

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON AGING

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April 7, 2021  
Start: 10:21 a.m.  
Recess: 1:23 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 2)

B E F O R E: Alicka Ampry-Samuel  
CHAIRPERSON

Margaret Chin  
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Diana Ayala  
Laurie Cumbo  
Ruben Diaz, Sr.  
Oswald Feliz  
Vanessa Gibson  
Mark Gjonaj  
Carlos Menchaca  
Kevin Riley  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Mark Treyger  
Jimmy Van Bramer  
Selvena Brooks-Powers  
Eric Dinowitz  
Mathieu Eugene  
Paul Vallone  
Chaim Deutsch

Helen Rosenthal

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

John Derek Norvell, Public Housing  
Activist and Resident

Sideya Sherman, Executive Vice President  
for Community Engagement and Partnerships  
NYCHA

Ukah Busgith, Senior Director for Family  
Partnerships  
NYCHA

Sarah Sanchala, Director of Governmental  
Affairs  
Department for the Aging

Michael Bosnick  
Department for the Aging

Merlene Shallow  
Department for the Aging

Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

Beth Williams, Deputy Director of Legal  
Services  
Project Guardianship

Brianna Paden Williams, Communications  
and Policy Associate  
Live On New York

Leo Asen, President  
AARP New York

Molly Krakowski, Senior Director of  
Governmental Affairs  
JASA [sp?]

Suhali Mendez, Senior Advocate  
Disability Justice Program  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Melissa Sklarz, Senior Governmental  
Relations Strategist  
SAGE

Bonnie Lumagui, New York City Resident



1 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE  
ON AGING 6

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning. Will  
3 sergeants please start their recordings?

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Computer recording  
5 rolling.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Recording to the cloud  
7 all set.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. And Sergeant  
10 Biondo, your opening statement?

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes. Good morning and  
12 welcome to today's remote New York City Council  
13 hearing for the committees on Public housing jointly  
14 with the Committee on Aging. At this time, would all  
15 panelists please turn on their video for verification  
16 purposes? To minimize disruptions, we ask you to  
17 please place all electronic devices to vibrate or  
18 silent mode. If you would like to submit testimony,  
19 please send via email to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).  
20 Again, that is testimony@Council.NYC.GOV. Thank you  
21 for your cooperation. Chairs Ampry-Samuel and Chair  
22 Chin, we are ready to begin.

23 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you and  
24 good morning. The hearing is coming order.

25 [GAVEL]

1 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON  
AGING 7

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Good morning  
3 and thank you for coming to today's joint hearing by  
4 the Committee on Public Housing and the Committee on  
5 Aging. I am Council member Alicka Ampry-Samuel and I  
6 chair the Public Housing Committee. Thank you to my  
7 cochair, Council member Chair Margaret Chin, for  
8 making this joint hearing possible on the seniors  
9 aging in place and NYCHA during the pandemic. We are  
10 also joined today by committee members Council member  
11 Reverend Diaz Senior, Council member Treyger, Council  
12 member Menchaca, Council member Riley, Council member  
13 Van Bramer, Council member Salamanca, and Council  
14 member Gjonaj and we are also joined by Council  
15 members Brooks-Powers and Council member Deutsch.  
16 Today, we will have the opportunity to discuss an  
17 important group within the NYCHA community: our  
18 seniors. The Covid 19 pandemic has taken a  
19 disproportionate toll on NYCHA residents and seniors.  
20 Together, that creates a special vulnerability among  
21 our seniors that live in NYCHA. We are here today  
22 because we want to know what the city is doing to  
23 provide NYCHA seniors with resources and services  
24 they need and deserve to ensure their health, safety,  
25 and well-being. The height of the pandemic brought

2 darkness and death that we have never seen in our  
3 lifetimes. We, as a city, got a lot of things wrong  
4 and, from those lessons, we have no excuses to not  
5 get it all right now. I represent the many seniors  
6 who live in my district with pride, whether they live  
7 in public housing, Pvt. housing, Senior only housing  
8 that is not on NYCHA grounds. My seniors are vocal,  
9 they are engaged, and they like to follow the rules.  
10 In fact, some of the rules led to severe isolation  
11 which is where we still feel that are feeling the  
12 effects today. I have heard from many of the seniors  
13 in NYCHA buildings in my district about the  
14 challenges that they have faced during the pandemic,  
15 but I also want to be clear that the burdens NYCHA  
16 seniors have shouldered throughout the pandemic are  
17 not limited to the ones in my district or to anyone  
18 district alone. Our two committees held a joint  
19 hearing on this topic in December 2018, at that time,  
20 it was unclear exactly how NYCHA and DFTA were  
21 coordinating their efforts to meet the unique needs  
22 of seniors in NYCHA developments. And, frankly, we  
23 were not able to get much clarity then. So, now, two  
24 years later, we remain committed to getting answers  
25 and pushing both NYCHA and DFTA to be more



2 transparent and collaborative, working together about  
3 how they are serving lunch is older population. We  
4 are especially interested in hearing about these  
5 efforts, given the new challenges that Covid 19  
6 pandemic has presented. Because of the  
7 disproportionate effect of the virus on older adults,  
8 many of had to shelter at home for the last year.  
9 Many have had poor or no Internet access, limiting  
10 their ability to stay connected with family and loved  
11 ones, and many of had limited access to food,  
12 supplies, and even essential services like heat and  
13 hot water. Additionally, we are looking for updates  
14 on some of the issues that came up at the 2018  
15 hearing. We want to know what is going on with our  
16 senior centers, including update plans to expand them  
17 to senior buildings and developments that still don't  
18 have them or even have standalone centers recognize  
19 that are currently operating without contracts and  
20 funding. We want to know whether the critical  
21 repairs have been made while the centers have been  
22 closed during the pandemic. We will also be hearing  
23 two pieces of legislation that I believe will go a  
24 long way in improving service is for seniors and  
25 NYCHA. Intro number 415, sponsored by Council member

2 Chin will require NYCHA to annually report on senior  
3 centers. I understand this bill was originally  
4 drafted both for DFTA took over the operation of all  
5 senior centers, so with the caveat that the bill  
6 would need to be amended so that the right into to  
7 doing the reporting. We expect to hear testimony on  
8 the merits of the bill. And my bill, Intro number  
9 1827 would establish a liaison to NYCHA within DFTA.  
10 And this would be an important common sense step in  
11 approving the coordination of services between NYCHA  
12 and DFTA. The liaison would be responsible for,  
13 among other things, more clearly delineating roles  
14 and responsibilities between NYCHA and DFTA. For  
15 creating a system for senior residents to submit  
16 comments and complaints about programs and facilities  
17 and to simply be able to identify who and where our  
18 seniors are. So, before I close, I want to thank  
19 committee staff Audrey Sun, José Condi, Sarah Gaslam,  
20 and Ricky Chawla, along with my Council staff Erita  
21 Naomi and Jennifer for all of your hard work to make  
22 this hearing happened. And, with that, I will now  
23 turn it over to my cochair, Council member Chair  
24 Margaret Chin for her opening remarks.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Good morning. I am  
3 Council member Margaret Chin, Chair of the Committee  
4 on aging and I would like to welcome you to today's  
5 joint hearing on seniors aging in place in NYCHA  
6 during a pandemic. I would like to thank Chair  
7 Ampry-Samuel for cochairing this very important  
8 hearing with me. During today's hearing, we will be  
9 discussing what has been done to keep our cities  
10 NYCHA seniors safe and healthy during the Covid 19  
11 pandemic. We expect both DFTA and NYCHA to testify  
12 as to the efforts they have undertaken to reach NYCHA  
13 seniors during the pandemic and offer them critical  
14 services, including a safe place to live. We will  
15 also be hearing testimony on two pieces of  
16 legislation. My cochair has already spoken about the  
17 first one, Intro 1827, which she is sponsoring. The  
18 second piece of legislation, Intro 415, sponsored by  
19 myself. This important legislation would allow us to  
20 get more information about NYCHA, about senior  
21 centers within their buildings. Intro 415 requires  
22 the agency to be part of NYCHA senior centers,  
23 including such information such as complaints filed  
24 with NYCHA and what NYCHA has done to address these  
25 issues. This bill seeks to ensure transparency and

2 accountability surrounding our NYCHA senior centers  
3 and I look forward to hearing testimony on how to  
4 strengthen it. As many of you remember, back in  
5 2018, the Committee on Aging and Public Housing came  
6 together for a joint hearing on senior services and  
7 centers in NYCHA. It was at the hearing that we  
8 learned about some of the troubling realities of our  
9 seniors in NYCHA. We learned, for example, that some  
10 NYCHA seniors have been living in high-rise buildings  
11 where elevators have been broken for months. Some of  
12 these buildings have also have mold, ceilings that  
13 are falling in, peeling paint, heavy leaks, and  
14 rodents. We learned that these terrible conditions  
15 were also prevalent in NYCHA senior centers and  
16 social clubs. At times, many of these facilities  
17 have also lacked proper heat in the winter and proper  
18 airflow in the summer. At the hearing, our seniors  
19 and advocates came forward and spoke the truth. They  
20 demanded change and I want you to know that the  
21 Council is standing with you all in this fight just  
22 as we did three years ago. It is now April 2021. We  
23 are living in a pandemic that has only exasperated  
24 the problem raised in 2018. While life as we know is  
25 changed for everyone in New York City, NYCHA seniors

2 have been hit particularly hard by the virus. In  
3 October 2020, for example, it was reported that  
4 senior and NYCHA buildings with poor ventilation's  
5 were being slammed by Covid 19. At the time, the  
6 infection rate in 22 NYCHA senior developments were  
7 much higher than the rates for the rest of the city.  
8 For example, NYCHA development in the Bronx occupied  
9 mostly by seniors reported a nine percent infection  
10 rate. A senior only development in upper Manhattan  
11 reported eight percent and a senior only housing  
12 development in Brooklyn showed a rate of five  
13 percent. All of these rates were significantly  
14 higher than the city's average infection rate at the  
15 time of only 2.9 percent. This disproportionate  
16 impact on our NYCHA seniors is extremely concerning.  
17 This is why I was pleased to learn about the city's  
18 effort to get seniors living in NYCHA vaccinated.  
19 These efforts have included opening vaccination  
20 centers in NYCHA and conducting outreach to NYCHA  
21 residents to answer questions and help them sign up  
22 for vaccine appointments. However, although I am  
23 happy to hear about these efforts, I am even more  
24 concerned about the results. How many seniors in  
25 NYCHA have been breached by these efforts? And how

2 many seniors have been vaccinated? How has NYCHA and  
3 DFTA been working to make sure are homebound seniors  
4 are being vaccinated? How will both agencies make  
5 sure the vaccination rate among NYCHA residents, and  
6 especially NYCHA seniors, matches the vaccination  
7 rate across all neighborhoods in the city?

8 Additionally, what steps are the administration  
9 taking to address long-standing NYCHA issues like  
10 elevator breakdowns that may be preventing seniors  
11 from going out to receive their vaccinations? With  
12 so many stay-at-home orders being enacted in the past  
13 year, what work has NYCHA been doing to ensure the  
14 senior residents have a safe and sanitary home to  
15 socially distanced and? Before the pandemic, our  
16 seniors were forced to live in apartments with  
17 rodents, mold, and falling ceilings. That was  
18 unacceptable even then and we must know that NYCHA is  
19 doing all that it can to ensure our seniors are not  
20 living in these conditions while they have nowhere  
21 else to go. Finally, while I know we have been  
22 focusing our efforts on protecting our seniors from  
23 the coronavirus, I want to stress that it is equally  
24 important that we protect their mental health and  
25 social well-being. So many of our seniors have been

2 isolated at home for over a year and we are eager to  
3 safely interact with their neighbors and friends  
4 again. I've said this many, many times before and  
5 will keep saying it until it happens: we need to  
6 safely reopen our senior centers. I am looking  
7 forward to hearing about the administration's plan to  
8 do just that. I would like to thank the committee  
9 staff for their help in putting together this  
10 hearing. Our counsel, Musa Tadori, policy analyst  
11 Colima Johnson, finance analyst Daniel Croop, and  
12 finance unit head Dohini Zapora. I would also like  
13 to thank my director of legislation and  
14 communication, Connor Irvin. I would like to thank  
15 the other members of the committee will joined us  
16 today. Now, I will turn it back to Chair Ampry-  
17 Samuel. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you,  
19 Chair Chin. We have also been joined by Majority  
20 Leader Cumbo, Council member Adams, and Council  
21 member Eugene. Before we proceed to opening panels  
22 of our NYCHA residents, I will briefly turn it over  
23 to our committee counsel, Audrey Sun, to go over some  
24 procedural items.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very  
3 much. I am Audrey Sun, counsel to the city councils  
4 Committee on Public Housing. Before we begin, I want  
5 to remind everyone that you will be on mute until you  
6 are called on to testify. Please listen for your  
7 name to be called. When it is your turn, I will call  
8 your name and you will be unmuted. We will now hear  
9 from an opening panel of NYCHA residents followed by  
10 Council member questions, if any. In order to hear  
11 from everyone, the clock will be set to three  
12 minutes. We will now hear from John Derek Norvell.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

14 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Yes. Hello? This  
15 is John Derek Norvell. Can you hear me? No?

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes. We can.

17 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Oh, okay. Yes. I  
18 am a resident of Abraham Lincoln houses and I just  
19 turned 67 about two weeks ago on March 18 and I am  
20 concerned-- I been an advocate for public housing  
21 for quite some time. I had lobbied in DC with the  
22 New York-- National Low Income Housing Coalition. I  
23 was also Guardian ad litem in the courts for seniors  
24 and I also worked for the Division of Human Rights  
25 before my untimely accident, a hit and run victim, I



2 was, in January 2011. I still am an activist for  
3 these issues and I am concerned about, as I told Ms.  
4 Sun yesterday, the problem that we have with our  
5 water being cut off or virtually cut off in the  
6 bathrooms, I mean, it's down to a trickle with the  
7 bathroom sink hot water. In this happened about two  
8 years, I think, before the pandemic. I think the  
9 term they use is aeration. You know, these new  
10 terms. What does that mean? And what happened was  
11 they cut down the level of our water in the bathroom  
12 sink and so, with these issues of washing your hands  
13 and all of this, you know, we just have, you know, a  
14 small stream coming from the hot water and then we  
15 have to wait until the hot water warms up. Last  
16 week, there was a problem with the water and we  
17 didn't have any water at all and the sinks and, when  
18 we did, it was cold for a long while and then,  
19 finally, it heated up. But, without having the hot  
20 water that we used to have and the cold water, I  
21 mean, you wonder how can you-- you know, I mean, we  
22 do our best. We do our best under this virus for the  
23 handwashing and everything else. I wear to  
24 facemasks, I wear a face shield and everything else..  
25 I am very serious about this virus, but these things

2 are done. The cutting down of our water without  
3 consulting us, without asking our opinion or  
4 anything. The same thing happened before when we  
5 used to have the trash compactor's and the burning of  
6 trash done without consulting us and then we had a  
7 rise in rodents and we still have a problem with  
8 rodents and stuff and we have to wait and wait and  
9 wait until we have an exterminator come by and take  
10 care of that issue, in fact. And they were pretty  
11 good exterminators here, but just the services are  
12 very slow, again, because of the pandemic and what  
13 really concerns me is the water and the water issues  
14 and that. And we want our water back like it was. I  
15 mean, I don't know why our water was The way it was  
16 in the bathroom sink in such. And we want the hot  
17 water in the cold water. And, oh, this winter has  
18 been the worst. Every time it's been cold-- and it  
19 has been pretty cold this winter-- we've had  
20 virtually no heat. Very, very little heat at all.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

22 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Order we get all  
23 the heat in the world and it's just as bad. We want  
24 the heat when it is seven degrees, not heat when it's  
25 65. And those are some of the issues that we have.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.

