's 16th and not 116th. But when they get to my
9 office, often times I hear, "Oh, God, I don't have
10 any more money. I had enough to get there and back
11 home."

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Access HRA, I
13 think they do come to your office. They could really
14 apply on Access HRA the portable port where they make
15 the applications. That's one of the things. So they
16 actually don't have to go into an office to apply for
17 public assistance, and they--

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] But
19 some people do, because some people don't have, you
20 know, computers or they don't-- they're not computer
21 literate, or they may not-- you know, in my district
22 I have two libraries. Both closed.

23 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Come into your
24 office--
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Same
3 time. I mean, you know, they aren't really-- not
4 effectively, you know, gauging where the needs are
5 going to be. But it is-- it's a problem, and the
6 point that I try to make is that even when you have
7 one site that is working well, it would be nice to
8 have multiple sites that work just equally as well so
9 that folks that are already burdened, that are
10 already going through, you know, their own
11 psychological stress that are now-- you know, they
12 have children that have to carry their belongings,
13 don't have to travel across the boroughs to get to
14 the south Bronx to be able to see an intake worker,
15 right? It's a-- it is emotionally overwhelming, and
16 I think that it's really hard to explain it unless
17 you've kind of lived it. You know, and I have. I
18 did. I remember spending, you know, I don't know--
19 it must have been at least 24 hours at PATH at
20 Catherine Street when Catherine Street was open.

21 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I remember
23 somebody preparing me mentally. Like, you need to
24 go, you need to take food. You need to take water.
25 You need to take a book. You need to talk a Walkman

1 at the time. Remember Walkman's? You know,
2 something to entertain yourself, because you're going
3 to be there for a long time. Being there with my son
4 was another trip, you know? He was all over the
5 floor. He was hungry. He was tired. He was
6 restless. He was kicking. He was crying. He wanted
7 to go home. You know, it just adds layers of defeat,
8 if you will, right, to a person's spirit. And so,
9 you know, we're not trying to frivolously spend
10 taxpayer dollars on things that are not necessary,
11 but trying to make these services more readily
12 available to the people that need them. And while I
13 don't have a specific complaint about the site. I've
14 been there several time to the Bronx. I do believe
15 that it's, you know, really unfortunate that they're
16 not able to recreate that same experience at least in
17 another borough so that folks that are living in
18 southeast Queens can easily access that site if
19 possible. So, the numbers are going to really be
20 helpful. Now you also mentioned that when a person
21 is at PATH, the-- in addition to, you know, to
22 whatever other services, they also have access to HRA
23 and SNAP, Fair Fares, all of those services.
24 Somebody's connecting them to those?
25

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, we have at
3 PATH-- and thank you for your story at Catherine
4 Street. I remember those days Catherine Street and
5 Kings County and really people spending multiple
6 hours at intake, that we'd be able to shrink that.
7 But we have HRA Homeless Diversion Unit, as well as
8 my resource room where we have social services
9 workers and social workers who'll begin the
10 application for public assistance.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: At PATH?

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: At PATH. And so
13 we also have now it's Access HRA that we're really
14 doing that piece up front to really help them to open
15 the cases while they're there, and that it-- so we
16 have that starting there at the front door, and then
17 when they get to shelter placement, they've trained
18 our providers to use Access HRA so that can continue
19 there. If they haven't started there, that we're
20 doing it on site when they get to placement. So
21 we're laser-focused on public assistance making sure
22 that we have our families connected there. So,
23 starting at the front door. And while I was there,
24 we had started that, but now we've really ramped that
25 up in this year to make sure that we are paying

1
2 attention to get folks PA case, public assistance
3 cases open, SNAP, cash, you know, whatever they
4 quality for starting at that front door. So, HRA--

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Well,
6 that's genius, because I mean usually it's-- you
7 know.

8 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: There's usually other
10 underlying factors that are contributing to the
11 situation, or programs and services that are not
12 aware exist that they may qualify for. Are those
13 services also available to migrant families that are
14 coming in through PATH? I don't know if they're-- if
15 you have any more families that are coming in through
16 PATH at this point, but--

17 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, if an asylum-
18 seeking family comes to PATH, we do-- once we realize
19 it's an asylum-seeking family, we do transport them
20 to the arrival center. So, if they come through our
21 front door, once we realize that, they're transported
22 to the arrival center, so they're not processed at
23 our intake site.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: but at some point
3 they were. Were they also beneficiaries of all of
4 these services?

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: They--
6 unfortunately, you have to have the immigration
7 status to be able to get public assistance. So
8 that's something that we are [inaudible] for.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But IDNYC you don't
10 need citizenship for.

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So--

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Legal
13 services you don't need.

14 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, at our
15 sites, now we don't do any processing for the asylum-
16 seekers at our site at all. We do the-- just kind of
17 once we realize them, we're moving-- transporting to
18 arrival center.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How many sites does
20 DHS currently operate that are for asylum-seeking
21 families?

22 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: We opened 162 and
23 now we have 160. Yes, confirming 160.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 160?

25 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yes.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sites, okay. So
3 those sites-- those-- I'm assuming that those
4 residents are recipients of whatever resources are
5 available--

6 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] DHS--

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: to other DHS--

8 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: That are available
9 that they qualify for.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That they would
11 qualify for.

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yes, ma'am.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, alright. You
14 mentioned that through the Women Forward, the
15 Administration is committed to increasing families
16 with children exiting from shelter into permanent
17 housing by 25 percent by 2030. Can you elaborate on
18 how they hope to achieve this goal?

19 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, for DHS-- this
20 is the Administration. So, for DHS we have two
21 initiatives. We have our Troop 6,000 [sic] which is
22 our Girl Scout.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, I love them. I
24 love them. They're so cute.

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, they are
3 cute, right. So, Girl Scouts, and so they're doing a
4 series of financial empowerment, you know, savings
5 for these young ones, and so that's part of the
6 Women's Forward initiative, and the second thing that
7 we have is the pilot with New Destiny for 100
8 families with domestic violence in the DHS system
9 with NYCHA Section 8 vouchers. So, they have
10 navigators to help them to exit shelter. So,
11 navigating to help them to seek permanent housing,
12 and so there's lots of work happening there so that
13 we could help them to get out. So, that's our two-
14 part of that Housing Forward initiative that's
15 happening within the Administration.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I would also say that
17 you should plug in that we have as a Council voted
18 out a number of land use projects that would make
19 available a set-aside for homeless families, and the
20 faster they're able to finance those, the faster you
21 get to your goal of 2030. Just saying. Regarding
22 the asylum-seekers families with children, Documented
23 [sic] has reported that a number of families staying
24 at WIN shelters received notices ordering them to
25 transfer to another shelter within 24 to 48 hours.

1
2 Do you know anything about that and how many families
3 have in total have been asked to transfer?

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, Council
5 Member, since 22 when the crisis started, initially
6 because we didn't realize how big this was going to
7 happen, we were placing asylum-seeking families into
8 a regular system, right, just-- and so that was
9 started. And then we started to open asylum-seeker
10 sanctuary sites. We just started to open those. And
11 so since 2022 we have been transferring families into
12 these particular sites really dedicated to get-- you
13 know, pay attention and get their services
14 [inaudible] to that. Early today, mom talked about
15 she'd been in a shelter, that that had not happened.
16 So what we want to do is to have families kind of
17 geared to that, because in a tier two that's not what
18 our expertise has been, right? We're a regular tier
19 two. I mean, I work in a tier two shelter. That is
20 not my expertise, I can tell you that. That's not--
21 we're all learning, but that's not what we're experts
22 at. And so we have been transporting families to
23 that. So, I don't have a number of that, but I do
24 know, you know, 24 hours is not the right time. We
25 should really be planned for-- and we should have

1
2 been 48 hours, should have been in the right
3 language. I'm not so sure what happened there. And so
4 that is something that we have been doing. We've
5 talked about just making sure that we're getting these
6 asylum-seeking families in a place where they can get
7 those services. I am going to follow up after this,
8 because I don't know what happened, mom that was
9 talking about when she gets to this place. I'm going
10 to-- I was texting during that testimony. I'm like,
11 okay, I need to follow up on that one. But this is
12 something that we've been doing. This is not
13 something that's been-- that we'd started. So I know
14 that that did happen, but it's something we have been
15 doing since we started this, because we really wanted
16 to get the appropriate service that's geared towards
17 asylum-seeker so that they can get, you know, what
18 they need to do and get resettled and get their
19 services and get them working-- you know, opportunity
20 to go to work, right? That's what I want us to be
21 able to do. So this is something that we have been
22 doing throughout, and we've talked about this.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I'm assuming
24 that if WIN did this, it was under the advisement of
25 DHS? I mean,--

1 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing]
2
3 Pardon me, I missed your question, Council Member.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They would-- WIN
5 wouldn't just decide arbitrarily that they're going
6 to send folks--

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] No.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: from, you know, from
9 their site--

10 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] This
11 is--

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: somewhere else, so
13 they must have been given a directive.