3 If there are any questions from either Chair or  
4 Council members, we will now turn to testimony from  
5 the administration.

6 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: I do have a  
7 question for Mr. Norvell. Is this a current problem  
8 right now with the water pressure? Mr. Norvell?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe he is  
10 currently muted.

11 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Oh. Can you hear  
12 me now?

13 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Yes.

14 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Oh. Well, as I was  
15 saying, we still have the problem-- I don't know if  
16 it is administrative or what-- with the hot water in  
17 the bathroom sink where it is just a small stream.  
18 You know, it's water, but it is a small stream and  
19 when you turn on the cold water or something like  
20 that, nothing happens. I mean it's just a small  
21 stream coming out of the faucet when you turn the hot  
22 water on, it's just a small stream. I mean, you  
23 really-- you have to wash for more than usual just  
24 to make sure that your hands are clean because, you  
25 know, we keep hand sanitizers as well as so and that,

2 but I would just like to know why was our water cut  
3 down without even consulting us or without even  
4 asking us. You know, I am still bothered by that.

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. Thank  
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. I have a question  
8 for Mr. Norvell.

9 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Yes?

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Do you have an active  
11 resident Association IN your development?

12 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Yes. We do. They  
13 are in an apartment building now, you know, on the  
14 first floor and, of course, because of the virus, we  
15 don't have the use of the senior center, but we have  
16 another issue with the senior center. We used to be  
17 able to vote in the senior center and that, too, was  
18 taken away from us. And so, we have to travel about  
19 two blocks down to a school in order to vote and I  
20 can tell you the first time that we were there, he  
21 was not prepared for us. There were nails sticking  
22 up out of the floor. Many of our seniors have  
23 wheelchairs and rollators. I have a rollator. And  
24 we were saying, you know, this place isn't even ready  
25 for us to vote. This was about-- maybe about three

2 or four years ago and we still have to vote at the  
3 school. It's about three blocks down from us. We  
4 lost the voting polling places in our senior center  
5 and I am angry about that, as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, we are going to  
7 have committee counsel staff follow up with you to  
8 get to the bottom of this. I mean, this is  
9 unacceptable that you're not getting information  
10 about why the water service is so-- is a problem.

11 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And they should really  
13 tell you when it is going to be fixed. And not  
14 having heat, that is unacceptable.

15 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Oh. That was  
16 extremely rough this year. It was extremely rough.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, we will follow up  
18 with you to get more details and I hope that the  
19 NYCHA representatives who are at this hearing today  
20 will also follow up with you and your development  
21 because what you are telling us is really  
22 unacceptable. Thank you.

23 JOHN DEREK NORVELL: Thank you very  
24 much.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. If  
3 there are no further questions, we will now turn to  
4 testimony from the administration. A reminder to  
5 Council members to please use the zoom raise hand  
6 function if you would like to ask the administration  
7 any questions. In the interest of time, you will be  
8 set to a clock of five minutes. After we hear from  
9 the administration, we will hear from the remaining  
10 members of the public. I will now administer the  
11 oath to the administration which is represented by  
12 Sideya Sherman and Ukah Busgith from NYCHA and  
13 Merlene Shallow, Michael Bosnick, and Sarah Sanchala  
14 from DFTA who will be available to answer questions.  
15 After I say the oath, I will call each of your names.  
16 Please wait for me to call your name and respond one  
17 by one. Please raise your right hand. Do you affirm  
18 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
19 the truth before this committee and to respond  
20 honestly to Council questions? Sideya Sherman?

21 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ukah Busgith?

23 UKAH BUSGITH: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Merlene Shallow?

25 MERLENE SHALLOW: I do.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Michael Bosnick?

3 MICHAEL BOSNICK: I do.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sarah Sanchala?

5 SARAH SANCHALA: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may  
7 begin when ready.

8 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Chairs Alika  
9 Ampry-Samuel and Chair Chin, members of the  
10 Committees on Public Housing and Aging and other  
11 distinguished members of the city Council, NYCHA  
12 residents, and members of the public, good morning.  
13 I am Sideya Sherman, NYCHA's executive vice president  
14 for community engagement and partnerships. I am  
15 pleased to be joined by Ukah Busgith, the senior  
16 director of NYCHA's family partnership department, as  
17 well as our partners at the New York City Department  
18 for the Aging. Thank you for this opportunity to  
19 discuss NYCHA's efforts to support seniors aging in  
20 place, including during the Covid 19 pandemic, as  
21 that is one of our top priorities. Over the past  
22 year, the coronavirus has brought immeasurable loss  
23 and disruption to our lives, sparing no spot on the  
24 planet. I would like to take a moment to remember  
25 all that we have lost. Every one of us have been

2 deeply affected by the pandemic and it has brought to  
3 light deep inequities and disparities around the  
4 globe related to health, economics, and connectivity.

5 This extraordinary crisis has compelled us to come  
6 together as the world, as a nation, as a city. I

7 have seen remarkable demonstrations of this  
8 cooperation, this perseverance over the past 13

9 months. The resident leaders who organized food

10 drives and PPE distribution and conducted their own

11 informal wellness checks in neighborhoods. The hard-

12 working NYCHA employees that came to work every day

13 when many in the city were sheltering in place to

14 keep the heat on in the elevators running and to keep

15 our buildings clean. The staff in my department who

16 communicated daily with residents and help to

17 coordinate distribution of food and other essentials

18 and to do outreach on Covid 19 testing and now on

19 vaccinations. And that community and government

20 partners who assisted with all these efforts,

21 including members of the city Council. While these

22 challenges are unprecedented, so, too, is the sense

23 of ingenuity, strength, resilience, and community.

24 Throughout the crisis, NYCHA has been following

25 guidance from federal, state, and local experts to



2 ensure our policies and procedures are thorough and  
3 responsive to the rapidly changing environments. The  
4 pandemic has stressed the importance of timely and  
5 accurate information and communication. Since day  
6 one, we have been working nonstop to amplify the  
7 guidance from our partners with in the city of New  
8 York, including the city's health department, to  
9 inform residents and employees of the best health and  
10 safety practices to follow during the pandemic. As  
11 of April 2, we have delivered approximately 4.5  
12 million Covid 19 related communications via Robo  
13 calls, person-to-person calls, emails, mailings, rent  
14 inserts, and other outreach methods to residents and  
15 resident leaders. Section 8 residents, employees,  
16 elected officials, as well as advocates. For our  
17 social media reach up about 47 million, we have  
18 posted about Covid 19 over 1300 times between March  
19 and April of last year to this year, as well as on  
20 all of our social media. Across all of our social  
21 media channels. We dedicated a page to our website  
22 for Covid 19 resources and we have also posted  
23 important information and updates within the NYCHA  
24 Journal which is our digital newspaper for residents.  
25 The Covid 19 safety posters we put out that all of

2 our more than 2200 buildings provide information in  
3 five languages and other information all notices we  
4 distributed were available in 13 languages. During  
5 the pandemic, the hard-working staff from our  
6 community engagement and partnerships team made over  
7 120,000 wellness phone calls to our most vulnerable  
8 residents, including seniors, to make sure they  
9 understood how they can stay safe, determine whether  
10 they had any special needs, and connect them to  
11 resources from DFTA and other partners and we  
12 partnered with New York Cares, volunteer  
13 organization, to provide seniors with anybody who can  
14 make routine phone calls to those requesting regular  
15 checks and other types of assistance. Those calls  
16 are ongoing. We sent a newsletter to more than 230  
17 resident Association leaders two to five days a week  
18 to keep them informed about Covid 19. Our efforts in  
19 key NYCHA and city resources. At the height of the  
20 pandemic, we had almost daily phone calls with the  
21 Chair in the citywide Council of Presidents and spoke  
22 with other resident leaders about two to three times  
23 per week, representing nearly 30,000 calls since the  
24 start of the pandemic. We also posted on 11 resident  
25 advisory board meetings and are hosting monthly

2 webinars for resident leaders with senior NYCHA and  
3 city officials to discuss Covid 19. In November, we  
4 implemented weekly standing meetings with the COP and  
5 NYCHA six executive staff, including Chair Russ. And  
6 we provide elected officials with regular updates,  
7 including a now weekly newsletter specifically for  
8 elected officials and community partners. NYCHA's  
9 intergovernmental relations team has helped nearly  
10 500 external meetings to date to brief elected  
11 officials and staff and other community partners on  
12 the authority of Covid 19 response and needs. And we  
13 respond to inquiries in real time. We have also  
14 posted 18 tele-town halls to provide updates and  
15 guidance to thousands of participants and we are  
16 conducting informational webinars for advocates, as  
17 well as industry groups within their forums. These  
18 communication efforts will continue to ensure that  
19 all of our residents, including seniors, have the  
20 latest information and resources to keep themselves  
21 safe. At the very beginning of the crisis, NYCHA  
22 suspended resident evictions for as long as the city  
23 is under a state of emergency to help our families  
24 stay healthy and housed. In addition, we closed our  
25 offices and adjourned all cases before the housing

2 court. We also simplified our rent hardship policy  
3 to make it easier for residents to apply. And in  
4 only a few weeks, we amended a process that was,  
5 admittedly, burdensome for residents to be able to  
6 benefit from it. Now, with just a few clicks on a  
7 computer or by answering the a few questions with the  
8 customer contact representative, residents can  
9 request a rent adjustment due to partial or full loss  
10 of income. There is no waiting period to apply and  
11 residents self-certified their loss of income. Our  
12 rent hardship policy is a powerful thing about for  
13 families who lost work or due to Covid 19 and the  
14 future of the stabilizing institution. Because our  
15 rent is generally capped at 30 percent of adjusted  
16 gross income. At the end of March, NYCHA decreased  
17 rent for nearly 65,000 families in public housing and  
18 over 6000 in section 8. Since day one, we have been  
19 working with the city agencies and community partners  
20 to connect residents to food, medication, and an  
21 essential health and social services during this  
22 crisis is, including Covid testing, to help keep  
23 residents safe, healthy, and informed. As we now  
24 embark on in unprecedented vaccination efforts, NYCHA  
25 has worked hand-in-hand with the city to ensure NYCHA

2 seniors have access to crucial information and  
3 locally available vaccines. All in January 2021,  
4 NYCHA and the city opened weekend vaccination clinics  
5 at three and national NYCHA developments through  
6 which more than 2000 seniors were vaccinated. Since  
7 then, NYCHA has continued to operate roving pop-ups--  
8 to help operate roving pop up vaccination clinics at  
9 developments throughout the city, reaching a total of  
10 over 60 NYCHA sites so far. I have visited many of  
11 these vaccination clinics and I am proud to say that  
12 they are real signs of hope and renewal after what  
13 has been a long and difficult year. NYCHA works  
14 closely with the on-site DFTA senior center providers  
15 to host and help enroll residents for appointments.  
16 These efforts are a key part of the city's work to  
17 ensure equitable distribution of the Covid 19  
18 vaccine, including by making the vaccine available in  
19 neighborhoods hardest hit by the virus in addressing  
20 vaccine hesitancy at the community level. Of 11  
21 long-term NYCHA vaccination clinics that will serve  
22 communities with high concentrations of NYCHA  
23 housing. These clinics will serve all eligible NYCHA  
24 residents staying open for at least 4 to 18 weeks.  
25 To spread awareness about vaccine clinics and to help

2 residents make appointments, NYCHA continues to  
3 promote the cities vaccine for all campaign the role  
4 of our communication channels. Our outreach efforts  
5 are robust and include flyers, Robo calls, thousands  
6 of person-to-person calls, emails to residents and  
7 social media promotion. NYCHA has also trained key  
8 community engagement and partnerships staff to be  
9 vaccine navigators, integrating vaccine messaging and  
10 resource navigation into routine outreach work. In  
11 partnership with the New York City Department of  
12 Health, we are also hosting community conversations  
13 for NYCHA residents to learn more and ask questions  
14 about the Covid 19 vaccine and on-site vaccination  
15 clinics. Interpretation services are available at  
16 all of these virtual sessions. We also work with our  
17 city and community partners to get the word out and  
18 assist our older and vulnerable-- to get the word  
19 out and assist our older and vulnerable residents.  
20 New York City Health and Hospitals, Testing Tray  
21 staff, and our community engagement partnerships  
22 staff organized door knocking campaigns and  
23 developments and enroll residents for vaccination  
24 appointments through direct phone calls. At the  
25 height of the pandemic, NYCHA in the city worked to

2 enroll all eligible residents in the Get Food New  
3 York City program. We also instituted both food  
4 delivery in many of our senior buildings and hired  
5 residents to assist with the delivery process. NYCHA  
6 also worked with a variety of partners to help  
7 organize pop up food distribution and other targeted  
8 meal delivery programs. We would like to thank all  
9 of our partners, including members of the Council,  
10 for your assistance in these vital efforts. Early in  
11 the pandemic, we installed hand sanitizer dispensers  
12 at all of our senior buildings and to help our  
13 seniors stay cool and safe at home, NYCHA provided  
14 air conditioners to more than 16,000 households last  
15 summer through Mayor Bill de Blasio's heatwave plan  
16 to protect vulnerable New Yorkers. And the city had  
17 provided free tablets and Internet services to more  
18 than 10,300 NYCHA seniors to help them stay connected  
19 to their friends and family, as well as critical  
20 online resource. Thanks to DFTA and Older Adults  
21 Technology Services, or OATS, NYCHA seniors can  
22 connect to the senior plan hotline which is staffed  
23 by OATS certified multilingual trainers for  
24 assistance with technology and accessing beneficial  
25 resources such as how to participate in exercise

2 classes or city Council hearings, order medication or  
3 food or socialize with friends and family online.

4 And nearly 3000 seniors have participated in virtual  
5 trainings, workshop connectivity's from OATS on

6 topics ranging from how to use the zoom and android  
7 to bilingual game nights. Through our partnership,

8 NYCHA connects seniors to a range of supportive and  
9 other services. Our goal is to ensure seniors have

10 access to a quality program and services so they can  
11 each employee safely and gracefully. This has always

12 been our mission and it has continued during the  
13 pandemic. Across our portfolio, NYCHA seniors have

14 access to 108 senior centers in a loving, naturally  
15 occurring retirement community programs operated by

16 settlement houses and other long-standing community-  
17 based organizations. The senior centers provide one-

18 on-one counseling, as well as recreational and  
19 cultural opportunities from the Department of Aging

20 and many other providers. At 11 North sites,  
21 homebound and non-homebound seniors are connected to

22 services and get help with accessing public benefits  
23 and improving their health. Throughout the pandemic,

24 many providers converted to virtual services and  
25 person-to-person calls to keep seniors engaged.



2 Through enhanced services, we have continued to  
3 formalize referral partnerships with local service  
4 providers to offer direct case management and other  
5 assistance to NYCHA residents citywide. Throughout  
6 our HUD funded elderly Safe at Home program, NYCHA  
7 family partnerships staff assists seniors at 17 state  
8 senior only properties to support themselves to live  
9 safely and independently within their homes. Through  
10 the ESAH program, staff provide home visits and  
11 connections to services and crime prevention and  
12 other workshops and they organize volunteer for  
13 captains to facilitate neighbor to neighbor support.  
14 Citywide, our family partnerships [inaudible  
15 00:37:49] referrals submitted by property management  
16 and other NYCHA departments for vulnerable residents  
17 of social, financial, behavioral and/or mental health  
18 could surgeons that placed their tenancy at risk.  
19 Throughout this universally challenging experience,  
20 we remain guided by our top priority, promoting the  
21 health, safety, and quality of life residents,  
22 including seniors. We will continue to share the  
23 latest guidance with our residents and do all we can  
24 do to connect them to lifesaving resources and  
25 services. I, again, would like to thank the Council,

2 the city, the state, and our community partners for  
3 their support which is enabling us to overcome this  
4 pandemic and continued to transform. I would also  
5 like to thank our residents and our resident leaders  
6 who are also out on the front lines of this pandemic  
7 helping to keep their neighbors safe. When this  
8 chapter New York City's history is written, it will  
9 show that community resolve made an incredible  
10 difference in how we surmounted this extraordinary  
11 challenge. We are all in this together and we are  
12 overcoming it together. I would also like to note  
13 that our partners at DFTA who are with us today our  
14 best position to comment on the two pieces of  
15 legislation that are being considered as part of this  
16 hearing. Thank you and we look forward to continuing  
17 to update you when our work and we are happy to  
18 answer any questions that you may have.

19 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you so  
20 much, Ms. Sherman, for your testimony. We have also  
21 been joined by Council member Helen Rosenthal and  
22 Council member Ayala. And because we are hearing  
23 from both NYCHA and DFTA, I want to, in an organized  
24 way, focus my questions to NYCHA in the best way that  
25 I can and be able to go back-and-forth and allow for

2 Chair Chin to be able to address questions to DFTA.

3 So, I'm going to try to make this make sense. So,  
4 first, with NYCHA, can you explain to me or to us who  
5 does what for the seniors that NYCHA exclusively?

6 And I know that, at the end of your testimony, you  
7 mentioned family partnerships. You mentioned family  
8 services and the elder Safe at Home program. But can  
9 you just flush out gesture organizational structure  
10 and explained to us at NYCHA who is working and  
11 focusing exclusively on the seniors?

12 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. Thank you for  
13 your question, Council member. So, when then our  
14 family partnerships department, we have a team that  
15 is focused on serving residents who may be vulnerable  
16 or at risk and, typically, this is connected to the  
17 tenancy. So, we have a citywide team that is  
18 organized at the borough level that responds to  
19 referrals typically from property management, but  
20 they can be external to the agency, as well, where we  
21 would provide support to residents who may be  
22 experiencing behavioral, mental health, or other  
23 challenges. A significant portion of our referrals  
24 are seniors, but there may be other vulnerable  
25 residents. Our role is to assess, provide

2 assistance, case plan for those residents, and then  
3 connect them to the right city agency or the right  
4 partner. In terms of senior activities and cultural  
5 and recreation programs, that work is really led by  
6 the Department for the Aging and that providers who  
7 are on campus. So, as I shared, we have over 100  
8 senior centers over 11 programs across our campus,  
9 and so our role is to really ensure that those  
10 providers are connecting to residents as the primary  
11 source of service. In addition to that, we have,  
12 through grant funding, the ability to staff within  
13 buildings and elderly Safe at Home program. So, this  
14 program has been targeted for 17 properties with an  
15 effort to focus on the properties where there are  
16 service gaps where we have staff who are on site and  
17 provide direct case assistance through this grant  
18 funded program. So, you know, our structure is to  
19 really facilitate coordination and access to  
20 services. We have a network of partners, many of  
21 whom are the DFTA senior centers who are on the  
22 ground. We share information, we promote those  
23 services and connect residents. We intervened in  
24 issues that are typically tied to tenancy or other,  
25 you know, typical landlord issues and provide that

2 social service support. And then, through grant  
3 funded programs, we have staff who are on site at  
4 targeted properties.

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, just for  
6 clarification, you don't have like a certain amount  
7 of social workers, like 10 social workers, who their  
8 exclusive job and duty is to only work on your senior  
9 population? That doesn't exist?

10 SIDEYA SHERMAN: No. I had been, we have  
11 a small team of social workers and clinical social  
12 workers respond to referrals for all vulnerable  
13 residents. Certainly specialized. The significant  
14 number of our referrals are hoarding referrals, for  
15 instance, right, which are typically seniors, but  
16 they are not exclusive to seniors. Based on our  
17 staffing in the capacity that we have in that skill  
18 set within our team, those staff members are  
19 leveraged across our portfolio for residents who are  
20 at risk of all ages.

21 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. Thank  
22 you. And, next, what initiatives did the city  
23 administration create to help seniors and NYCHA  
24 maintain their health during the Covid 19 pandemic?

2 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, during the  
3 pandemic, we worked across all of our city agency  
4 partners to outreach to seniors and other vulnerable  
5 residents. You know, food was a significant need to  
6 that we saw across the city-- and particularly in  
7 NYCHA-- and we partnered with the city to, you know,  
8 have a specific focus on NYCHA within the Get Food  
9 program. So, I'm sure, Council member, you and your  
10 colleagues are familiar with the Get Food program  
11 which offers free at home meal delivery to the  
12 residents. As part of that initiative, we identified  
13 a target of not only enrolling NYCHA residents in the  
14 program for individual meal delivery, but, in  
15 developments where there were high concentrations of  
16 seniors, we also enrolled those developments into a  
17 bulk delivery program that was, in part, managed by  
18 NYCHA where we had staff on board and deliver to  
19 these buildings. In the bulk delivery program,  
20 residents were automatically enrolled in had to opt  
21 out instead of opting in so that we made sure those  
22 resources got to them immediately. In addition, as I  
23 shared in my testimony, NYCHA also was able to  
24 provide over 16,000 air conditioners to residents and  
25 to seniors [inaudible 00:45:04] the pandemic to make

2 sure that they were able to keep cool and stay safe  
3 in their homes. The city also put in place the  
4 tablet distribution program who the chief technology  
5 office, who provided over 10,000 tablets to NYCHA  
6 seniors again said that they can stay connected and  
7 stay safe in their home. The city facilitated  
8 mailing of PPE to every single NYCHA household the  
9 which is inclusive of our seniors. And then, you  
10 know, with our partners at the Department for the  
11 Beijing, we facilitated a number of food  
12 distributions, outreach events, and other types of  
13 activities to ensure that seniors were connected to  
14 city resources.

15 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, question.  
16 How were you able to communicate directly with the  
17 residents themselves? Can you just talk through your  
18 work with the city agencies and communication and  
19 direct like education and even trainings to make sure  
20 that they were connected? Because we read in your  
21 testimony that there were a certain amount of phone  
22 calls that were made, but, you know, phone call is  
23 different from actually landing. Like you can count  
24 for a phone call that was made, but what happened on  
25 the other end? Did the person pick up? And if they

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2 picked up, what was the follow-up? So, can you just  
3 explain--

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: explain that  
6 process.

7 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes, Council member.

8 So, we worked to have a uniform script between NYCHA  
9 and the Department of the Aging for outreach to  
10 seniors so that all seniors, NYCHA residents in  
11 particular, will receive the same information and we  
12 trained a number of our staff in the call script and  
13 the resources that were available within the call  
14 script so that it was a uniform way that seniors were  
15 connected. And I'm sorry. I hope you can hear me,  
16 but there is drilling behind me. I don't know if you  
17 can hear me clearly. So, as I mentioned, we made  
18 over 120,000 calls. Those calls went to 77,000  
19 households, so these are households that had a senior  
20 at least once a year in the household. This also  
21 includes households the maid had a person who is on  
22 life-sustaining equipment or--

23 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Can you go  
24 back to that Sideya? You said he made 100 and what?

25



2 SIDEYA SHERMAN: 127,000 calls to 77,000  
3 households and we had about a 62 percent success rate  
4 with those calls in terms of being able to speak with  
5 someone and get them the information that they are  
6 requesting. We also auto generated mailings to those  
7 seniors as well as the calls and we also worked with  
8 partners on the ground to make calls to seniors. So,  
9 in some developments we were able to have seniors  
10 consent to have NYCHA share their information with  
11 the on-site provider and we were able to provide that  
12 information for seniors for the provider to have  
13 ongoing calls. We also were able to facilitated data  
14 batch WITH DFTA where we were able to identify NYCHA  
15 residents who were already DFTA clients so that we  
16 were not duplicating calls to those residents and we  
17 could better focus our efforts. There was  
18 coordination throughout to make sure that there was  
19 consistently-- consistency and a uniform process.

20 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Is there a  
21 process in place for receiving input and feedback  
22 from the seniors and, if so, what is that process and  
23 what did you do or what do you do with that  
24 information?

2 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, we received  
3 feedback from our staff as a result of calls and  
4 constantly adapted the script based on what we heard  
5 people's needs were. I would say at least each month  
6 there were some adaptations to the script based on  
7 what we were hearing from seniors and what their  
8 needs were at that time. We did not have a formal  
9 survey process for seniors, but we certainly were  
10 able to constantly adapt the script based on  
11 resources that were available are and what we heard  
12 seniors needed. I mean, you know, many of the  
13 seniors we connected to also shared that they had  
14 personal systems of support in place which, you know,  
15 is very encouraging. And so, as we also continued  
16 our calls and outreach efforts, we also gave seniors  
17 an opportunity to opt out of receiving consistent  
18 calls from NYCHA where they were expressing that  
19 they, you know, wanted to do that and were receiving  
20 calls from a number of agencies including NYCHA.

21 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, with that,  
22 as there been a significant decrease in the number of  
23 calls to the seniors because they have, you know,  
24 decided to opt out or because of the change in  
25

2 dynamics, more seniors are getting vaccinated? Do  
3 you see a difference?

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, the initial  
5 call campaign that was really tied to the first wave  
6 and sort of the peaks in the second wave ran March  
7 through September and seniors were identified for a  
8 need for ongoing consistent calls were referred to  
9 DFTA for New York Cares or to a community-based  
10 provider that would offer that. So, those seniors,  
11 for instance, would still be receiving calls.  
12 Somewhere around rolling case management and still  
13 requesting that call. But there were other seniors  
14 who got the information that they needed, expressed  
15 that they wouldn't need further calls and did not  
16 need other supportive services. During the fall, I  
17 will say, however, we also completed a mailing to all  
18 NYCHA households, including seniors, again, sharing  
19 Covid information and emphasizing the cities  
20 messaging around gathering for the holidays. We have  
21 continued to message to those households. But those  
22 requiring ongoing body systems or calls with case  
23 management services were handed off to and connected  
24 to providers.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. We have  
3 also been joined by Council member Koo, so I want to  
4 recognize Council member Koo's attendance. So we  
5 have heard from Mr. Norvell. Mr. John Derek Norvell  
6 and I would like for you to just speak to-- as we  
7 get into questions and I'll end my questions around  
8 maintenance and repairs and then kick it off to  
9 cochair Chin-- so, I would like for you to speak to  
10 what we heard from John Derek Norvell this morning  
11 because, if we are doing wellness checks and we are  
12 making sure that our senior issues are addressed  
13 during a pandemic, it's great to be able to let folks  
14 know about where they can go get tested and, you  
15 know, going downstairs in the center to get a  
16 vaccination, but if you can't wash your hands  
17 properly, you know, what are we doing? And so,  
18 again, can you respond to Mr. Norvell's testimony?  
19 And then I would like to hear about how you are  
20 prioritizing the repair needs and maintenance needs  
21 in our senior buildings.

22 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, yes. I  
23 apologize to Mr. Norvell to what he is experiencing.  
24 So, I'm looking into exactly what is occurring at  
25 Lincoln Houses. I think that is the development that

2 he shared. But, in general, we've had a process  
3 where we have suspended most planned outages during  
4 the pandemic unless there is a critical repair need  
5 and those are going through a chain of approval and  
6 escalated before there is approval given to the  
7 property management or our skilled trades team to  
8 have all water shut down in order to address repair  
9 needs. So, a lot of routine planned schedule outages  
10 that are tied to work have been paused. My  
11 understanding is that Lincoln houses, there is  
12 significant capital projects underway in this water  
13 outage was most likely tied to that work. But we can  
14 get the specifics, however, residents should receive  
15 firsthand and advance notice. If it's an emergency,  
16 they would also receive notice if it happens  
17 unexpectedly and there should also be updates that  
18 are indicating the timeline and the estimated  
19 duration of the outages. For the outages tied to the  
20 capital work at Lincoln houses, my understanding is  
21 that outage was supposed to be four hours. So, we  
22 can certainly check and make sure that we address the  
23 issues that are happening at that development in  
24 particular.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. Thank  
3 you. But I do want to stress that it is not unique  
4 to Lincoln because I know, for a fact, that we have  
5 had a significant number of constituent calls from  
6 other developments in my district and one, in  
7 particular, it is our Brown Houses, which is a senior  
8 only development and they were without water, they  
9 were without hot water and water, in both buildings.  
10 333 Thomas Boyle and 636 St. Mark's for some time in  
11 addition to some other issues in their building. And  
12 so, you know, it is not unique to Lincoln and so I  
13 really did want to know our senior developments are  
14 buildings with a high proportion of vulnerable  
15 residents prioritized all in terms of repairs?