14 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: This is DHS,
15 right. We, DHS, you know, WIN is our contracted
16 provider.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

18 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, we do-- we are
19 the transferring-- we make the transfers, right, so
20 we say yes, transfer. And we should have done the
21 48-hour notice, but we have been moving families from
22 the tier twos to really have them all in a dedicated--
23 - a site that's dedicated to get the services that
24 they need for the asylum-seekers. We've been doing
25 that throughout our system to really have-- because

1
2 we now have two separate systems, right? We have the
3 DHS regular New Yorker system, and now we have the
4 CMT, the Crisis Management System which is what we
5 call it. Right? They're all under one leadership,
6 but I have a dedicated line this way with staff
7 that's now-- because it got so big. I didn't think
8 we've had 162, now 160 shelters. I never-- we never
9 thought that. And now because it got so huge, we had
10 to really make a whole arm that manages that. And so
11 that's what we were moving, you know families to do
12 that. We've been doing that throughout. This one,
13 you know, 24-hour transfer notice is for emergencies,
14 and it wasn't an emergency. So, we will follow-- you
15 know, we have since corrected that. And so I will
16 follow up on what happened with this particular--

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know in
18 general how many families were asked to transfer? I
19 mean, I'm assuming again, that this is not just WIN,
20 that this is-- this extends far beyond.

21 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I don't, because
22 what we find that-- you know, we don't track it like
23 that because if I tracked by country of origin, we
24 are concerned about privacy, right? Because if I
25 tracked by council--

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] No, but
3 I don't-- I didn't ask that. I asked how many
4 families in total have been asked to transfer. I
5 don't-- I don't--

6 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] I
7 don't have--

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] And I
9 would like to know also from how many different
10 shelters. Yeah, I don't--

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] I
12 will-- I will-- let me get back to you on that one.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I appreciate
14 that. According to DHS asylum-seekers census as of
15 June 2nd, there were 8,692 asylum-seeking families
16 with children in DHS shelters, inclusive of 10,239
17 school-aged children. How are the particular needs
18 of asylum-seeking children including language access,
19 mental health support, trauma-informed care handled?

20 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, the
21 educational needs, we work with the Department of
22 Education, right. The same way that we have DOE at
23 our-- who rotate through our regular DHS shelters, we
24 have that same connection with DOE. So they're
25 coming through, you know, to our-- our asylum-seeking

1
2 shelters, right? So when we opened those shelters,
3 DOE does [inaudible] that we've opened those
4 shelters, and then they're coming on site to really
5 make those connections for school. There are
6 interpreters available. We are-- at our asylum-
7 seeking sites, if there's no language, people don't
8 speak the same language, we're really pushing to make
9 sure that we have people how speak the language on
10 site at these shelters, and we've done pretty good
11 in-- you know, good enough in making sure that we
12 have the language access, but we do use Language Line
13 if needed. We have ASL if needed. I know there are
14 wait time for language access is about eight seconds
15 we found in 2023. So there's no real wait for that
16 at this point. So, and we give referrals. H+H do--
17 we use H+H's system to refer if we need to, and so
18 we've made supports for all of our families, not just
19 in the asylum-seeker part of our system, but in our
20 entire system.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Now, you
22 reminded me. I would really appreciate it if when
23 you were looking into the 24-hour issue where folks
24 were being transferred out, if whatever documentation
25 they filled out was in their native language, because

1
2 I don't want to have to-- I would love to get to the
3 bottom of that without having to FOIL that, because I
4 find that highly problematic that folks are-- if in
5 fact they are being provided with documents that are
6 not in their native language and they're signing
7 stuff, that essentially gives away their rights They
8 need to know that. And you know, there's no excuse
9 for not ensuring that that's the case. So, if you
10 could just add that to the list of things that you're
11 going to get back.

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, let me just
13 say that we, DHS, we have 12 languages, right? So we
14 should be making sure, and we'll follow up also,
15 Council Member, that we're using-- we're making sure
16 that we're giving forms in the language of people's
17 choice. And so absolutely we'll follow up on that
18 one.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Look, I think you guys
20 have done the best that you can. However, I do think
21 that, you know, when history retells this story that,
22 you know, we're not going to be in the best position
23 to be able to explain away how we displaced, you
24 know, so many children who came in here innocently
25 without consenting, without you know, so much as--

1
2 you know, saying a word, you know, giving any
3 consent. And we are taking them-- and this is my--
4 this is-- and you know, and again it's not a critique
5 of DHS, because I understand that you also have to
6 follow rules that are set by individuals that have no
7 lived experience with, you know, any of this. The
8 fact that we're moving families with children out of
9 settings that would allow them a level of stability,
10 and then moving them into, you know, inappropriate I
11 would say settings in hotels, and you know, HERRCs
12 where they're now subject to 30 and 60-day so that
13 we're bypassing our right to shelter laws is to me
14 problematic. And I just-- I feel really badly for
15 these children, because I believe her when she says
16 to me that the children are getting sick off of the
17 food. I believe that. I've seen it. I've seen
18 people come and testify before our hearings in the
19 past few months. I mean, I had a gentleman come and
20 bring me breakfast. His breakfast consisted of a
21 yogurt with raisins. So, you know, I've learned to
22 ask more detailed questions, because when I ask, you
23 know, are people being fed, and I'm told yeah,
24 they're given-- they're provided with breakfast,
25 lunch and dinner, it never occurred to me to ask,

1 well is the dinner that they're being provided the
2 same day after day? Is it culturally-relevant? Is
3 it warm enough? Is anybody checking into it to
4 ensure that it was-- it didn't expire? And these are
5 real things that people are living through, right?
6 And then we are seeing also as a result of that, that
7 people are one, not eating, not getting enough
8 nutritional, you know, contents of food throughout
9 the day, but then there's also a lot of waste, right,
10 because folks are refusing to eat the food. And I
11 have a mother that sits in front of a store every day
12 with her children and refuses-- she says that the
13 last time she ended up in the emergency room with her
14 son with food poisoning, and so she sits in front of
15 the dollar store and she begs people for not money
16 but for food for her kids, and that's heart-breaking.
17 Because if she was the exception and not the rule,
18 then I-- you know, it's sad, but the fact that she is
19 part of the rule is to me an indication of how badly
20 we are failing these children. And regardless of
21 whatever people may think of the adults that are
22 making the decisions and are, you know, migrating
23 here for whatever their own personal reasons are,
24 these children are innocent and they are being, you
25

1
2 know, re-traumatized every single time that we're
3 forcing them to leave a school, every single time
4 that we're forcing them to leave a place that they
5 now call home, every single time that they think that
6 they're going to have to sleep on the street because
7 they don't have anywhere else to go, because nobody
8 did their due diligence to ensure that they had a
9 place to go and just assumed that they may. So now,
10 they have to continuously rotate through the system.
11 I don't-- I can't justify that. And I just have to
12 say that because I don't-- I want to be able to sleep
13 at night and feel like I was complicit in a system
14 that allow these injustices to happen. I'm a mother.
15 My mother struggled with us as we were, you know,
16 growing up. We were, you know, very poor. We were in
17 shelter. The tier two that we lived in is on Houston
18 and Columbia, still there. We moved in when it was
19 brand new, and I remember what that felt like as a
20 child. And I just-- you know, whatever the politics
21 and the reasoning and the money and-- there's no
22 justification for putting young children out on the
23 street. You know, and even in the adults, with the
24 adult migrants, I get it. it's a-- you know, we may
25 look at that a little bit differently, but I worked

1
2 with a migrant-- with two migrant young men, and it
3 took me months to be able to get them an ID to be
4 able to get them an attorney that they could see so
5 that they could start their paperwork so that they
6 can get their working papers. So it's a process that
7 should be started on day one, right, so that then
8 we're at least ensuring that they're exiting with the
9 resources that they need to be successful in that
10 journey, right, that we keep hearing about. SO, you
11 know, I just had to say that. I sorry that I
12 regurgitating that on you, but--

13 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] I
14 know. I know you-- you said a lot, but could I just--
15 -

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Yeah, I
17 know. I know.