16 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, buildings that have  
17 seniors or [inaudible 00:54:37] with seniors are  
18 typically prioritized for service outages and,  
19 throughout the pandemic, NYCHA has continued to make  
20 emergency repairs and still has 24-hour crew  
21 available. We still have the same aging  
22 infrastructure, however, so there are certainly  
23 outages that are unanticipated that have happened  
24 throughout the pandemic and, you know, we have been  
25 sure that emergency teams come out to address them.

2 But when we also make calls to seniors, whether we  
3 are scheduling a vaccine appointment, for instance,  
4 our team is able to also identify their work to get  
5 issues or needs and we certainly escalate those to  
6 our property management team and our skilled trades  
7 teams, as well.

8 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. So,  
9 it's the same process. So, the residents would have  
10 to call in the same 707 number, get a ticket, and it  
11 is just the same regular process? So, there is no  
12 like heightened alert where, you know, folks will  
13 deploy because it is a senior building or population  
14 or there is an exclusive ESD team just for seniors  
15 like during the pandemic? I just wanted to make  
16 sure. I just wanted to be clear about-- it's the  
17 same process and it still an aging structure. Like  
18 we all know that the buildings, you know, have a lot  
19 of capital repair needs and concerns, however, you  
20 know, we do know that there are buildings that are  
21 exclusively for seniors and so, even amongst the  
22 entire 300 to developments, we know that this select  
23 group of buildings, because of who lives there, there  
24 would be a different response. I was just trying to  
25 figure out if there was a different response.

2 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, I can just  
3 clarify my response. So, individual work tickets are  
4 prioritized based on the work, right? So, emergency  
5 work tickets are treated as emergency use and they  
6 are triaged in that way in terms of outages, so a  
7 building system is out. There is a process for  
8 prioritizing the, you know, buildings that of seniors  
9 and vulnerable residents, as well as ensuring that  
10 there is outrage. And in the instance of Lincoln  
11 Houses in particular, we can look into what is  
12 happening there, but that should be the protocol  
13 generated.

14 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. All  
15 right. Thank you. I will stop there. I have a  
16 thousand other questions, clearly. I will stop there  
17 and turn it over to Chair Chin.

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. I know there  
19 is a lot of questions and I will start with a few and  
20 I know that other Council members have their hands  
21 raised. So, I just want to touch on the two pieces  
22 of legislation and I do want NYCHA and DFTA to  
23 address it because I don't think it's just DFTA being  
24 so responsible. I think, NYCHA, you've got to work  
25 together on this and the legislation that, you know,



2 Chair Ampry Samuel sponsored which calls for the  
3 liaison within the Department of the Aging with  
4 NYCHA, is there a-- you know, we have heard that  
5 there is this memorandum of understanding between  
6 NYCHA and DFTA. Is that a fact? I mean, is there an  
7 MOU between the two agencies that talk about  
8 guidelines and procedures and how two agencies work  
9 together dealing with senior centers and seniors  
10 living in NYCHA buildings?

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you for your  
12 question, Council member. So, at present time, there  
13 is not an active MOU between DFTA and NYCHA, but much  
14 of what we would want in an MOU is currently in  
15 place. So, NYCHA has a dedicated point within the  
16 operations division for being the liaison to DFTA  
17 when there are repair issues and that position  
18 reports to a VP so it is also so that there is  
19 visibility on concerns as they are raised. With  
20 respect to DFTA-- and I can turn to my colleagues to  
21 speak more to that-- DFTA also has baseline funding  
22 to address repair issues, as well, which was much of  
23 the discussions, right, our early discussions around  
24 the MOU getting to that place. And so, while we have  
25 not actively-- we have not actively advanced those

2 discussions around the pandemic, a lot of what we  
3 were looking to include into MOU was put in place and  
4 so we look to formalize that. And so, I can turn to  
5 my DFTA colleagues to elaborate.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, I think, once you  
7 formalize that, we would love to have a copy of it  
8 and also, I think in your testimony, you were talking  
9 about there is, I guess, 100 senior centers that are  
10 located in NYCHA developments?

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes, Council member.  
12 So, there are 100 senior centers and there are 11  
13 [inaudible 00:59:54] programs.

14 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: That is a huge  
15 portfolio. I mean, NYCHA-- I mean, DFTA senior  
16 centers are only about, what? 249 and 100 out of  
17 249, that is a large number and I think that, in  
18 terms of like making sure that these senior centers  
19 are being taken care of, it is crucial. And, I guess  
20 I will turn my question over to DFTA because we are  
21 asking legislation for 15 that I sponsor, we want to  
22 have a more close our working relationship between  
23 NYCHA senior centers and DFTA and also how does DFTA  
24 monitor those programs and in terms of the offering,  
25 the repair that is needed, I remember in 2018,

2 distinctively-- I think it is from Council member  
3 Salamanca, but he is going to as the question leader  
4 in terms of some pictures of horrible conditions in  
5 our senior centers inside NYCHA where the ceilings  
6 are leaking and like waters are collecting and it was  
7 like a plastic wrap and so I think that-- how is  
8 DFTA monitoring these programs within NYCHA and  
9 making sure that the repairs are done and the  
10 conditions are corrected? Deputy commissioner  
11 Bosnick?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BOSNICK: My  
13 colleague, Merlene Shallow, is going to answer that  
14 question for us.

15 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you, Council  
16 member, for that very important question. So, as it  
17 stands, we do have a centralized person at NYCHA  
18 whenever they are on the ground facility issues that  
19 need attention. We do have a very good working  
20 relationship with NYCHA. We interact with NYCHA on  
21 many levels. Many senior centers are located within  
22 NYCHA developments and, through the contracted  
23 providers for those locations, we are engaged  
24 regularly just like with any other center or  
25 [inaudible 01:02:22] contact with whom we are engaged

2 as needed. We partner with NYCHA on other targeted  
3 programs, as well, such as the targ-- the tablet  
4 distribution or PPE distribution. We do have a very  
5 good working relationship and we are happy to discuss  
6 this further with you with NYCHA and with our  
7 sponsors.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, I assume you are  
9 supportive of both legislations that we have  
10 introduced?

11 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you so very much  
12 for that question. We do support the intent of the  
13 bill and we do look forward to working with you and  
14 NYCHA on this proposal. As you may know, Council  
15 passed local law 140 in 2018 which requires reporting  
16 of all our senior centers, including those housed in  
17 NYCHA. This also includes daily average participant  
18 numbers of use, service units, [inaudible 01:03:23]  
19 and education and rec and ways of utilization. We  
20 will be happy to discuss this with you further, but,  
21 yes, we do support the intent of the bill.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. I think we will  
23 look forward to working with you on that. So, I  
24 guess what DFTA said-- what is the current status of  
25

2 the plan to reopen our senior centers and the  
3 [inaudible 01:03:57]--

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: Council member, thank  
5 you for that question. That's a very good question  
6 being asked by you and so many others. So, the  
7 safety of older New Yorkers, as well as all New  
8 Yorkers, is always top priority and any decision to  
9 open in person congregate service is going to be  
10 guided by public health authorities. As we look to  
11 transition the in home vaccination program that  
12 deploys teams of nurses and professionals to vaccine  
13 sites, but right now that is a priority. Now that  
14 the roll out of the vaccine services has begun, we  
15 remain hopeful in every type of reopening of our  
16 centers. It remains to be deterred exactly when  
17 congregate services will be reopened, but in the  
18 interim, senior center providers continue to serve  
19 their members virtually and remotely. Our mutual  
20 hope is to return to some sense of normalcy as soon  
21 as it is safe to do so for the sake of our older  
22 adults.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. I mean, our  
24 seniors are asking when they can go back to their  
25 senior center to get the nutritious meal that they

2 enjoy so much. When are they going to be able to see  
3 their friends? Schools are opening, right? I mean,  
4 they are increasing capacity. How come our senior  
5 centers don't-- they're not a priority to open.

6 UKAH BUSGITH: That's Margaret Chin. I  
7 like her. Council member.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I don't even see a plan  
9 because every time I have asked the Commissioner to  
10 say, yeah. We are hoping soon, what is soon? So,  
11 schools are reopen. Talk more senior centers are  
12 not, right? We've got to have some definitive answer  
13 to that because our seniors are asking. Look, we  
14 want them to be safe. We understand that. The other  
15 thing relating to that is that now that senior  
16 centers are closed, right-- they're not open. Even  
17 though our providers are doing wonderful jobs in  
18 providing virtual programs, but there are a lot of  
19 seniors that have repair issues. So, can you tell us  
20 between you and NYCHA, are some of the senior centers  
21 that had repair issues, the been taken care of during  
22 the pandemic while the centers are closed? Are those  
23 repairs being done?

24 MERLENE SHALLOW: Currently, yes. I would  
25 say yes because we have senior centers that, while

2 they are closed for congregate services, the staff do  
3 have a hybrid format of remote and on-site-- working  
4 remote and on-site. So, they are able to assess if  
5 repairs are needed and, if the repairs are needed,  
6 that those repairs are being addressed.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think we would like to  
8 get a list of **all the** centers that are getting their  
9 repairs during the pandemic, especially the NYCHA  
10 senior centers and NYCHA that requested repairs?

11 MERLENE SHALLOW: Sure. That would be--

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Can you forward that  
13 list to us?

14 MERLENE SHALLOW: Yes. we will.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. That will be  
16 helpful. Chair Ampry-Samuel, I think we should pass  
17 on to some of the Council members who have been  
18 waiting and then we can always come back. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Yes. And then  
20 we come back, I do want to follow up on one of your  
21 MOU questions and how are we advocating on behalf of  
22 seniors still. I'm jump in after. Okay. So,  
23 committee counsel?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. Thank you.  
25 I will now call on Council members to ask questions

2 in the order that they have used the zoom raise hand  
3 function. Council member, please keep your questions  
4 to five minutes including time for answers. The  
5 Sergeant-at-arms will keep a timer. We will now take  
6 questions from Council member Koo followed by Council  
7 member Salamanca.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Hi. Thank you,  
10 both Chairs of the committees, and thank you, vice  
11 president Sherman. Hello? Yeah. Hello?

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: We can hear you, Council  
13 member.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Oh, I can go ahead?  
15 My iPad. Yeah. We still hear you. Maybe I-- okay.  
16 So, my question is you mentioned in your testimony  
17 about iPads for senior residents. I have a lot of  
18 echoes. Okay. I think I've got that now. Yeah.  
19 Thank you. So, our understanding is that NYCHA  
20 provided iPads to senior residents to provide  
21 Internet access. However, we heard from seniors of  
22 developments in my district: [inaudible 01:09:18]  
23 House, Latimer, and 34th Street Levy, that they  
24 weren't able to access the iPad program because they  
25



2 had run out. How is distribution of the iPad  
3 determined?

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: All right. Thank you  
5 for your question, Council member. So, in  
6 collaboration with DFTA and the CTO's office, we, you  
7 know, facilitated the distribution of over 10,000  
8 iPads. The distribution was prioritized for seniors  
9 who lived alone and lived in neighborhoods that had  
10 low broadband adoption. So, those were the first  
11 rounds of outreach that was completed. So, we issued  
12 calls to seniors who live in those communities and  
13 who meet that criteria, living alone, as our first  
14 wave of outreach and then future waves of outreach as  
15 supply was available was made to seniors citywide who  
16 lived alone. We did this via robocall. We also  
17 worked with our partners in senior centers, as well  
18 as many elected officials that helped get the word  
19 out so that seniors could take advantage of the  
20 program.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So there were none  
22 available for NYCHA residents in my district?

23 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I have had-- excuse  
24 me-- tablets available for NYCHA residents across  
25 our portfolio, so we can certainly follow up with

2 you, Council member, and share iPad that were issued  
3 within your specific district, but the priorities  
4 were communities based on the city's Chief Technology  
5 Office that are known for low broadband adoption and  
6 then expanded to NYCHA seniors who are citywide. We  
7 can certainly identify seniors and tablets that were  
8 distributed within your district in particular.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay. So you will  
10 communicate with us? So, how did NYCHA--

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes. We will follow up  
12 with you all.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah. So, how did  
14 NYCHA get important information about the pandemic to  
15 seniors and to the other residents who don't speak  
16 English. Specifically in my area, we have a lot of  
17 Chinese and Korean speaking seniors, you know? How  
18 do you communicate with them? Because you mentioned  
19 in your testimony that you have tried different ways  
20 to communicate with the NYCHA residents?

21 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes, Council member.  
22 So, typically, NYCHA communicates in five languages  
23 as our primary languages. During the pandemic, we  
24 increased that to 13, so all of our NYCHA materials  
25 were translated into 13 languages. In addition to

2 the city's materials in the Department of Health  
3 which are also translated into one number of  
4 languages, that was used across all of our platforms.  
5 We also, as we make individual Robo calls, all of our  
6 staff have been trained in using Language Line and  
7 know how to add Language Line as 1/3 party. If we  
8 are speaking with someone and we don't or not able to  
9 speak in their given language, and as we have rolled  
10 out in partnership with the city, vaccination sites  
11 across NYCHA developments, we have also worked to  
12 make sure that on-site translation services  
13 available. We also have partnered with our  
14 community-based organizations, as I shared, where we  
15 work to, you know, provide outreach in our NYCHA  
16 developments and connect them to services that are on  
17 the ground and many of these are organizations that  
18 are multilingual and culturally competent and do that  
19 work within the communities. So, we also work with  
20 them on our volunteer efforts another distribution  
21 efforts. But we have made sure that our materials  
22 have been translated and that interpretation services  
23 are available at any of the meetings that we've had.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: You mentioned 13  
3 languages. You know, just that include Korean and  
4 Chinese?

5 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I can get the list.  
6 Chinese, for sure. Chinese is one of our standard  
7 five. I can follow up and just confirm what the 13  
8 languages all and we could probably get that to you  
9 by the end of the hearing.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay. So, my next  
11 question is probably-- I don't know do you order to  
12 NYCHA. Bland House in my district, they used to have  
13 a NYCHA senior--

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: center, but who is  
16 responsible for the Bland center until now? The  
17 senior center is clause. What services were provided  
18 to residents during the pandemic? That's my last  
19 question. Yeah.

20 MERLENE SHALLOW: Councilman, I will take  
21 that question. This is DFTA. So, overall congregate  
22 sites which include senior centers and social clubs  
23 are still on the executive order 100 which ordered  
24 the close of all in person congregate services at our  
25 neighborhood centers and we continue to have

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2 conversations with the Department of Health and  
3 Mental Hygiene and once we are advised we get open,  
4 we will. But right now, [inaudible 01:14:16] is  
5 providing services at that site, but the site is  
6 close under the executive order 100.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay. Thank you.

8 SIDEYA SHERMAN: and Council member, if I  
9 may return to your question regarding languages, so  
10 our standard five covered languages that we always  
11 use for translation are English, Spanish, traditional  
12 Chinese, standard Chinese, and Russian. During the  
13 pandemic, we included Arabic, French, Bengali,  
14 Haitian Creole, Korean, Urdu, you dish, and Polish.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay. Thanks.

16 Thank you, Chairs.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will  
18 followed by Council member Ayala.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yes. Hello,  
21 everyone. Good morning. I just have some very basic  
22 questions. I have the Melrose Mott Haven senior  
23 center located at 372 East 152nd Street and on top of  
24 the senior center is a NYCHA senior building. Fiscal  
25 year 18 I allocated \$50,000 for surveillance cameras.

2 Not just that it wasn't enough. Fiscal year 19 I  
3 allocated to 225 for a grand total of \$275,000. Can  
4 you tell me what is the status of the surveillance  
5 cameras and that senior building where there has been  
6 multiple robberies and holdups against my seniors?

7 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, Council member  
8 Salamanca, get that information to you. We can get  
9 that to you within the course of this hearing. I  
10 don't have it on hand, but we can't give you a  
11 status.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. I would  
13 really appreciate that. My other question is I have  
14 a senior center that is in a NYCHA facility in Adam  
15 Houses and there was an issue there with the kitchen.  
16 The gas in the stove. There needed to be an outside  
17 plumber that needed to come in- and this was pre-  
18 pandemic. Can you give me an explanation or an  
19 update as to what is happening in that senior center?

20 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, Council member, we  
21 can also get you an answer on Adams Houses and the  
22 issue with the stove. I know, across our portfolio,  
23 we sometimes have challenges restoring gas to our  
24 community facilities if the original hookup is not in  
25 line with DOB guidelines, so we can certainly share

2 the situation at Adams. I don't know about that  
3 personally, but I will make sure we follow up and get  
4 that answer to you. And with respect to the cameras  
5 that you referenced, that project is currently in the  
6 planning phase, so we should be able to give you a  
7 timeline for when work starts.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Where in the  
9 planning phase is it?

10 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, typically, it goes  
11 through design as part of the planning phase. We can  
12 give you a breakdown of the schedule. We will get  
13 that to you, Council member.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right.  
15 And then, lastly, the Mott Haven Senior Center which  
16 is also, you know, in a NYCHA facility, it is run  
17 by-- I think it's-- Eastside Houses. Throughout my  
18 time as a Council member the last five years, you  
19 know, I've been advocating and communicating with  
20 NYCHA about the leaks. When it rains outside, it  
21 rains in the main kitchen-- I mean, in the main  
22 dining area. The facilities have been closed,  
23 obviously, for a year now because of, you know, the  
24 pandemic. Did NYCHA take advantage that there's no  
25 seniors in this facility to take the opportunity to

2 actually address the problem inside that senior  
3 center in terms of the leakage when it rains?

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, I know that there  
5 has been ongoing work at that facility. I can  
6 confirm what was accomplished during the pandemic. I  
7 know our property management teams have responded to  
8 that facility consistently. And I can get that  
9 update for you and make sure that you have a breakout  
10 of all the capital projects and repairs within your  
11 district.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right.  
13 Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chairs.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will  
15 now take questions from Council member Ayala and,  
16 again, a reminder to other Council members, if you  
17 would like to ask any questions, please use the zoom  
18 raise hand function. Council member Ayala?

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Hi. Good morning,  
21 everyone. I have three questions. One of them is  
22 also security-related because we also funded a series  
23 of layered access systems throughout some of our  
24 senior developments and I understand that the company  
25 that was responsible for that layout went bankrupt



2 and is no longer operational. I had an instance  
3 where I had a building that you can't get it anymore.  
4 The key fobs don't work and then the side door which,  
5 when we initially funded the very expensive system,  
6 the idea was that if the side door was left open  
7 with, you know, a rock or whatever, then that would  
8 then signal some sort of alarm to the company that  
9 will come and make sure that it is close just to  
10 ensure, you know, and additional layer of safety for  
11 the seniors and that has never happened. My staff  
12 was there yesterday because we were doing  
13 construction of the seating area and there is a lot  
14 of scaffolding and it has been a little bit dark, so  
15 we wanted to kind of, you know, SS what that looked  
16 like at night and the side door was completely open  
17 posing, you know, threat to the seniors. So, I  
18 wonder what is NYCHA's plan to, you know, one, maybe  
19 find a new contractor to take over considering that  
20 those systems were really expensive and then  
21 wondering if we know how many-- If you could tell us  
22 how many senior buildings benefit from on-site social  
23 services, I miss little bit of it. I was at a  
24 vaccine event, so I am sorry if I'm asking the  
25 question that was already answered, but the reality

2 is that most of our seniors, you know, go to senior  
3 centers and some of them don't, right? We have to be  
4 prepared for both and senior buildings really house,  
5 you know, the most vulnerable. They should be  
6 equipped with a social worker and the assumption that  
7 they will go to a senior center is not always  
8 accurate. That has been my personal experience, so I  
9 think that, to DFTA-- so those are the two questions  
10 for NYCHA, but then to DFTA, just so that-- I would  
11 like to know if there's any additional support given  
12 to the senior centers to better outreach and market  
13 senior center services to NYCHA seniors so that they  
14 feel more welcome and more comfortable coming into  
15 the senior center setting. So, I guess NYCHA first.

16 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Council  
17 member. So, to your first question, I will have to  
18 follow you up on that and thank you for sharing it.  
19 It's very concerning because, I think, for the  
20 development you shared, we can make sure that the  
21 access issue is addressed. Unfortunately, our safety  
22 and security and capital projects teams are not  
23 working today. I can make sure we get a detailed  
24 update on what's happening in terms of late access  
25 and other projects at that development. I know that

2 you received a response from DFTA on social services  
3 within our buildings, but there are 49 developments  
4 that are senior-only, so these are either fully  
5 senior only or partial, meaning that's a building  
6 within, you know, a campus that is senior only. And  
7 I would say-- and I'll get the exact number. Less  
8 than 10 are without on-site services and so a lot of  
9 this has been either met by DFTA or our elderly Safe  
10 at Home program or have been spaces where we brought  
11 in nonprofit providers to be on site. During the  
12 pandemic, we were able to assign a team that focused  
13 on one of our developments that did not have coverage  
14 from any nearby senior provider and we also are  
15 working to bring more partners on site to the extent  
16 that we have space available. I agree that, you  
17 know, there is a need for senior centers and  
18 programming, but also dedicated social service work.  
19 So, to the extent that we can, between our grant  
20 programs, as well as partners, we have worked to  
21 bring more programs in the buildings and one site  
22 where we are seeing the need.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Yeah. I think  
24 there just needs to be a little bit more effort made  
25 to ensure there is a connection being made because I

2 think that DFTA is satisfied with the fact that there  
3 is a senior center in some of these senior buildings  
4 and the senior programs are already, you know,  
5 stressed. You know, they are strained. They have  
6 limited resources and so they are providing the  
7 services that they are providing, but they are not  
8 necessarily, you know, going into the building and  
9 posting, you know, this is the menu. We're going on  
10 a trip. You know, you are welcome to come with us or  
11 we are having yoga. You know, they are not doing  
12 that. That level of coordination rarely ever happens  
13 in my experience and it shouldn't be that way. So,  
14 when the social workers were removed from the NYCHA  
15 buildings, it further, you know, made the situation  
16 worse. It just made the situation worse because now  
17 they didn't have the senior center and now they don't  
18 have the social workers that they were used to that  
19 new them that understood. And, quite frankly, there  
20 they are more frequently to ensure that, you know,  
21 they didn't see Mr. Smith come down in three days,  
22 right? Or maybe they have a relationship with the  
23 mailman and the mailman is saying, you know, this  
24 mailbox is full. You know, has a significant amount  
25 of--

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: mail. Know what  
4 is, you know, coming to retrieve it. Can someone  
5 maybe knock on that door and find out what is  
6 happened deed? Like that is important in senior  
7 buildings and that is why I support the Section 202  
8 model because it incorporates all of that and NYCHA  
9 should really benefit from reconsidering how they  
10 provide senior services because I think that you  
11 can't house, you know, a number of vulnerable  
12 population in a building and then kind of leave them  
13 there without that additional layer of support. So,  
14 thank you for that, Ms. Sherman. I think, and I'm  
15 sorry, Madam Chairs. I went over my time.

16 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Of course, I  
17 appreciate that question because that is what I was  
18 asking-- Ms. Sherman, that is why I was asking the  
19 question about the social workers because, in my  
20 brain, I still remember, you know, 14 social workers  
21 assigned to the division and, you know, they were  
22 going to be working in the senior buildings. But, I  
23 am, of course, thinking about five or six years ago,  
24 you know, but I appreciate that question.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Did we ever hear  
3 from DFTA about the support services to ensure that  
4 the senior centers have--

5 MERLENE SHALLOW: Can you repeat that  
6 question, again? I didn't hear quite clearly.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: So, the question  
8 was in those buildings where you senior center and  
9 a-- a senior center is located in a senior building,  
10 is there any additional support that can order  
11 already provides to the senior centers to better  
12 market those services to the seniors that live in the  
13 building?

14 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you so much for  
15 the question and thank you for repeating it. It's a  
16 very important question. So, the senior centers that  
17 are located in NYCHA's site, they establish  
18 committees that do outreach in the building, so and  
19 they advertise their services. So, while there might  
20 be a senior that might not want to come every day to  
21 a senior center, if there is a particular function  
22 that is occurring in that center, if there was a  
23 social worker or case manager on site to the outreach  
24 efforts, that individual would be informed and if  
25 they would like to participate, but we encourage--

2 again, we encourage our senior centers to do outreach  
3 not just in the buildings, but in the surrounding  
4 areas to encourage seniors to come in-- at least  
5 come in and explore and see what possibly [inaudible  
6 01:26:22] there are, if there is something that they  
7 would like to engage in, if not congregate services  
8 and they would like assistance with-- you know, with  
9 case assistance or any other type of service is  
10 because there are a range of services that are  
11 provided in our neighborhood sites.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Ms. Shallow, that  
13 is not a requirement, right? It's a suggestion,  
14 right? Like--

15 MERLENE SHALLOW: It is not a requirement.  
16 It's just, you know, we encourage all seniors to  
17 participate--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: I know. I get  
19 that. I am sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have  
20 enough time here. I'm saying that the assumption is  
21 that the senior center is extending an invitation to  
22 the seniors that live in the building, however, with  
23 limited staffing and as much, you know, as is  
24 happening at the senior center during the day, it  
25 becomes very difficult for them to focus their

2 attention on the seniors inside of the building, so  
3 they need additional support in order to do that were  
4 it has to be a requirement in their contract that  
5 they do that when they are situated in a building  
6 that is a NYCHA senior building, right? That doesn't  
7 happen. So, I appreciate that we encourage people to  
8 do many things, but it doesn't mean that they do them  
9 and it is not even-- you know, it's not their fault.  
10 I don't fault them. I think senior center staff  
11 works really hard and they were tremendously hard and  
12 are really underappreciated and I think, you know, we  
13 have to recognize that, but they don't have those  
14 resources to do that. So, I think that is something  
15 that may be DFTA could give a little bit of  
16 consideration to. It would help because there is no  
17 reason why a senior center in a senior building  
18 should have, you know-- they should be overwhelmed  
19 with the number of seniors that are coming every  
20 week. They should not be underutilized at all.

21 MERLENE SHALLOW: And that is so duly  
22 noted. Michael Bosnick, who is also on the panel,  
23 might be able to talk a little bit more about that.  
24 Michael, do you have any suggestions? This will be  
25 taken back on advisement and for further discussion



2 and we would like to engage you, you know, for  
3 suggestions and to see how we can address this issue.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Thank you.

5 MICHAEL BOSNICK: Yes. I think the one  
6 thing that I might add is that, as part of our RFP  
7 process that we have been engaged in this year, we  
8 have gotten a lot of input from providers and  
9 providers have talked about outreach and marketing  
10 and how to reach people in the community and in their  
11 buildings in the case of on-site services, so our RFP  
12 is addressing that both in terms of the kinds of  
13 outreach and marketing that should take place in  
14 making sure that there is some support for that in  
15 the budgets that we provide. So, we are looking  
16 forward in that way to better marketing and outreach.  
17 And also we will talk more internally about the  
18 specifics that you have raised, Council member, and  
19 see if we can think of additional supports to--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: [inaudible  
21 01:29:27]. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very  
23 much. If there are no other Council member questions  
24 at this time, we will return to the Chairs for  
25 additional questions.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. I want  
3 to just, you know, go back to my follow-up questions.  
4 So, Merlene, you mentioned earlier about waiting for  
5 guidance, you know, based on the executive order that  
6 was put out in order to reopen the centers. How do  
7 you really advocate for residents and how do you  
8 gather information and concerns and communicate that  
9 information back to the administration, either the  
10 Mayor's Office or the Governor's Office, because I  
11 realized-- we all should realize by now that we have  
12 to think outside the box and be very creative and we  
13 can't wait for guidance because sometimes the people  
14 that are working in these offices don't know what we  
15 need on the ground. And so, we are waiting for, you  
16 know, someone to tell us what to do. You know, had  
17 you been providing your suggestions to the  
18 administration on how you can open up and on how you  
19 can best provide services and resources to the  
20 residents because the centers need to be open. You  
21 know, they need to be able to access the courtyard  
22 space and there is a need and there is a way to be  
23 able to do things in a safe way as opposed to waiting  
24 for, you know, just procedures and a process and  
25 guidance from the administration, so what have you

2 done, you know, in NYCHA or DFTA, to be able to get  
3 the centers reopened in an urgent way?

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you, Council  
5 member, for that question. So, DFTA, through the  
6 pandemic, has been hosting monthly meetings with  
7 our-- both providers. This sentiment that you have  
8 just echoed we are hearing from them, as well. Our  
9 commissioner, in her meeting, have articulated this  
10 same sentiment, but, again, as I stated before, we  
11 are a Mayoral agency and we work-- you know, we are  
12 under an executive order and until we are advised  
13 otherwise, we have to work under those guidance.  
14 Under the public health guidance. And as soon as  
15 they indicate to us, we have lots of ideas and lots  
16 of programs to implement, but we want to make sure  
17 that when we open the state, we have to follow the  
18 guidance and so we want to make sure that the safety  
19 of all seniors is that-- is our number one priority.  
20 So, yes, we are hearing and, yes, it's under  
21 consideration and we are getting all these ideas from  
22 providers, from stakeholder, from elected officials,  
23 from older adults and we are still under executive  
24 orders. So, until such time, we--

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: You're kind of  
3 making me cringe. I try not to cringe.