18 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: You know, I think
19 there's-- I mean, one of the things that's important
20 to me, and I like you was very poor, and was
21 [inaudible] and lived tripled up, a mom with DV, and
22 you know, on the ledge of coming into shelter, but my
23 aunt saved us. So, you know, I feel that I do this
24 work because I connect with the humans that we work
25 for. So, you know, I understand where you're coming

1 from, and I understand that piece of it. I
2 understand how hard it is to work in this space, and
3 so we-- and on to my leadership, and I've been here
4 for a long time, right? So, this is my 28th year
5 sitting in DHS, right? So, I stayed because I loved
6 the work and I do, and I want work-- you know, my
7 folks hear me talk about raising the bar on services.
8 And so, one of the things that's important to know
9 that we're really-- and the food issue really focus
10 and how do we-- what do we need to do about food and
11 really focus on that. We have a nutritionist and my
12 medical director who are really paying attention to,
13 you know, looking at that food and the food service
14 and what we need to that. So, that's something that
15 we're working on. I'm aware of that, and we had a
16 whole meeting yesterday and thinking about that. So,
17 we're working on that. In terms of, you know, the
18 DHS and the 60-day rule, that is not-- we're
19 evaluating that that's not something that's happening
20 here, and so those families are not going to be moved
21 or transferred within DHS. We want on the beginning
22 whether it's DHS system or asylum system within DHS
23 to be thinking about exit strategy. We want to be
24 thinking about asylum-seekers. How do we get them
25

1
2 their legal services so they can actually get to work
3 and not depend on, you know, the system? I heard the
4 mom say it, we just want to work, right? I'm an
5 immigrant. My mom came, you know, legally, right?
6 She just wanted to work so I understand that. She
7 just wanted to work. so, for me, it's trying to
8 figure out how do we just get them to work and how do
9 we get the services, not just sit in a tier two for a
10 year and a half and not to get those services met.
11 But how do we really help people when they come here,
12 children who come through no fault of their own? Me,
13 who was saved, through no fault of my own, because
14 domestic violence, right? And I was saved-- no body
15 saved those children. That's our job to do that, and
16 I want to make sure we get, you know, get those
17 services so children can be saved, too. So, we're on
18 the same page. And so, you know, we are
19 systematically-- you know, there's-- like I said
20 earlier, there's more work for us to do, but we're
21 striving to get there. And it may seem that, you
22 know, we're taking those steps, and we are taking
23 those steps and we're thinking about ways to make it
24 a little bit better every single day, right. So I
25 will, you know, look at what happened. Notices need

1
2 to be, right, in the language that people speaking. I
3 mean, I speak English barely sometimes. People
4 hardly understand because of my accent, so I know.
5 People who don't speak English, it's even harder,
6 right? So, I understand we need to make sure that
7 we're sharing information and the way people speaking
8 that they understand what we're saying to them and
9 that we get their needs met. So, you and I are on
10 the same page, and so we'll [inaudible].

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, I believe that.
12 Can you just tell me what-- I mean, I think you heard
13 also testimony from young women about the transfer
14 situation in schools and how difficult that is. And
15 actually, the mother that I was referencing to that
16 sits in front of the dollar store, you know, she says
17 that her kids have transferred out of school at least
18 three times, you know, in this school year, and it's
19 been horrible for them because they have friends in
20 school. They have teachers that they learn to care
21 for, and then they have to leave those environments
22 as well. So what kind of coordination is taking
23 place between DHS and the DOE in advance of these
24 types of shelter transfers and shelter closings to
25 ensure that children aren't missing school days or

1
2 having to transfer to a new school for example in May
3 or June, and similarly when DHS intends to close a
4 shelter, why can't DHS wait until the end of school
5 year to do so in order to not cause the children to
6 be absent from school, transfer out in a year?

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, for children
8 we-- when there's a need to transfer, typically we're
9 trying to transfer within the borough where the
10 children go to school, and the parents have their
11 choice whether or not they're going to transfer their
12 children, you know, if they choose not to. They
13 don't have to, and then the DOE and Office of Pupil
14 Transportation to do busing for the younger ones. As
15 much as we can, if we have to close a shelter, a
16 hotel, because for a variety of reasons, sometimes
17 the hotel wants us to leave, and they may want us to
18 leave and don't want us to say until the end of
19 school year, right? There's just some reality. They
20 want us to leave now. As much as we can, if they
21 want us to leave, we're trying to push to the end of
22 the school year, end of June, to do that to make that
23 a seamless closing as much as possible. There are
24 times when that doesn't happen, but we do coordinate--
25 - DOE coordinates with the family to let them-- you

1
2 know, have that opportunity to make that choice if
3 they need, but we're trying to transfer within the
4 borough where the child does go to school. So that
5 is something that we try to do, so they don't have to
6 leave the borough of the youngest child's school.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I mean, it's
8 still happening, though. And what do you mean, if a
9 hotel asks DHS to exit, aren't there contracts that
10 are signed for a specific amount of time?

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Sometimes.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sounds very
13 spontaneous.

14 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Sometimes there's
15 a reason the hotel may not want to extend the
16 contract, right? You know, a contract ends. They
17 decide that they could do better business than us.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, hopefully you
19 don't-- we're not entering into many more contracts,
20 but--

21 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing]
22 Hopefully, not.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [inaudible] We've
24 learned to maybe, when there are families with
25 children, to extend them through the end of June.

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Until the end of
3 June, yes, and hopefully we can get real tier two's
4 and we can get open sites and not have to use hotels.
5 So, you know, I'm hopeful that we can get tier two's,
6 because you know, we don't want to have to use
7 hotels, and just-- you know, surging has happened,
8 right? We've had to open hotels which we were very
9 excited when we didn't have to, but right now we do.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I got that. So, the-
11 - I'm going to move to PATH intake shelters. So the
12 eligibility rate at PATH for families with children,
13 or the proportion of families with children
14 applicants found eligible has consistently been under
15 60 percent since 2017. Do you know the main reason
16 for denial or why families with children were found
17 ineligible in fiscal year 23 and 24?

18 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Primarily,
19 families-- you know, it is for us, it is because of
20 the state law. We follow the state regulations,
21 regulatory compliance. We comply with them.
22 Families have to cooperate with the investigation.
23 There may be another housing option. Sometimes it is
24 because-- primarily, those are the two reasons why
25 families are found ineligible. They didn't cooperate

1
2 with housing, with the investigation or there's
3 another housing options. Those are the two reasons
4 why folks are found ineligible.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Who determines that
6 the housing option is viable?

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, let me just
8 kind of take a step back and kind of walk you through
9 the process a little bit. When families are placed
10 in the conditional placement, they have met with a
11 family worker and they do present a two-year housing
12 history. Our field specialists do meet with the
13 placement, the friends and families they've resided
14 with. They do go to the homes. They do meet and
15 they do investigate. They do go to the houses, and
16 if there's adequate space and there's no domestic
17 violence and hater's no risk of violence in the home,
18 they could be a viable housing option, right? It is
19 space and safety that is viable.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And does DHS work
21 with-- let's say you find somebody ineligible. You
22 send them back to maybe their mother's house. They
23 obviously-- maybe they're overcrowded. Maybe there
24 are other issues in the household. Does DHS then
25

1
2 refer that individual to another program that can
3 help identify housing?