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: We are continuing as  
5 best as possible to engage our senior through our  
6 daily--

7 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: The seniors  
8 and the advocates. I, how are you articulating that  
9 information and back to the administration because I  
10 don't-- like I don't sit around and wait for  
11 anything. You know, if an idea pops up in my head, I  
12 am providing that information to the-- like I'm  
13 going to-- I continue to talk to the administration  
14 about this is what you need to do. This is what my  
15 seniors are saying and. This is what, you know, my  
16 residents are saying and I know Brian and NYCHA is on  
17 the call and I have given suggestions on, you know,  
18 what we can do around vaccinations in {inaudible  
19 01:33:27] Houses, right? You know, [inaudible  
20 01L:33:28] zero contracting place with that  
21 particular development and that organization. No,  
22 that's not okay. Well, what are we doing to make  
23 sure there is access to that development? And, you  
24 know, these are a bunch of one offs. So, I was  
25 hoping to hear that there was like, you know, some

2 kind of affordable strategy or creative way that you  
3 came up with like a plan and that was submitted to  
4 the--

5 MERLENE SHALLOW: So, Council member, as I  
6 said, I, you know, share your sentiment and I am sure  
7 that there are discussions. What I would like to do  
8 is to take this back and speak to our executives at  
9 that level and try to get, you know, set something up  
10 so those discussions can be as [inaudible 01:34:26]  
11 as possible. We would like to address this and  
12 discuss it further, providing more information to  
13 you, but I will definitely take it back to our  
14 executive level because I am sure that they are  
15 having these discussions.

16 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And it would  
17 just be helpful to tell us and, you know, let us know  
18 what is happening, what is being discussed and for  
19 the overall public, as well. Because that is why  
20 people are always to start off with government.  
21 Quote unquote government, right? It's like there is  
22 no creativity. There is no, you know, people just do  
23 business as usual. It's just always just checking a  
24 box and, you know, the just enough for just bare

2 minimum. People, you know, clearly deserve more than  
3 that.

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: Understood. I will  
5 take that back and we welcome, you know, an  
6 engagement process with you where discussions can be  
7 further explored. I will take that back.

8 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. Back to  
9 the MOU, how many years have you been working on the  
10 MOU?

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I assume this question,  
12 Council member, is for NYCHA. Well, both of us. So,  
13 this MOU has been an open issue for a number of  
14 years and--

15 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: How many?

16 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I've been in this  
17 position at least four years, so at least since I've  
18 been in this position, but I know it proceeded me.  
19 It's been a lagging issue for a number of years.  
20 And, really, the fundamental issue is less about  
21 roles and responsibility and more about funding. And  
22 so, you know, what has changed now and is what makes  
23 this more of a reality is that DFTA has funding that  
24 is baselined for repairs and that is something that  
25 didn't exist before. That allows us to have a clear

2 role of responsibilities where NYCHA has the typical  
3 landlord responsibilities, building systems,  
4 stoppages, leaks from above, and DFTA is able to  
5 manage HVAC system conversions, for instance, and  
6 other repair responsibilities that would typically  
7 fall within that of a tenant. Now that we have that  
8 in place and it's baselined for future years, we will  
9 be able to move forward with this MOU and that has  
10 typically been our challenge. During the pandemic,  
11 we had not resumed negotiations. Obviously, NYCHA  
12 has also had a number of changed of leadership during  
13 that-- you know, since I've been in this capacity,  
14 but we are well positioned to finalize this now and I  
15 think that has been what was holding up the sticking  
16 point for quite some time.

17 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. All  
18 right. I just wanted to [inaudible 01:37:08] that  
19 out because, you know, we've built bridges in less  
20 time than it's taken to finalize this MOU and with--

21 MERLENE SHALLOW: I don't disagree and--

22 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: [inaudible  
23 01:37:23]

24 MERLENE SHALLOW: worked at NYCHA and how  
25 many times-- you know, I just wanted to highlight

2 that because I would really hope that the next  
3 conversation we have, it is not asking what is  
4 happening with the MOU.

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Pole sites.  
6 Mr. Norvell mentioned the pole sites and his seniors  
7 and how it was closed a couple of years ago. What's  
8 the plan? Has there been a conversation or plan  
9 about the upcoming June elections and going into the  
10 senior centers and [inaudible 01:38:02] pole sites.

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So with pole  
12 sites, we receive notice from the Board of Elections  
13 every year of which locations-- NYCHA locations--  
14 they are choosing for pole sites and we work with the  
15 providers at DFTA and DYCD to ensure that there is  
16 access and we did that during the pandemic, as well.  
17 My understanding, I think the pole site at Lincoln  
18 was changed because there is active construction in  
19 that center which would prevent it from being safe  
20 for voting. I can look into that specific pole site  
21 and see why it was or wasn't selected, but typically  
22 the pole sites are confirmed from the Board of  
23 Elections and then we would work to provide access to  
24 the space. The center provider or NYCHA, if there is  
25 not a center provider, would open and close and make



2 sure that the space is available. And that will  
3 continue with every election.

4 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, I want to,  
5 of course, emphasize just the irony of the year,  
6 right? So, we can open up a senior center or a  
7 senior space for hours and hours and hours and have  
8 people on top of each other at the polling site and  
9 have hundreds of people in and out of the space for  
10 election day with the Board of Elections, but the  
11 space is closed to the seniors who live in that  
12 building in the amount of seniors that would utilize  
13 that space is a small fraction compared to election  
14 day. And so, I just think that it is very  
15 interesting how, you know, certain agencies can work  
16 with NYCHA and utilizing the space for election day,  
17 but not be able to utilize that space to get a meal  
18 to, you know, [inaudible 01:40:15] utilize and use  
19 the space, but they will be open. I, in June. They  
20 were open last June for the primary in 2020 to  
21 highlight that point. I will stop there for my  
22 cochair.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. I totally agree  
24 with you because last summer during the height of the  
25 heat season, I think 80 senior centers were open as

2 cooling centers and I know that DFTA has learned a  
3 lot from there and what we are asking for is that a  
4 plan in place so that providers and seniors can have  
5 some expectation of what is going to happen. And we  
6 have heard from providers that even have the center  
7 available for-- maybe would start off with like the  
8 counseling. If a senior wants to come in and talk to  
9 a social worker and have some, you know, forms filled  
10 out. And that is not even available and that should  
11 be available. What about, you know, having the  
12 kitchen staff start cooking again? And deliver the  
13 meals again? Or what if a senior comes in and just  
14 even grabbed a meal and be able to say hello to staff  
15 and say hello to some of their friends? So, we just  
16 want to see a plan in place that will say that we all  
17 are planning to reopen the center safely and just let  
18 the public know and lead our seniors now that there  
19 is light at the end of the tunnel. I mean, it's like  
20 it's not like something that is impossible. I mean,  
21 we see get pushback and pushed back and even our  
22 school, right? They have hybrid, so why can't our  
23 senior centers have a hybrid version? We just need  
24 to get some information on how we can start safely  
25 opening up these centers. So, I really urge DFTA to

2 work on that with the provider and let the public  
3 know and let us know what is the plan and what is the  
4 date that we can expect centers to gradually open  
5 back up? I wanted to ask Ms. Sherman you were  
6 talking about with the MOU that one of the reasons  
7 that DFTA has been a slight defunding, is that the  
8 funding for capital repairs and how much is that?  
9 Because DFTA does capital budget is very, very tight.  
10 So, are you talking about more money being allocated?

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Council  
12 member, for that question. I will need to turn to  
13 DFTA to clarify the funding and how it applies to  
14 repairs.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. Deputy  
16 Commissioner?

17 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you. I am  
18 director of senior centers, Council member. So, we  
19 have \$4 million that was baselined into DFTA's budget  
20 and this funding covers repairs of the senior centers  
21 housed within NYCHA sites. The amount of money and  
22 the majority of this is used for HVAC repairs, but it  
23 could also be applied towards other smaller repairs  
24 and service contracts such as replacing window  
25 replacement, grease trap, electrical, and plumbing

2 and replacement. So, this has been enough to cover  
3 the costs of these additional repairs.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: That is still a very  
5 small budget because most of the money members  
6 because I know my senior centers have asked me for  
7 repairs at their site and it is very, very expensive,  
8 so I think that it is great that this money is  
9 baselined. We definitely need to increase on it.  
10 And I also wanted to follow up on the question about  
11 the technology. Like from all the-- is NYCHA  
12 working on getting Internet access to at least all  
13 the senior developments? Because I've got to numbers  
14 here, so I don't know which one is correct. I  
15 thought there was only 17 NYCHA senior only buildings  
16 and then I also heard 49. So, how many standalone  
17 NYCHA senior buildings are there in the NYCHA  
18 portfolio?

19 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Council  
20 member--

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And do they plan to get  
22 Internet access to those buildings?

23 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Council  
24 member. So, with respect to the number of buildings,  
25 there are 49 partial or full senior buildings.

2 Either standalone senior buildings or standalone  
3 senior buildings connected to all multi-generational  
4 development. This number 17 that I referenced is  
5 where we have that elderly Safe at Home program.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, okay.

7 SIDEYA SHERMAN: That is the HUD funded  
8 program that NYCHA administers where we have on-site  
9 social services within 17 buildings and those have  
10 been strategically allocated to fill the gaps between  
11 where DFTA services are not. And so, those are the  
12 sites that I was referencing. With respect to the  
13 broadband access and Internet access, so, as an  
14 immediate way to address connectivity, as I shared  
15 earlier, there was this capital distribution and  
16 partnership with the city to that over 10,000 seniors  
17 targeting seniors who lived alone and did not have  
18 connectivity which some, you know, may have  
19 connectivity, you know, devices within their  
20 household. There are a number of NYCHA developments  
21 that are already connected to the broadband. The  
22 issue is not necessarily the connection, but the  
23 affordability. And so the city has worked to also  
24 have new investment in broadband at NYCHA to provide  
25 affordable low cost or no cost access. There was a

2 request for expressions of interest last year for at  
3 least 20 developments and I can share that list of  
4 locations and where they would be and providers that  
5 can come in and actually build a low cost or no cost  
6 Internet connection within 20 of our developments and  
7 then there is a new RFP that went out just a few  
8 weeks ago that will use additional, you know, NYCHA  
9 spaces, city assets to provide broadband connectivity  
10 across more of our portfolio. And so, those are  
11 longer-term capital projects, but with respect to the  
12 immediate need for connectivity, the tablet  
13 distribution program was used to target those folks,  
14 the seniors in particular, who live alone.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay. Yeah. If you  
16 could provide us with updated information on that  
17 because I know that some of the other HUD 202  
18 buildings, I know there was one in my district that  
19 wanted a hearing or a discussion that I had with them  
20 and they were able to get very inexpensive Internet  
21 access into the whole building so that the seniors  
22 didn't really have to pay that much at all. And  
23 then, also, the programs from the federal government  
24 and resources out there that NYCHA can also access.  
25 I mean, I think that is the key question in terms of

2 cost so that we can really be cost-effective  
3 throughout the whole building. That solves the  
4 problem in terms of you don't have to get these  
5 expensive tablets. So, I think, yeah, we do want to  
6 see some updates on that, so that would be very, very  
7 helpful. Back to the capital money, maybe DFTA can  
8 answer, how much was spent on doing repairs and our  
9 senior building in the last three fiscal years? Do  
10 you have that information?

11 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you, Council  
12 member Chin for that question. But before I respond,  
13 can I just go back to your statement regarding the  
14 budget? So, our needs always outpaces our resources  
15 and so we are very proud at DFTA at staff that has  
16 been working and who continue to do more with less.  
17 We sincerely appreciate the Council's past advocacy  
18 for seniors and we are thankful to have the continued  
19 support of the committee and the Chairs, especially  
20 given this city's current fiscal situation. We would  
21 appreciate your partnership in lobbying Albany and  
22 Washington DC. And in response to your last  
23 question, we have spent about \$2 million of that \$4  
24 million.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Only 2 million out of  
3 four? Why so slow?

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: Yes. Because it takes a  
5 while to get-- especially now during the pandemic,  
6 to replace the HVAC system which the HVAC systems  
7 that are needed, it takes a while to get that in  
8 place through the bidding process and procurement.

9 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And when you talk  
10 about HVAC systems, the discussion happened way  
11 before the pandemic about, you know, senior centers  
12 not having air condition and they happen to be  
13 cooling systems and how could the HVAC system not be  
14 working? And I--

15 MERLENE SHALLOW: And we have replaced  
16 quite a few. We have replaced quite a few, but as  
17 time goes by, new issues-- new HVAC issues-- do  
18 arise.

19 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes. And I know that,  
20 but in this year's budget, I will not accept the fact  
21 that we are in a dire budget, okay? We are getting  
22 money from the federal government and I do expect to  
23 see an increase in DFTA's budget so that we can meet  
24 all these, you know, critical needs that we are  
25 talking about improving our senior services. So, I



2 am going to pass back on to other Council members.

3 This discussion--

4 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: is ongoing and I just  
6 hope that DFTA has-- you know, let us know as soon  
7 as possible the plan to reopen senior centers safely  
8 so that we can let our seniors know when they can get  
9 back to their beloved center. So I expect to hear  
10 about that as soon as possible. Thank you.

11 MERLENE SHALLOW: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: One quick  
13 follow up. Back to the tablet connection. The  
14 tablet connection is going to expire next month. Did  
15 you mention anything about how like the extension of  
16 that at all or like those who have a tablet, will  
17 they be able to get direct assistance on an extension  
18 so they don't have to pay?

19 SIDEYA SHERMAN: That's a great question.  
20 Thank you, Council members. So, we can confirm that  
21 there is an extension in place and my understanding  
22 is that the services that they received from OATS  
23 would be continuing, as well. I'm not sure if DFTA  
24 would be able to weigh in further on that question.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: The actual  
3 WI-FI subscription was for one year with these  
4 tablets. And so, they will be one year for the  
5 actual subscription?

6 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes. so, we can answer  
7 that. I wasn't sure if my colleagues at DFTA had  
8 that answer, as well. We can follow up and confirm  
9 that for you.

10 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. And  
11 can you clarify some senior developments that have a  
12 senior center attached to it are not contracted with  
13 DFTA? How many of those centers exist within the  
14 NYCHA portfolio?

15 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, there are centers  
16 that are operate-- there are more programs than are  
17 operated by, for instance, settlement houses that may  
18 have a funding relationship with DFTA that's through  
19 City Council allocation, for instance, but all of our  
20 formal senior centers are within contact of the  
21 Department for the Aging. There are some smaller  
22 NORC programs that are with CBO's that have a  
23 relationship with DFTA through the City Council  
24 funding. But all of the other standard senior  
25 centers are under DFTA contract.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Can you  
3 explain Mount Ararat to me?

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Excuse me?

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Can you  
6 explain Mount Ararat to me?

7 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I'm not familiar with  
8 that provider.

9 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Ukah or  
10 Brian?

11 UKAH BUSGITH: All right. Good  
12 afternoon, Council member. Thank you for that. Yes.  
13 I know you are familiar with Mount Ararat. So, there  
14 is discretionary funding there and Wayside turned  
15 over the space back to NYCHA but now they are in  
16 discussion with us to-- for us to give them access  
17 to [inaudible 01:53:58] license agreement. So, my  
18 understanding is DFTA unfunded that program about  
19 three to five years ago and there was discretionary  
20 fundings assigned to it and there's a volunteer-- I  
21 forgot her name-- who is working in the center, but  
22 we have to negotiate with her to make sure we have  
23 our insurance in place through the support  
24 programing, ensure that our seniors are protected,  
25 and Ms. Samon [sp?] from Wayside submitted an

2 agreement a couple weeks ago. I'm still going back  
3 and forth with her in terms of all the requirements  
4 that need to be in place to support--

5 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: That was  
6 getting too much into the weeds. I was just trying  
7 to figure out the structure itself because they do  
8 not have a DFTA contract. They haven't had a DFTA  
9 contract since pre-2014.

10 UKAH BUSGITH: Right.

11 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And so  
12 that's--

13 UKAH BUSGITH: So, right now, we have  
14 an elderly Safe at Home program staff assigned to  
15 that location that works with Ms. [inaudible  
16 01:54:59], but I don't have any update as to if DFTA  
17 will include that center in the next round of RFPs.  
18 I mean, I think that would be one way of funding or  
19 restoring funding to that program in the future.

20 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: But a little  
21 clarification. They're not a [inaudible 01:55:20].  
22 They are not contracted with DFTA, right? And they  
23 are--

24 UKAH BUSGITH: Right.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: a senior  
3 building-- a senior development because it's more  
4 than one building and they have a large--

5 UKAH BUSGITH: Right.

6 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: senior  
7 center attached to it that's an amazing space and  
8 outdoor space and there is no contract with the city  
9 for any kind of services and although there is an  
10 organization that used to be attached to it, they do  
11 not receive any direct funding outside of, you know,  
12 like the small \$10,000 discretionary funding because  
13 that's the only way that they can actually receive  
14 funding. So, I just wanted a point of clarification  
15 because, Sideya, you know, you mentioned like all  
16 was-- like there is something. They fall into some  
17 kind of category and I want it to be known that there  
18 is this particular development. It's not a NORC  
19 [sic] and they are not contracted with DFTA and they  
20 have had no contract with DFTA in a minimum of six or  
21 seven years. And so, are there any other  
22 developments that fall along those same lines?

23 UKAH BUSGITH: So there are some vacant  
24 facilities, right?

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: It would have  
3 made it seem as though, you know-- go ahead.

4 UKAH BUSGITH: Yeah. That one is  
5 actually very unique and we did, you know-- for  
6 years, we have reported that Wayside is in that  
7 location, but with very minimum funding. Like you  
8 said, the \$10,000 discretionary, but for NYCHA, we do  
9 have the elderly Safe at Home program there, so we  
10 don't consider it a building with no services at all,  
11 right?

12 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. So  
13 how long has that program been in the building?

14 UKAH BUSGITH: It's over a year when we  
15 close-- I think it was Palmetto-- it was converted  
16 to PAC. We moved our workers to Brown to support it.  
17 A year. A year and a half, I think.

18 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And that  
19 person is who?

20 UKAH BUSGITH: Ms. Galati. Jeanette  
21 Gafiti [sp?]. Gafiti. Sorry. And she works well  
22 with Miss-- I forgot her last name. It starts with  
23 light.

24 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And she's on  
25 the ground in the building?

2 UKAH BUSGITH: During the pandemic,  
3 they have been working remotely, but they check in  
4 with all of the seniors remotely on a daily basis.  
5 That is part of their responsibility. So they do  
6 wellness checks, they can do a virtual home visit if  
7 the seniors agree and we have really moved towards  
8 that. But yes, we do support the seniors daily with  
9 wellness calls at those developments.

10 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. So,  
11 Chair Chin, I just wanted to highlight that because  
12 we had conversations, you know, about, you know, that  
13 this particular development. And so what I'm hearing  
14 is that this is the-- out of the entire NYCHA  
15 portfolio with fever buildings and senior centers,  
16 this is the only one that just so happened to be in  
17 my district. The only one, right?

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, hopefully, I  
19 think we were talking about a new RFP that they could  
20 apply. But also, I think when you talk about, 11--  
21 11 NORC program? Yeah. 11 NORC program in NYCHA,  
22 there's-- do you project to see more than 11?  
23 Because a lot of developments have seniors aging in  
24 place. I mean, a lot of them, these developments are  
25 quite old and a family moves in maybe with kids, you

2 know, in their 30s or 40s and now they are in their  
3 60s and 70s. so, is NYCHA and DFTA looking, in terms  
4 of the developments, how we can create more NORCs  
5 within those developments?

6 UKAH BUSGITH: I think a lot of  
7 developments-- Oh, sorry, Sideya.

8 SIDEYA SHERMAN: If I can just jump in.  
9 So, Council member, thank you for your question. So  
10 I just want to offer just one correction to a  
11 statement I made previously. So, there are 47 senior  
12 building or developments-- not 49. I miscounted  
13 during our call, so apologies for that. And then,  
14 with respect to NORCs, you're correct. A significant  
15 portion of our portfolio would be the definition of a  
16 NORC and so what really we would be seeking as  
17 funding for a NORC program. So, 11 developments have  
18 providers with funding to offer the services that we  
19 would see at a NORC. We have certainly applied for  
20 funding and encourages our CBO partners to apply for  
21 funding for NORC. We have not been awarded. The  
22 state funding or other resources or funding, but  
23 certainly we have a number of NYCHA developments that  
24 meet that criteria and communities organizations that



2 continually apply for those resources as well as  
3 NYCHA.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, I think we would  
5 appreciate having the list of developments that you  
6 think or a building that you think would qualify  
7 being a NORC because the Council has provided  
8 discretionary money just to start some NORCs so that  
9 they, in the future, could be in a NYCHA-- I mean,  
10 in any DFTA pipeline or get funding from the state,  
11 but we need the statistics and the information so  
12 that you can provide us, you know, with the lists of  
13 development that you think would qualify to be a  
14 NORC, then we can share that with our colleagues in  
15 the Council and they can help us, you know, advocate  
16 for that. Because we want to make sure that the  
17 services are there for our seniors because when you  
18 are talking about this elderly, safe program, if you  
19 can also provide us with a list of which of the  
20 senior buildings that have this program, that would  
21 be helpful because I have, you know, number of senior  
22 buildings in my district and there are some that,  
23 yeah, they're a social worker and they do and are  
24 able to get the help and then others do not. So we  
25 want to make sure that ever senior development has

2 the services that they need. So, if you could  
3 provide us with those information's, I think that  
4 would be very helpful.

5 SIDEYA SHERMAN: We will. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And I just  
7 have a few more questions that I wanted to breeze  
8 through that we wanted to get on record. Does NYCHA  
9 have the trained staff on hand to address elevator  
10 outages and senior buildings?

11 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Yes. We have trained  
12 elevator mechanics and repair people.

13 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And what  
14 options are available to seniors who are wheelchair-  
15 bound or cannot take stairs when the elevators in  
16 their buildings are not functioning?

17 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, there is  
18 notification to tenants when there is an outage and  
19 there are updates throughout the duration. I'm sure,  
20 as you are aware, Council member, we recently had a--  
21 sorry. There is noise behind me.

22 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: It's like  
23 every time you go to answer something.

24 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I'm going to talk a  
25 little louder, but we recently had an elevator action

2 plan that was approved by the federal monitor and it  
3 includes requirements around specific outreach from  
4 our property management staff and housing assistance  
5 to vulnerable tenants. This includes making sure  
6 that they have access to stair climbers and other  
7 ways to exit in an extended outage and so that  
8 process is in place and that is part of the elevator  
9 outage planned that night just submitted as part of  
10 its had agreement.

11 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. And  
12 going back to the vaccinations, do you have an actual  
13 number of seniors who have been vaccinated in the  
14 NYCHA developments?

15 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, we have, of the  
16 events, the vaccination events that we-- excuse me.  
17 The vaccination pop up clinics and now we have these  
18 long-term clinics. There have been at least 15,000  
19 doses administered across city and state, as well as  
20 some of our other hospital partners where we had  
21 vaccination events. There have been over 15,000  
22 doses administered. The majority of those are  
23 tonight just seniors, but as eligibility has opened,  
24 we have also started to open, you know, eligibility  
25 to other NYCHA residents. Our direct outreach and

2 recruitment an appointment registrations, however,  
3 have been focused on NYCHA seniors. This, however,  
4 does not account for NYCHA residents who are  
5 accessing vaccination and within the community at pod  
6 sites, and houses of worship, and a number of the  
7 other vaccination distribution points that are  
8 available in the city.

9 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Is there a  
10 way for you to get that information? Like are you  
11 doing any surveys were like self-disclosing, you  
12 know, methods to be able to get a sense of how many  
13 out of your residents are actually vaccinated? You  
14 know, because the conversation around herd immunity  
15 is an actual thing and I am just trying to figure out  
16 if you are looking along those lines to get a real  
17 number.

18 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. So, we don't have  
19 access to the vaccination data, but for good reason,  
20 but we have, you know, the Department of Health is  
21 tracking vaccination date at the ZIP Code level and  
22 that is updated daily and overlaps significantly with  
23 our communities. We also are looking to, as the  
24 vaccination program continues, work to identify the  
25 number of NYCHA residents and aggregate who have been

2 vaccinated as that data becomes available. But  
3 within our outreach to residents, you know, as the  
4 weeks have increased and we are reaching out to  
5 residents for appointments, we are finding that a  
6 number of residents are sharing that they have been  
7 vaccinated. At least 22 percent of our calls to  
8 seniors were where we were reaching out for  
9 appointments and seniors have indicated that they  
10 have either received their first dose, they are fully  
11 vaccinated, or they have an appointment scheduled  
12 elsewhere, which is really a positive sign. But we  
13 know there is a lot of work to do within NYCHA and  
14 communities surrounding NYCHA to increase uptick.

15 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: How many  
16 vaccination sites are located at NYCHA at this very  
17 moment?

18 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, we have had 60  
19 across the-- you know, since the beginning of the  
20 vaccination program. We have all Levin that will be  
21 long-standing sites for at least four to-- I want to  
22 say 14 weeks. And so, seven of those 11 are active  
23 now and we have a scheduled to open up the other  
24 sites. And we still have some second dose  
25 appointments that are happening across the city at

2 some of our former sites. So, we can make sure that,  
3 Council member, you have an update of what is open  
4 and available right now and then the remaining sites  
5 that are scheduled to be open.

6 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And how many  
7 are senior only? Like, so out of the seven that are  
8 activated, how many are senior only?

9 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, these sites are  
10 available to all eligible NYCHA residents. Our  
11 outreach is to seniors. So, we are calling seniors  
12 to help schedule appointments. Test and trace has  
13 also been on the ground knocking on doors and,  
14 particularly, reaching out to seniors. As we reach  
15 seniors who have other members in their household who  
16 are eligible, we are scheduling them for  
17 appointments, as well, and we have also been  
18 encouraging and offering seniors an opportunity for a  
19 plus one so that they can scheduled appointment with  
20 someone that they trust and want to attend with,  
21 regardless of age, as long as that person is  
22 eligible, which now we are moving towards  
23 universality.

24 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: And do you  
25 believe that you have enough advance notice working

2 with the administration on opening up the sites and  
3 do you feel that you have an efficient about of  
4 workers to be able to conduct the outreach efforts?

5 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. We are fully  
6 working with the city and the Vaccine Command Center  
7 and we have also had members of our NYCHA team who  
8 have been assigned to the Vaccine Command Center,  
9 specifically, to be part of this effort. So,  
10 communication, collaborative planning, and really,  
11 you know, up-to-the-minute coordination has been  
12 happening across the site. So, certainly enough  
13 advanced notice and, you know, we, particularly in  
14 the early sites, a lot of our planning was really  
15 tied to the volume of doses that the city receives  
16 which fluctuates, so there is constant adjustment  
17 within the program. In terms of staff, we have, you  
18 know, certainly used leverage in our NYCHA staff to  
19 make calls and perform outreach and we have had  
20 really great support from Health and Hospitals and  
21 the test and trace team who have a robust network  
22 with the canvassers who have been on the ground at  
23 NYCHA developments and in NYCHA communities  
24 performing outreach.

2 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. Okay.  
3 Okay. And we were talking about seniors and  
4 vulnerable populations, as well. Do you  
5 differentiate between your seniors and your homebound  
6 seniors at all?

7 SIDEYA SHERMAN: So, our seniors, we have  
8 been reaching out to seniors generally. We don't  
9 necessarily know who is medically homebound. What we  
10 do know our seniors who may be mobility impaired or  
11 who are on life-sustaining equipment that, but that  
12 does not necessarily mean that they are homebound.  
13 So, as we are speaking with seniors, if they are able  
14 to on site or nearby, we are scheduling appointments.  
15 I think in our calls, we probably of reached less  
16 than 10 seniors or so that indicated that they are  
17 medically homebound and then were able to connect  
18 them to the city homebound program.

19 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay. All  
20 right. I am actually done with my questions and I  
21 know that we have also been joined by the Honorable  
22 borough president Gale Brewer who I know is going to  
23 speak after, and so, counsel, Audrey Sun, I'm not  
24 sure if there are any other members.



2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks. If there  
3 are no further questions from either Chair, then we  
4 will follow up with additional questions from Council  
5 member Koo and then we will move into your testimony  
6 from the public beginning with the Honorable Gale  
7 Brewer. Council member Koo, your clock will be set  
8 to three minutes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Hi. Thank you,  
12 both Chairs, for your advocacy for our NYCHA  
13 buildings and our seniors. Now, we always say New  
14 York City is the greatest city on earth, no? if we  
15 don't care-- if we don't take care of our NYCHA  
16 buildings and our seniors, how can we say that we are  
17 the greatest city? We are one of the worst. So, I  
18 hope the administration and everybody involved that  
19 you moved to take good care of our senior centers in  
20 our senior citizens because they are the treasures of  
21 our community and also the buildings. We cannot  
22 allow the NYCHA buildings to further deteriorate.  
23 It's at the worst already, so we must take care of  
24 these buildings. So, my question is I always receive  
25 complaints since the combination of Latimer Gardens

2 and Bland Houses management office is. We've got  
3 complaints that the office is not responsive to Bland  
4 residents and that the office is never open during  
5 posted hours. I tried going there during normal  
6 business hours and the doors were locked. Elderly  
7 and disabled residents cannot travel across downtown  
8 Flushing to Latimer House. This was even before the  
9 pandemic. So, many cannot access the necessary  
10 technology highlighted by NYCHA. Soon, this  
11 [inaudible 02:11:41] has only gotten worse during the  
12 pandemic, as many folks do not leave their homes, so  
13 no additional support in the management office  
14 provides to senior residents at Bland Houses during  
15 the pandemic to ensure their concerns were addressed  
16 in a timely manner?