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: If it's
5 overcrowded and it doesn't meet the-- if it's
6 overcrowded and we determine it's overcrowded, we're
7 not going to be-- it's not going to be viable,
8 right? So, our field specialist follow the
9 regulations of what OTDA says is overcrowded
10 standards, right? So, if it's overcrowded and its
11 standard as what overcrowded is, then it's not
12 viable. So they are standards that we do follow
13 based on what the regs say, and those are determine--
14 those make the determinations for viable or not
15 viable.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright.

17 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: If there's
18 domestic violence in the home, if there's family
19 violence in the home, intimate partner violence in
20 the home, they're not-- those housing options are not
21 viable. They're not suitable.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, so regarding
23 the-- you mentioned the two-year look-back at
24 previous housing, what's support is provided to
25 applicants in obtaining, you know, the evidence that

1
2 they need specifically for people who may have
3 difficulty getting acceptable proof or such as those
4 who are previously unsheltered?

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: The-- our staff do
6 help with that, as well as if you're unsheltered. We
7 do get-- we will talk to-- if they're unsheltered on
8 the street, we'll talk to store-keepers. Our
9 outreach teams can verify that a person was
10 unsheltered on the street. That's typically on the
11 adult family side. Families are not-- we don't see
12 families with children unsheltered on the streets.
13 That's not something-- we don't see that. I could
14 say that in my time at PATH or even here, that that's
15 something that we're seeing, unsheltered families on
16 the street. But our field specialists and the staff
17 at PATH do help with that. That's some of the things
18 that we're charged with to really help support. If a
19 family has been in a hospital and they miss-- we do
20 find-- we're supposed to help do that. You just
21 can't say it's on you and you don't do it. We're
22 supposed to help the family with that information to
23 help to get [inaudible].

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, recently I
25 learned that there was a pilot program at some-- I

1
2 don't know, maybe nine shelters-- that would pay
3 \$4,000 to migrant families that could-- that maybe
4 have family in Texas, if they could relocate there,
5 and then there was some other type of monit-- I think
6 it was like a gift card or something like that that
7 they would be provided. When-- assuming that a
8 family receives, you know, that payout and they leave
9 the system and they go to Texas and it doesn't work
10 out, and they end up back in New York City, are they
11 no longer eligible for--

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] We
13 can't turn you away. It's [inaudible] asylum move-
14 out assistance pilot.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

16 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yes. If we help
17 you through that pilot and you move out, we hope you
18 do not return, but if you return, I'm not going to
19 say to you, Joslyn Carter, you know, we gave you--
20 and you can't come in, right? We have to honor that
21 person if they need a unit, need a bed.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And I'll just
23 go through this really quickly, because I know we
24 want to get you out of here. But PATH clients, they
25 can request a fair hearing if they feel that they've

1
2 been unfairly denied. How many fair hearings were
3 held in fiscal year 23 and 24, and what were the
4 outcomes of these hearings?

5 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, one of the
6 things is that we get our results from OTDA for fair
7 hearings. Unfortunately, they don't break it out by
8 families with children, single adults, or adult
9 families. I don't have families with children by
10 itself. I don't know if I could parse that out
11 because it comes from OTDA. So, I don't have
12 families with children fair hearing information,
13 because OTDA just sends us-- the state does our fair
14 hearings. So, I don't have the families with
15 children fair hearing results.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So you know the
17 amount of hearings that were held, but you don't--
18 you can't make the distinction of whether or not--

19 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] Of
20 who is families-- which ones are families with
21 children.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright, do you know
23 how many fair hearings were held in general?

24 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I don't have that.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you get that to
3 us? Reporting from the Institute of Children and
4 Poverty and Homelessness on PATH intake processes
5 noted that anecdotally client characteristics such as
6 English proficiency, assertiveness, and educational
7 level play a role in eligibility determinations.
8 What training is given to DHS staff undertaking these
9 investigations to ensure that all clients are
10 receiving the same level of clarity, information and
11 support, and what training is provided to ensure that
12 staff avoid unconscious bias?

13 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: So, we believe--
14 we strongly in trauma-informed care, right, and
15 making sure that we are meeting the family where they
16 are. That's important to me. You know, I always see
17 myself in these families. And so we train staff. We
18 have monthly training with all of our staff. We have
19 monthly training in how we're engaging our families.
20 We have-- you know, it's from top down. Every person
21 that are in those trainings recognizing unconscious
22 bias. We have our-- from our training area, Training
23 Department, we have training that happens at PATH and
24 then I have a training at DSS, Department of Social
25 Services area that does training. So, they're doing

1
2 training for us also just to make sure that we have
3 staff that's aware of what's happening for
4 themselves. So that does happen at DSS for the
5 entire agency.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is there a place
7 where folks can make a complaint if they feel like
8 they've been mistreated or-- I mean, I think--

9 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] At
10 PATH?

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I don't know how you
12 do it, because you know, doing-- providing social
13 services is very difficult and the burnout rate is
14 really high, you know, usually at DSS and DHS. The
15 retention rates are pretty high. Most folks that I
16 speak to have been there for over 20 years, which is
17 unheard of, but I have witnessed interactions, right,
18 between some workers and clients that are a bit
19 harsh, right? And I think that with time people
20 become desensitized, and so we want to make sure that
21 that's not happening or that at least we're
22 recognizing it when it does. And allowing that
23 individual, you know, of an opportunity to kind of
24 reassess whether or not this is something that they
25

1
2 want to continue to do. Is that part of the
3 training?

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: It is. But let me
5 just step back a little bit. That's-- one of the
6 things that's important for us is thinking about
7 staff also. So, when I got to PATH, and you know--
8 I'm going to talk about myself a little. When I got
9 to PATH, the folks in our-- because our folks stay,
10 like you said. Our folks on the front line had been
11 there for a long time, and so one of the things that
12 I started to institute was pulling them off the front
13 line, and having them come upstairs for some training
14 and have managers work that front line, right, to
15 give them opportunity to kind of talk about what's
16 happening for them, because what I always say to this
17 is I recognize where clients are coming from. You
18 know, what's happening with them and what they're
19 giving to you is not-- don't take it personally.
20 They've been through trauma, right? And so you're
21 getting secondary trauma, so what happens to you?
22 So, then I-- so what I have now-- and I am still a
23 licensed social worker-- is having the personnel who
24 is in charged-- first it was Ms. White who was also
25 licensed, and now putting a social worker in that

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2 role prior to me was an attorney. nothing against
3 attorneys, but-- but you know, we want to put people
4 who have some kind of, you know, clinical training to
5 pull folks off the lien and have them kind of talk
6 about how they're feeling, right? And we always
7 thinking about families and who's coming in, but--
8 right. So what we do now is pull folks off so that
9 we can actually hear how they're doing because we
10 want to also recognize how hard this job is, right?
11 This is a hard job. And so that is happening, right?
12 So that's one of the things. But you asked me about
13 complaints at PATH. So, we do have a dedicated
14 complaints line that clients can call. That, we have
15 posted up, and if clients call 311 and talk about how
16 bad we're doing at PATH, hopefully they don't do
17 that, but if they do it get routed to the same
18 complaint line. Then they [inaudible], right? So
19 there's multiple ways that our clients, our families,
20 can complain and can leave kind of hopefully good
21 things about us to, and it's addressed. Depending on
22 the severity of what the complaint is really depends
23 -- it really will tell us who is going to respond to
24 that. So, those numbers are posted up. So we want
25 to make sure that we get an opportunity. On the

1
2 floors at PATH now we have as you come off the
3 elevators, those-- you've been there. So when you
4 come off those, you know, counters are staffed now,
5 right? So, we want people when they come out to have
6 somebody to talk to. I'm now making sure people are
7 on those floors asking questions, getting-- people
8 getting their answers met, their questions answered,
9 and if there's something happening, they can find a
10 person to talk to so that they don't leave-- we don't
11 have the questions answered. And so there are
12 multiple places, multiple touch-points that we've put
13 in place now. And we-- you know, sometimes you don't
14 do it right, but I want to make sure that if we know
15 that we can, you know, fix it. And so we have posted
16 the numbers up. Staff is on the floor. I don't want
17 staff just in offices. I don't want a seventh [sic]
18 floor with people. I want people downstairs on the
19 floors, right, just kind of roaming the building. So
20 that's how we're changing the culture there. But I
21 also want to recognize how hard the job is. You
22 know, we stay and we stay because we love the job,
23 right? People who come in, I always say, you choose
24 to work here, I love you, but you choose to work here

1
2 because there's something about you. That's why, you
3 know, our staff stays.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Certainly not for the
5 money.

6 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Certainly not for
7 the money, you're right about that.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, I said-- it's
9 important assessment I have too, maybe. I go through
10 this with my staff all of the time, too, because we--
11 you know, we get people that come in and sometimes
12 they're-- you know, they're down on their luck or
13 they're just like-- and we're human beings. Like, I--
14 - I already-- I know when I'm ready to step away for
15 a little while, because you know, I get crankier and
16 my fuse is a little bit, you know, shorter, but it's
17 important to kind of be able to kind of regulate
18 yourself and to check yourself right, and under-- and
19 be able to identify like, okay, I need a moment here.
20 I need a break, right? Because I'm worn out and I no
21 longer care, and at that moment you're not helpful to
22 yourself, the agency, or the people that you're
23 representing. My final two questions are regarding
24 the reporting of-- so, City Limits in May reported
25 that over 60 percent of shelter exits were marked as

1
2 unknown in DHS' system. Can you tell us what
3 measures DHS has taken to capture exit outcome from
4 families with children leaving the shelter, what
5 outreach is done to stay connected with those
6 families who were formerly in the shelter system?

7 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: The families as
8 they exit shelter, and most of our exits that we want
9 to happen with subsidies, right? Because those are
10 the ones that we find that stick. When families
11 leave with a subsidy, they don't return to us. The
12 return rate is 0.6, and so they stay out longer.
13 Those are the ones that we're-- some people may stay
14 a little bit longer in shelter because they really
15 need to get themselves much more stable before they
16 leave. Some families come in and leave, just you
17 know, they come in and leave, and that's really--
18 they make their own arrangements. We don't track
19 those families. We really track families who come
20 because, you know, if I decide I'm going to leave, I
21 don't want people just kind of-- you know, I've
22 decided I'm not going to stay, this is not the place
23 for me, and I think people have a right to self-
24 determination if they decided I don't want shelter.
25 And so even if-- we used to have an aftercare program

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2 early on in my career here, and when you call people
3 are like, why are you calling me? Right? So, I want
4 nothing else to do with you, but when people make
5 their own arrangements-- but for a permanent shelter
6 exit which are [inaudible] ready, more than they were
7 last fiscal year, they're the ones that sticking and
8 those are the ones that people are moving to
9 permanency, and those are the ones that we want to
10 have happen. Those who come through front door,
11 develop and exit strategy with our staff, get their
12 vouchers in hand, in hands quickly-- which we made a
13 lot of changes to make sure that happened quickly--
14 get our processing in place, get a key, move home--
15 not to permanency when I speak to families, because I
16 never say I'm moving to permanency. I always say I'm
17 moving home, and then they stay because they're
18 actually move with a voucher. Those are the ones
19 that we want to see. You know, those that make their
20 own arrangement and decide I want to go live with a
21 family or whatever else, I don't track them after.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But 50 percent is a
23 pretty big number, right, and I mean, I would imagine
24 that people are not just walking out like, peace, you
25 know. They're saying to somebody I'm leaving, you

1
2 know, I'm not going to live here anymore, and that
3 that somebody is asking, you know, maybe
4 congratulating them or saying, you know, are you
5 sure? Where are you going? So that folks have an
6 understanding of whether they're leaving because they
7 found something on their own, because they decided to
8 go back to wherever they came from because they got
9 tired of waiting, you know, and just decided it
10 wasn't in their best interest. I think that
11 information is helpful.

12 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, hold on.
13 Could you-- I'm going to have to follow up on that
14 one, Council Member.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, yeah. And
16 then-- the last question. So that same City Limits
17 report noted that only 38 percent of exiting families
18 with children secured permanent housing with a rental
19 voucher. Do you have any insight into why so few
20 families with children are succeeding and utilizing
21 rental vouchers to leave shelter and enter the
22 private market, and what can be done to increase this
23 number?

24 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Well, what I would
25 say to that is families exit with multiple means from

1
2 shelter, right? So not necessarily with just a
3 voucher. We have families who exit using NYCHA, HPD,
4 supportive housing, right? It's a variety of
5 exiting. One size does not fit all in terms of how
6 family leaves us. So, I think that-- and I haven't
7 read City Limits. I'm not so sure. That's why I'm
8 looking at my folks saying I'm not sure about this.
9 But I do know that it's not just vouchering that the-
10 - that families leave us. So there's a variety of
11 means that families leave. So, the City Limits and I
12 have to read it, you know, to be truthful. I do know
13 that families leave with multiple ways to exit
14 shelter. So we have families that are leaving,
15 right? We have, you know, at this point over--
16 almost 5,700 families who have left, which is much
17 more than we have done in the last fiscal year. So
18 they're leaving, right? So if it's 38 percent or
19 whatever the numbers are, I know that they're using
20 different means to exit. So I don't want us to think
21 that every family is using just this one particular
22 means to leave our system, and you know, it's a
23 variety of ways that they are leaving shelter to
24 permanency to go home.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, 30-- then, if my
3 math is correct, the 38 percent is leaving-- of
4 families are leaving with a rental voucher, 50
5 percent we don't know where they went, so then that
6 leaves 12 percent that would have potentially left to
7 a supportive housing unit or something--

8 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: [interposing] I
9 have the numbers. I just have to find it.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: You'll give me a
12 minute.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sure.

14 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Okay. So, so far
15 through April, I have 2,129 non-HPD CityPHEPS, 2,039
16 HPD, 473 NYCHA, 242 supportive housing, and 768 all
17 others. Could be [inaudible] or on their own. So,
18 so far through March 5,651 subsidized exits for
19 children. So almost 5,700 so far exits families with
20 children. Compared to 4,986 for the same period
21 through FY 23, families are exiting.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, that's good.

23 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: And you know, we
24 also have to mention that we're competing with a 1.4
25 percent vacancy rate in New York City. So,--

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CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] I know.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: We're getting families--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] You can make that push to the Administration to [inaudible] all of those housing units that we've already voted for. That would be excellent.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Yeah, we're getting-- we're moving. We're pushing--

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] That would be great.

ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: to get families to exit. That is our, you know, one thing that absolutely have to make sure that as families enter our doors, exit strategies are being developed with the families. So, you can see that result.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that, and I appreciate-- sorry, spilled a little bit of water. I appreciate, you know, all of the work. I know that it isn't easy, and any-- you know, we'll review your feedback on some of the bills, and then I guess, you know, we can work through them and try to get to a place where we build some consensus here,

1
2 and any way that we could also be helpful, you know
3 where to find us.

4 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you so much.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.

6 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We will
8 now be moving over to public testimony, and if you
9 give me a two-minute break. Okay, I now open the
10 hearing for additional public testimony, and I remind
11 members of the public that this is a government
12 proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all
13 times. As such, members of the public shall remain
14 silent at all times. The witness table is reserved
15 for people who wish to testify. No video recording
16 or photography is allowed from the witness table.
17 Further, members of the public may not present audio
18 or video recordings as testimony may be submitted,
19 but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the
20 Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.
21 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill
22 out an appearance card with the Sergeant of Arms and
23 wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
24 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic.
25 If you have a written statement or additional written

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2 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please
3 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant of
4 Arms. You may also email written testimony to
5 testimony@council.nyc.gov or other email addresses
6 that-- you know, mine, or the General Welfare staff
7 within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video
8 recordings will not be accepted. We will now call
9 the first panel. Will Watts [sp?], Deborah Berkman,
10 and Doctor Rivera. You may begin whichever one of
11 you wants to go first.

12 DR. XELLEX RIVERA: Thank you, Chair
13 Diana Ayala and the members of the General Welfare
14 Committee, for this opportunity to testify at today's
15 hearing. I'm Doctor Xellex Rivera, also known as
16 Doctor X. It's easier, right? Chief Program Officer
17 at Housing Solutions of New York. Housing Solution
18 of New York is committed to ending homelessness in
19 New York City. We accomplish our mission by
20 delivering essential support services as well as
21 creating holistic paths to employment and stability
22 so that individuals and families experiencing
23 homelessness can secure and retain safe, clean,
24 affordable permanent housing. HSNY offers emergency
25 transitional housing and support services with over

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2 20 facilities in New York City through Department of
3 Homeless Services. In FY 23, 75 percent of my
4 facilities, 15 out of 20, are emergency housing
5 facilities that service families with children which
6 are mostly headed by single women. Thirteen of these
7 families with children facilities are located in the
8 Bronx and two are located in Queens. In the last
9 year, HSNY has serviced 1,050 families with emergency
10 housing and support. We would like to thank Speaker
11 Adrienne Adams and the members of the City Council
12 for their relentless advocacy and efforts to support
13 unhoused New Yorkers. The recent increase in
14 families living in shelter is due largely to the
15 current asylum-seeker crisis which HSNY did partner
16 with the City to address. HSNY has provided shelter
17 for over 3,000 migrants with partnering to open five
18 commercial hotels and working to transfer over to
19 tier two facilities. To this day, two of the
20 Brooklyn sites have transitioned fully to sanctuary
21 sites with the continuing effort to provide resources
22 for the new New Yorkers. Included in this number is
23 over 200 families with children in areas that require
24 two fair zones. Before I run out of time, I do want
25 to indicate that we are in support of Intro 123,

1 Intro 124, and Intro 440, emphasizing the Intro 125,
2 we do agree that the trauma that is imposed at the
3 PATH center does have a lasting ripple effect when
4 they enter the shelter system, and there should be a
5 better way to streamline these services. A lot of
6 the stuff that they collect in PATH, we're not
7 necessarily privy to, and it does delay our ability
8 to then service them when they come on site. I also
9 want to indicate that we at HSNY offer culturally-
10 sensitive food options to our asylees by our food and
11 nutrition program offering pantry bags. Thank you
12 for allowing me to testify.

14 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Should I wait until the
15 clock starts? Good afternoon Deputy Speaker Ayala,
16 Council Members and staff, and thank you so much for
17 the opportunity to submit this testimony. NYLAG
18 overwhelmingly supports all of the bills on today's
19 agenda, and I've written-- I've submitted written
20 testimony expanding on that support. But right now I
21 want to focus on the experience of my new immigrant
22 clients in DHS shelter. First of all, I want to
23 thank you for all the questions that you asked
24 Administrator Carter about the food, about the
25 eligibility process. All of that is really

1 important, but I want to note that when new
2 immigrants are sorted into the DHS shelter system,
3 they are overwhelmingly placed in DHS emergency
4 sanctuary site shelters. And while these shelters
5 are operated by DHS, they lack the supports and
6 resources of the traditional DHS family shelters that
7 non-new immigrants are placed into. We've heard so
8 many stories from our clients that highlight the way
9 that these emergency sanctuary site shelters are
10 deficient. Many clients are not able to enroll their
11 children in school and haven't received help or
12 guidance from the shelter staff, because they don't
13 have a case worker. I have several clients who don't
14 have enough beds to accommodate all the family
15 members in their family. In fact, one NYLAG client
16 family has seven families in a room with only two
17 double beds. And one of the biggest challenges that
18 our clients in the emergency sanctuary site shelters
19 report is that their children can't eat the meals
20 provided. And I was so happy to hear that you have
21 culturally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive food,
22 because that's such an important thing. But also,
23 clients have reported being given food that is still
24 frozen or has visible mold, only being served cold
25

1 foods or being served the same meal several times per
2 day. The majority of our new immigrant clients
3 report that their children experience
4 gastrointestinal distress when they eat the provided
5 meals which has led to the children losing weight,
6 experiencing lightheadedness, headaches, and fatigue.
7 Our team has worked with families whose children are
8 under close medical evaluation due to the symptoms
9 they experience as a result of the food they're
10 provided. Two more points. It's very difficult for
11 families when children have a medical need that has
12 dietary restrictions to obtain a reasonable
13 accommodation, especially when the accommodation
14 needed is access to a kitchen. And particularly with
15 clients who have children on the autism spectrum
16 disorder who have problems with certain textures,
17 that's a huge challenge for them. I also wanted to
18 note that a lot of clients report to us that they
19 have been subject to racist and xenophobic comments
20 and behaviors directed to them by shelter staff, and
21 I've written more about that in my testimony, but our
22 request is that DHS sanctuary sites be funded and
23 supported at the same level of all other families
24 with children sites, and that staff at DHS emergency
25

1 sanctuary sites undergo culturally competency
2 training to ensure that our new neighbors are able to
3 have a safe environment to live in. Thank you very
4 much.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. That's a
7 really good point, and I appreciate all the work you
8 do, and thank you so much for, you know, for the
9 food. It's been an issue, and I-- you know, I hear
10 it from sometimes when we-- some of my colleagues,
11 you know. Have you seen how much food is being
12 thrown out, you know, thrown away in the garbage?
13 And I'm like, have you eaten the same food every day
14 for three months? I mean, I always remember-- this
15 is a funny story. When I was in elementary school
16 they used to serve, there was this fish-- I don't
17 know if any of you went to public elementary school,
18 they serve this fish that had like a layer of cheese
19 underneath it. Oh, my God, it was so good, the bomb.
20 And when I went to junior high school, you know, they
21 didn't have that. They had hamburger every day, so
22 the kids would go across the street, because we could
23 go to the Chinese spot. They used to sell these
24 little doll rice boxes. I'm aging myself. Or we
25 could go to the pizzeria. When we got to high

1 school, we couldn't go outside, so we had to eat the
2 food inside, and they-- I went in the first day, they
3 had that cheese, the fish cheese, and I said, oh my
4 God, thank goodness. I haven't-- day one I had it.
5 Day two I had it. By day three I was done with the
6 fish. I was like, is this every day? Like, it was
7 that or peanut butter and jelly sandwich. You know,
8 so I get it, right? It almost feels like, because
9 we're poor or because we're coming from a certain
10 community we should be grateful that we have
11 something to eat in the first place, and it's just
12 so-- you know, it's just wrong. It's wrong, and I
13 don't want to be in the wrong, you know, side of
14 history when, you know, this story is told about how
15 we handle this situation. So, I really do appreciate
16 your taking the time to recognize that and make those
17 changes, because you know, it does make a difference.
18 Thank you. Thank you. Alright, next panel is Will--
19 is Will Watts here? Will, there you are. Catherine
20 Trepani, and Maya Jasinka. I think you guys don't
21 want [inaudible] people anymore [inaudible]. I mess
22 up everybody's name. You can begin.

24

25

1
2 WILL WATTS: I feel like ladies should go
3 first. My mom and dad would be very upset with me if
4 I didn't say that.

5 CATHERINE TREPANI: I always defer to the
6 Council's order, but I appreciate it Will. Thank
7 you. Thank you, Chair Ayala, for the opportunity to
8 testify today. My name is Catherine Trepani, and I'm
9 the Assistant Vice President for Public Policy at
10 Volunteers of America. We operate five family
11 shelters in the traditional DHS system that serve, I
12 think, 430 families an additional 244 families in the
13 specialized DHS sanctuary system. I have submitted
14 written testimony that's much more detailed, but I
15 want to talk a little bit about family intake. About
16 20 percent of the families in our DHS shelters are in
17 conditional status at any given time. We find the
18 intake process to be very arduous. It was
19 interesting that they said it was faster. Our
20 experience is that our families have to reapply
21 multiple times. We've had some people in conditional
22 status for up to six months, diverting our shelter
23 staff that's supposed to be helping them with
24 permanency to simply establish their eligibility
25 before they're even allowed to begin the path to

1
2 permanency. So, as you're aware, you're not eligible
3 for CityFHEPS or any other rental assistance until
4 you're found eligible. So we have people at our
5 warehouse going back and forth to PATH on this
6 vicious circle for months on end trying to establish
7 their eligibility. So, I want to really thank the
8 Council for your attention to the crisis at intake
9 and all of the bills that you've introduced to make
10 it a much more client-centered process. One word of
11 caution about your bill that would allow children not
12 to be present with the household at PATH. We have a
13 parent that was in our care who sent her children to
14 school. She had no working phone, because she's very
15 low income. When she reapplied to PATH, the process
16 took so many hours that she was unable to pick her
17 children up from school. Our shelter staff knew this
18 mom and we picked her kids up for her and desperately
19 tried to reach her at the PATH center to make sure
20 everything was okay. We called all four numbers that
21 PATH had relentlessly for hours, couldn't reach her.
22 She couldn't reach us. Shift changed. We fed her
23 kids dinner. We took them upstairs. It was after
24 midnight, we finally had to-- we're mandatory
25 reporters, and had to call ACS and Children's

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2 Services because there was nothing we can do, and
3 they removed the children for that night, and when
4 she got off the bus an hour later at one o'clock in
5 the morning to return to her conditional placement
6 with us, her kids were already gone. So, I would
7 strongly encourage, and I know I'm over time, but to
8 please prioritize the other reforms to get that
9 intake system tight and efficient before, you know,--
10 I could not in good conscious tell a parent to
11 separate from their children unless they had ironclad
12 childcare, just because of that--

13 UNIDENTIFIED: [background conversation]

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Excuse me, Zoom, your
15 microphone is on. If you could just please mute
16 yourself. Yeah, I think that the intent of the bill
17 is to kind of give parents an option so that they're
18 not-- they don't feel like they're forced to bring in
19 their children, and if they have, you know, a family
20 member that can stay with the children while they're
21 going through that process, then it's a better
22 alternative than dragging children into the site, but
23 I get that.

24 CATHERINE TREPANI: Yeah, so more detail
25 is in my testimony. I realize I'm over time. but

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2 one other note on the other bill that's regarding
3 services, Intro 440 that would require eligibility
4 specialists, I just want to caution the Council on
5 trying to legislate program budgets outside of the
6 budget process, because what we often find is that
7 it's an unfunded mandate. So, if we were forced to
8 implement this without new dollars, we would just
9 wind up pulling a case manager off to satisfy this
10 requirement. It's actually in that reduction in
11 holistic services. So that would just sort of be an
12 issue, but more details in my written. I'm always
13 happy to talk to you and members of your staff, and I
14 really appreciate your advocacy.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We'll make sure to
16 share that with the sponsor.

17 CATHERINE TREPANI: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

19 MAYA JASINKA: [off mic] [inaudible] and
20 thank you for [inaudible] the opportunity to testify.
21 My name is Maya Jasinka and I'm the Manager of Policy
22 and Advocacy at WIN, the city's largest provider of
23 shelter [inaudible].

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I can hear you, but
25 is your mic on? It is?

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MAYA JASINKA: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, there you go,
yeah.

MAYA JASINKA: We operate 16 shelters in nearly 500 units of supportive housing across the five boroughs, and last night just under 7,000 people called WIN home, including over 3,600 children. Improving the intake experience at PATH is a top policy priority for WIN families according to a recent client survey. WIN families report that the process of applying for shelter at PATH is confusing and grueling, and that workers are insensitive and dehumanizing towards families, and there's more like actual client quotes in my written testimony. Worse, far too many families are found ineligible for shelter the first time they apply, unnecessarily forcing them to miss days of school and work. As one WIN parent told us, you can't keep a job if you keep on going back and forth to PATH. Experiencing homelessness is inherently traumatic, and entering the shelter system should not compound whatever trauma a family has already suffered. We seek policy solutions that simplify the process for a family to prove they need shelter and reduce erroneous denials.

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2 For example, Council should preclude DHS from
3 requiring the presence of children at intake and
4 reduce the housing history requirement from two years
5 to one year. Council should also pass legislation to
6 make the experience of being at PATH less confusing
7 and more humane, such as opening intake sites in more
8 boroughs, hiring navigators who clarify PATH
9 procedures, training PATH employees, and trauma-
10 informed care, and creating appointments to reduce
11 wait times at PATH which would also help with what
12 Catherine testified to. Finally, Council can pass
13 measures to improve the shelter experience for
14 families with children such as requiring public
15 assistance eligibility specialists at shelters, and
16 fully funding and implementing Local Law 35 so that
17 families in shelter have the mental health services
18 they need. Council should not neglect the
19 opportunity to transform PATH into a tool for
20 advancing the citywide goal of ending family
21 homelessness. Thank you.

22 WILL WATTS: Thank you, Deputy Speaker
23 Ayala and other members of the Council, for the
24 opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Will
25 Watts and I'm here on behalf of the Coalition for the

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2 Homeless and our counsel Legal Aid Society. With
3 shelter eligibility rate constantly hovering around
4 40 percent for families with children, the ability to
5 access shelter continues to be one of our top
6 concerns. Take for instance Lisa and her two
7 children who entered a conditional placement in
8 September. Now, three months later she still had not
9 heard anything from PATH about her shelter
10 eligibility or her eligibility for vouchers like
11 CityFHEPs. So, exasperated, she contacted our
12 office, and we learned that even though she had fled
13 her abuser and shared that fact with PATH at intake,
14 she had not been contacted or evaluated by the NoVa
15 office. In fact, upon filing for a fair hearing, she
16 learned that the City was alleging that she had not
17 cooperated with NoVa. So, we advocated for her and
18 finally five months after entering her conditional
19 placement, she was found eligible for shelter and
20 able to move forward with her housing search. But
21 overcoming the hurdle of getting into shelter is just
22 part of the challenge for families with children.
23 Take for instance, Jane, who several months ago was
24 living at a shelter with her two-month-old son who
25 had just been discharged from the NICU with liver and

1 kidney issues. Jane was concerned of that her unit
2 was not safe. You see, there were rats, and Jane
3 feared they might enter her son's crib and hurt him
4 or otherwise jeopardize his fragile health.
5 Compounding this was the lack of heat which was
6 particularly problematic because her son's medication
7 made him more vulnerable to the cold. Jane raised
8 these issues with the shelter several times, and her
9 case worker had even seen the rats in her unit. Yet,
10 the situation remained unchanged until she contacted
11 us and we successfully advocated for her to be
12 transferred, and it only took five days for her to
13 get the transfer once we were involved. So while
14 we're generally-- we generally support the bills
15 introduced today with a few caveats that will be set
16 forth in our written comments, we remain concerned
17 that too many families experience barriers to shelter
18 or unsafe living conditions. No one should be
19 subjected to this, least of all, of course, our
20 children.
21

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you
23 so much for your testimony. We did have some
24 questions about the conditions and the capital needs,
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2 but they were not able to respond to those, so we
3 were not-- we were asked not to ask [inaudible].

4 WILL WATTS: We've just been seeing an
5 increase in the number of conditions.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: OH, yeah, no, yeah,
7 yeah. We hear them all the time. People living with
8 bed bugs and roaches, and you know, mice, and again
9 it's-- they shame you for being poor, right? And
10 like, be happy you have a roof over your head, but
11 thank you so much.

12 WILL WATTS: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The next panel, and
14 I'm sorry if I ruin your name, Chloe Smith and Juan
15 Diaz. You may begin.

16 CHLOE SMITH: Does it work? Okay. Good
17 afternoon members of the Committee and thank you for
18 the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Chloe
19 Smith and as Director of Programs at the Children's
20 Health Fund, I lead CHS Healthy and Ready to Learn
21 Program. Today, we're hearing about ways that New
22 York City can better support families with children
23 in DHS shelters. We're happy to support Councilwoman
24 Ayala and others as they introduce bills that will
25 make life a little less challenging for unstably

1 housed families in New York City. At Healthy and
2 Ready to Learn, we work in schools every day, and we
3 know many of the students and families whose lives
4 will be meaningfully impacted by these bills. We
5 understand that children need to be in school to
6 learn, not at the PATH center. They also need to be
7 able to see the board, hear their teacher to do their
8 best learning. They can't be distracted by hunger
9 from food that is inappropriate for them or for their
10 family, and they can't be distracted by tooth pain
11 and by other challenges. Children and families
12 don't' only need supportive policies, they also need
13 programs, services and other supports that ensure
14 that their health needs are met and that their
15 environments where they live, learn, and play are
16 safe, are connected and provide opportunities for
17 developing strong relationships with caregivers. HRL
18 provides such support. We work with schools and
19 parents to ensure that students are well-positioned
20 to thrive in school. HRL was developed by the
21 Children's Health Fund in 2014 as part of our mission
22 of supporting kids so they can thrive. Through our
23 current model, we leverage findings from our flagship
24 school PS49 in the Bronx and in Councilwoman Diana
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2 Ayala's district, District Eight, to inform materials
3 and training that we conduct with educators and
4 parents citywide through our Resource and Training
5 Center. Launched in 2017, the Resource and Training
6 Center is an online platform that enables Children's
7 Health Fund to scale our impact and reach students
8 throughout New York City. It's HRL.nyc if anyone's
9 interested in sharing it with the families that you
10 work with. With eight seconds left, I just want to
11 say thank you to New York City Council. HRL reaches
12 thousands of families and educators throughout the
13 City every year, giving students the best chance of
14 succeeding in school and life no matter their housing
15 circumstances.

16 JUAN DIAZ: Thank you, Chair Ayala and
17 all members of the Committee on General Welfare, for
18 today's-- today's oversight hearing. My name is Juan
19 Diaz and I'm a Policy Associate at Citizen's
20 Community for Children, also known as CCC, a multi-
21 issue children's advocacy organization. CCC is a
22 [inaudible] of the Family Homeless Coalition, a group
23 of organizations united to end family hunger in New
24 York City. CCC applauds the City Council's efforts
25 to improve the services within DHS shelters.

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2 However, to improve the services, implement new
3 programs and retain staff, we urge the City Council
4 to support in calling the restoration of the Mayor's
5 2.5 percent PEG DHS shelter budget personnel lines
6 cuts. As you know, DHS shelters reduce vacancies and
7 collapse multiple positions into one to meet the
8 Mayor's November's budget cut. We will continue to
9 see service delays, longer shelter waits if the city
10 does not act to fully staff these critical positions.
11 Now, I want to turn to the bills considered today.
12 CCC's happy to know that DHS will no longer require
13 children present at PATH. We strongly support Intro
14 0123 which will codify the reform to eliminate this
15 inhumane practice. We also strongly support the
16 goals of Intro 124 which will provide process
17 navigator services at DHS into shelter center for
18 families with children, and also Intro 440 which will
19 provide-- require Department of Homeless Services to
20 designate eligibility specialists at shelters.
21 However, we urge the City Council to ensure adequate
22 funding if appropriate-- that adequate funding is
23 appropriated to implement these bills, because we're
24 concerned that DHS shelter providers would have to
25 relocate funding and personnel to fulfill these

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2 mandates. Lastly, we support Intro 0453 which would
3 require new shelters and intake shelters, therefore,
4 reducing the time of families that children have to
5 travel across town. Thank you for the opportunity to
6 testify, and I will submit more detailed information.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Were you
8 surprised to hear that DHS says that they don't--
9 that their policy is that you don't have to bring
10 children in? Because I mean, when I go to PATH there
11 are, you know, so many children. They're all over
12 the floor, you know, driving their mother's crazy.

13 JUAN DIAZ: Yeah, and I previously
14 joining-- I work in social services and homeless
15 prevention, and often times, we used to serve
16 families that were residing double [inaudible] and
17 they had to go to PATH, and that was one of their
18 concerns they had to bring their children, take them
19 out of school, wait for long hours, and it's just a
20 traumatic experience for children as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I agree.

22 JUAN DIAZ: As long as they have, you
23 know, childcare as--

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [interposing] Yes,
25 absolutely.

1 JUAN DIAZ: as the Catherine mentioned.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Thank you.

3 Thank you so much. Thank you both. Our next and
4 final panel will be Ibrahim Xavier Johnson and Sharon
5 Brown. You may begin. Just make sure that the light
6 is red.

7
8 IBRAHIM JOHNSON: Yes. My name is
9 Ibrahim Xavier Johnson. I'd like to thank Chair
10 Ayala. I do support the legislation that's proposed.
11 I just want to share briefly my experience at the
12 homeless shelter. I was sent to Bellevue shelter by
13 the VA. I am a veteran, and occasionally I do have
14 issues with homelessness from time to time, and the
15 VA always sends us to the shelter in New York.
16 That's how they do it here. I went to Bellevue
17 shelter. I was well-received. I was impressed.
18 That was the first time at that particular shelter.
19 I was impressed at the way the staff handled the
20 single men. However, there was an African family
21 that came there, a father with two sons, 15 and 16.
22 He was given the runaround because he had documents
23 in French. He was from Burkina Faso which speaks
24 French, and I live in Harlem. There's a lot of
25 people from that country. I would have just sent him

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2 to the mosque. They would have helped him faster,
3 but the worker sent him back to the embassy, and by
4 the way, the embassy is in Washington, D.C. She
5 really meant the consulate. There's a consulate in
6 New York. The embassies are in Washington. He was a
7 little bit confused, but she told him he had to have
8 his birth certificates translated by the Burkina Faso
9 consulate. Now, this is three o'clock in the
10 afternoon, and he's walking around with two teenage
11 boys homeless that were sent to the men's shelter.
12 Now, apart from that, I watched them process a person
13 fresh out of prison. He was processed quickly. I was
14 taken care. I was a veteran. They had a veteran from
15 Florida, came in off the bus from Florida. First day
16 in New York, they sent him right to the shelter. He
17 was okay. They processed a person who had medical
18 difficulties. They helped him. They fed us. They
19 took care of us. I felt safe, and fortunately, a
20 family member found out I was in a homeless shelter
21 in New York City. They sent me a bus ticket to D.C.
22 They said get out of there. But fortunately I was
23 able to solve my problem. And just to wrap up, I
24 think the system works well, but it could work better
25 for families.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that.
3 Thank you. Sharon, can you make sure that your light
4 is on, the red light?

5 SHARON BROWN: Yes, my name is Sharon
6 Brown. I think that the family shelters, they have
7 rooms or apartment-style things for people to go to.
8 When people come into the shelter, they-- some of
9 them have different scenarios why they're there.
10 Everyone doesn't need to go through six months or
11 whatever to qualify for subsidies and things like
12 that. if they come in there and they say they're
13 having an issue with the landlord or something that
14 can be solved by looking for an apartment, why don't
15 they take them into their office and say let's get on
16 the computer and start looking at apartments right
17 now, and then have somebody take them out the same
18 moment and look and see what they have? They have
19 the financing. If I come in and I said I have the
20 financing. I have a job here. I own a company. I
21 have children, they're in certain school. We want to
22 go into this area. We just need you to help us out.
23 Why isn't someone there to direct them directly out?
24 They can go into the shelter house or whatever it is
25 and stay there and lay down and relax until they're

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2 ready to call them. Okay, the first day, second day,
3 the second week, let's go out and look at housing
4 now. Why do they have to wait for six months, a
5 year, and say oh, my gosh, housing, oh my gosh it's
6 so horrible. There are ads full of apartments,
7 house. Why aren't they sending them out to own
8 homes? Why are they only telling them come into a
9 shelter to stay? Why aren't they saying you have all
10 your resources, there's no problems? So let's look
11 and go out on an interview today. Let's call. If I
12 was looking for an apartment, what would I do? Get
13 on the phone. Hello, I want an apartment. Hello, I
14 want a house, and I would go that day. I'm going.
15 Why can't they do that when they go into these
16 places? If the person is prepared, they're having a
17 problem with their landlord or whatever, there should
18 be-- if people who immediately go out and look for
19 housing or all they need is a computer or something
20 like that. It should be something to fast-track
21 certain people.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I know. I know. I
23 agree with you, Sharon. Thank you so much for coming
24 to testify. Really appreciate seeing you.

25 SHARON BROWN: Okay.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Alright. Thank you
3 guys so much. We have now heard from everyone who
4 has signed up to testify. If we have inadvertently
5 missed anyone who would like to testify in person,
6 please visit the Sergeant's table and complete an
7 appearance card now. We are making a final call for
8 Zoom registrants who have not yet spoken. Any? No?
9 Seeing none, okay. If we inadvertently missed anyone
10 would like to testify virtually, please use the raise
11 hand function on Zoom and I will call you in the
12 order of the hands raised. Nope? Seeing no on else,
13 I would like to note that written testimony which
14 will be reviewed in full by committee staff may be
15 submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the
16 close of this hearing by emailing it to
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. With that, this hearing
18 is closed. Thank you.

19 [gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 July 12, 2024