17 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you, Council  
18 member, for that question and for raising that  
19 concern, so we can-- I don't know offhand the  
20 specific issues that Bland and why the management  
21 office would have been locked, but so we can look  
22 into that and make sure it is being addressed, but  
23 with respect to outreach to the management office, I  
24 would also just at that, while there are many digital  
25 tools that have been in place and put in place for

2 residents to connect with us, our customer contact  
3 center is still available by phone and most of the  
4 services that our residents would access at the  
5 management office should be available remotely  
6 through the customer contact center, as well. But we  
7 would make sure to look into the current situation at  
8 Bland and then, I think what you are describing in  
9 terms of the management offices is a consolidation  
10 and, as I am sure you are aware, NYCHA recently  
11 released its transformation plan for the agency which  
12 will include board decentralization of staff, of  
13 supervision and, and also the opportunity to break  
14 apart some of our consolidation so that residents  
15 have a better on site presidents from management.  
16 So, we can also follow up with you and share plans  
17 with in your district and, particularly, at Latimer  
18 and Bland.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay. Thank you.  
20 Please communicate with us. Yeah. Thank you,  
21 Chairs. Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Can I just-- I just  
23 wanted to follow up on that. I heard something about  
24 decentralization and that there will be more and  
25

2 better services at each development. So, can you  
3 share that plan with us?

4 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sure. Yes, Council  
5 member. So we can make sure that that's available  
6 and I think just high level, it's really making sure  
7 that the-- not only property management, but the  
8 functions that support property management are closer  
9 to the field and closer to our properties where our  
10 residents are being served and where decisions are  
11 made. So, that is really the goal of that plan and  
12 we can share that with you.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. I am looking  
14 forward to seeing it because that has always been the  
15 complaint that we have heard that, through the  
16 centralization, just call that central hotline, and  
17 like residents are not getting the services as  
18 quickly as possible and oftentimes, you know, tickets  
19 are closed and they don't know what happened, but if  
20 they can just work with their management office and  
21 have enough staff on site, I think that would solve a  
22 lot of the issues that we have been hearing about.  
23 So I look forward to seeing that plan. Thank you.

24 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Thank you.  
25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great. Thanks very  
3 much. If there are no further question from Council  
4 members, we will now move to public testimony. We  
5 will begin by hearing testimony from the Manhattan  
6 borough president, the Honorable Gale Brewer.

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: All right.  
8 Thank you very much to Chair Chin and Chair Ampry-  
9 Samuel. This is an incredibly important discussion  
10 and I think a lot of us have been to both the state  
11 and the city NYCHA developments during the pandemic.  
12 I certainly have. God forbid I should talk to each  
13 other, with all due respect, and so, to have this  
14 hearing when you are talking about the entire  
15 situation, I deeply appreciate it. I don't know if  
16 my numbers are right, but between the senior only and  
17 the scatter sites and developments that are not  
18 designated as senior only, although they have a lot  
19 of seniors in them, I don't know if it is around  
20 62,000 or more 65 or older. And, again, I don't know  
21 how many are homebound, but that is a lot of people  
22 and you know better than I that this god-awful  
23 pandemic has brought out needs that are unique to  
24 seniors. I know when the senior centers closed--  
25 and I want to thank you, Council member Chin because

2 I know you had a hearing on that-- and how important  
3 they are. And almost, best example, of course, was  
4 the food and we know that, at that time, we had to  
5 try to get seniors on the Get Food NYC list and they  
6 weren't getting on it and the foods that they got  
7 wasn't the right kind of food. It was not a smooth  
8 transition. People who were used to getting scratch  
9 even food at their senior center were caught in a  
10 limbo-- bureaucratic limbo-- with you and others.  
11 They all navigated the system to try to get seniors  
12 through the cracks, on the lists, seniors who were  
13 part of the center, seniors who were not part of the  
14 center. It was a mess. And certainly without  
15 internet access, it was hard to sign up, period. So,  
16 that's one issue. I do support your Intro 1827 of  
17 2019 which would establish a NYCHA liaison within the  
18 Department of the Aging. I think if that person had  
19 been there, we might've had less challenges in terms  
20 of food delivery and because, you know, there is food  
21 delivery that is actually going to go on. I don't  
22 think it is going to end with the pandemic. I also  
23 know that, looking ahead, such a person could  
24 facilitate training for NYCHA seniors on the issue of  
25 technology. We all know that, even today, in 2021--

2 and here we are in April. There's just a lot of  
3 folks who don't have their shot because they don't  
4 know how to use the internet despite all the efforts  
5 and it is particularly true for seniors who live in  
6 NYCHA. So this kind of person could address those  
7 needs, no question, not to mention all the other lack  
8 of bandwidth, etcetera. I'm also supportive of 415  
9 of 2018 which requires NYCHA to annually report on  
10 senior centers that operate within NYCHA buildings.  
11 According to the Regional Plan Association in 2020,  
12 using NYC open data set, which you know is my bill,  
13 NYCHA provide space for 121 senior centers citywide  
14 or 47.5 percent of all senior centers in New York  
15 City. We all know that we need more. And we know  
16 that between November and 2021-- 2020 and 2021, we  
17 reached out to all of the senior centers in the  
18 borough of Manhattan asking them about reopening  
19 because that is the question now. And we all know  
20 that they were waiting for DFTA to issue guidelines.  
21 They have done their best to stock up on PPE and  
22 waiting about reopening. I would say my number one  
23 question when I go to NYCHA and now it is when will  
24 my senior center open? It is the lifeline and we  
25 know that some centers during the pandemic-- and I

2 know that the city Council was helpful in pushing  
3 this because we wanted the local centers to have the  
4 ability to cook and deliver their own meals and  
5 removal of using Get Food NYC and I think we know  
6 what the challenges are there in terms of the quality  
7 of the of the food and, despite all the effort, local  
8 is better. And I also know that, you know, just how  
9 this pandemic is going to change, our senior centers  
10 provide services to their members. Reopening will  
11 not look the same and so, you know, as somebody who  
12 focuses on the Internet and the technology, that has  
13 got to be part of the discussion so important to  
14 capture data from the centers of how many seniors are  
15 served, what programs are offered, the number of  
16 concerns that have been raised, how they are  
17 resolved, what is the baseline of new normal, because  
18 we don't know what that is and if Intro 415 passes,  
19 the first annual report would offer an invaluable  
20 data for the current state of NYCHA based senior  
21 centers and how these centers could adopt to post-  
22 Covid. Just one example, I am trying so hard to get  
23 a garden. You can see the old raised platforms at  
24 one NYCHA senior center. Just to get the small  
25 amount of money to do that is hard. What a great



2 opportunity for reopening, but to have fresh fruits  
3 and vegetables that are planted by the seniors with  
4 support from the senior center? Those kinds of  
5 things need to be part of that data. Do you have  
6 that fresh fruits and vegetables? How do you get  
7 them? In order for seniors living in NYCHA to age in  
8 place during the current pandemic, they have to be  
9 able to reach the Covid 19 vaccine. So I have been--  
10 not to all, but an awful lot-- of centers that are  
11 offering the vaccine and I have seen different  
12 situations. In some cases, on a weekend, I would go  
13 to seven or eight different centers: some that are  
14 run by Javits, some that are run by, obviously,  
15 different hospitals and then the ones that the state  
16 runs and the city run vis-à-vis NYCHA. And then for  
17 Ukah-- I call her. Ukah, I don't like what I'm  
18 seeing. Sorry. I don't care if it is midnight, 3  
19 o'clock in the morning, Sunday, Saturday. And I want  
20 to thank Ukah because she always answers my call.  
21 Thank you very much, Ukah Busgith, for being such a  
22 good public servant for the city of New York. Then  
23 there are lots of issues. I have to say, I will be  
24 honest with you and I don't want to say this, but I  
25 have to. It is just not as well organized as the

2 other centers and it has to be. You have the most  
3 vulnerable seniors. I don't see the numbers now. In  
4 some cases, whether it is to the credit of Test and  
5 Trace or Department of Health or NYCHA-- it's  
6 sometimes hard to figure out who is running it, to be  
7 honest with you, but I ask-- the numbers are not  
8 there. Where is the sign outside stating that this  
9 is a vaccine center? I know, supposedly, it is going  
10 to be going until June or May or another three weeks  
11 or whatever, but even then, the first day should be  
12 fall of seniors who are getting the vaccine or others  
13 with underlying conditions and so on. It doesn't  
14 feel like it has got the kind of outreach that is  
15 necessary. So, I will just leave it at that. I've  
16 been to the Johnson Center, have been the lower East  
17 side, I have been to Washington Heights. I've been  
18 to almost every development where there is a  
19 NYCHA/vaccine center and it does need to be more  
20 populated in terms of-- and I know that, in some  
21 cases-- I want to give you a great example on the  
22 lower East side where there was a J&J going on, which  
23 was good. Not enough people coming in in my opinion,  
24 but still really good. And then those who had gotten  
25 they shot earlier which had been either-- I think it

2 was Pfizer-- they were to the credit of the  
3 nonprofit. In this case, Grand Street. They were  
4 taking them in their van to Brooklyn to get the  
5 second shot because the second shot wasn't available  
6 there. So, I thought, great. Here's a nonprofit  
7 really doing the right thing. We still need more  
8 translation on the outreach in different languages  
9 and we still need constant, constant, constant  
10 outreach in terms of getting people to show up. And  
11 I think even with the homebound, so are eligible for  
12 the J&J, but they are still not getting the kind of  
13 information that they need to be able to-- the  
14 homebound person, you know, you have to fill out a  
15 form, there is online information. The senior  
16 centers are reaching out, but you just can't reach  
17 everybody. So, yes. It's a hard job, but it has to  
18 be done with that kind of, you know, this is one time  
19 life living opportunity. You're going to save a life  
20 if you do it right. So, I know that Robo call is  
21 used, emails which may or may not be helpful, and  
22 under the door with the leaflets, but sometimes when  
23 the Robo call comes, the seniors say that when they  
24 call back, there is nobody answering the phone. And  
25 you know how seniors are. If somebody doesn't answer

2 the phone, they may not even leave a message. So,  
3 Robo calls with a number that is not answered isn't  
4 necessarily helpful, particularly if there is a  
5 language issue. Print information in different  
6 languages is really the way to go. So, I am simply  
7 here to say that you can't teach in place if you  
8 don't-- in a pandemic unless our city is  
9 intentionally prioritizing seniors and public  
10 housing. So, I think I've tried to outline some of  
11 the issues. Put a sign outside. It's true that you  
12 can't-- this is an interesting problem. You can't  
13 tell the world, blasting it into the cities vaccine  
14 site because, if you do, then, with all due respect,  
15 the white people are going to show up. From  
16 Westchester they showed up at one NYCHA-- had to  
17 kick them out personally. So, you do have to have a  
18 local strategy and what has been working elsewhere as  
19 you give a tenant leader, I don't know, 20 or 30  
20 slots and say, listen, this is the amount you need to  
21 fill up for this particular Saturday or Sunday. That  
22 seems to be working or, you know, you go 10 times  
23 under the door with the leaflet. But it has to be a  
24 trusted partner that is calling that senior. No,  
25 maybe the numbers are up. I just heard 15,000. I

2 don't know if that is stated city. It's hard to see  
3 if this is both. There is not great communication.  
4 So, I want to say congratulations on the hearing. I  
5 know I have talked too much. I feel very  
6 passionately and I appreciate the opportunity to  
7 share what I've learned. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very  
9 much. We will now turn to testimony from the  
10 remaining members of the public. Thanks so much for  
11 your patience. Please listen for your name as I will  
12 call individuals one by one and will periodically  
13 announce the person who is speaking next.

14 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: One second.  
15 There was a question from Council member--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so  
17 much. I really appreciate that. This is a question  
18 for Borough President Brower. You know, we can talk  
19 off-line about this, but because this is the topic of  
20 this hearing, you know, we, at Amsterdam Houses, have  
21 an opportunity-- you know, have plans drawn for a  
22 NORC and I think that happened while you were Council  
23 member like 10 years ago and that never went  
24 anywhere, although we had beautiful plans drawn in.  
25 I didn't bring it up this time at the hearing. I

2 have brought it up previously, but do you think NYCHA  
3 at all intends to go forward with those plans? It  
4 could be a model for--

5 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: I mean, NYCHA  
6 knows better than I do, so I don't want to-- but it  
7 is my experience that the reason NORCs makes sense is  
8 that there are so many family buildings that have  
9 seniors and so, if you don't help them, they are  
10 going to get lost without that extra support. So,  
11 yes. I am very, very supportive of NORCs and what  
12 was found at Amsterdam when there was a NORC for a  
13 while and then the funding ran out was the mental  
14 health issues for the seniors and the family building  
15 were huge. A surprise even to social workers. So,  
16 yes. NORCs are the best way to go definitely. And  
17 in this pandemic, it would have helped a lot.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.  
19 If there are any further questions, we will now turn  
20 to testimony from the remaining members of the  
21 public. Once again, please listen for your name to  
22 be called. Once your name is called, a member of our  
23 staff will prompt you to unmute and the sergeant-at-  
24 arms will set the timer and announced that you may  
25 begin. In the interest of time, your testimony will

2 be set to three minutes. I would now like to welcome  
3 Beth Williams to testify followed by Briana Peyton  
4 Williams.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

6 BETH WILLIAMS: My name is Beth Williams  
7 and I am the deputy director of legal services for  
8 Project Guardianship. We were a demonstration  
9 project of the Vera Institute of Justice before we  
10 sped off. We service court appointed legal guardian  
11 to many, many elderly people in New York City and we  
12 have served hundreds in our 15 years that we have  
13 been in service. I, personally, have represented  
14 many seniors across New York City who reside in NYCHA  
15 public housing and, based on my experience, there are  
16 couple of reasons for seniors to be displaced from  
17 their homes. One is they have a decline in their  
18 health and their ability to perform activities of  
19 daily living and that necessitates they go to a  
20 nursing home. And the other reason is there tenancy  
21 is terminated and they are evicted. Generally, that  
22 is due to recertification issues, nonpayment issues,  
23 or nuisance issues that can directly be related to  
24 cognitive decline. I am really concerned that the  
25 senior centers aren't open and visitation programs

1 aren't happening because, with the pandemic, because  
2 there is really not anybody watching what is  
3 happening to seniors in NYCHA buildings and when  
4 nobody is really keeping an eye on them, that means  
5 that they are not going to get the medical assistance  
6 and the support that they need at home and that is  
7 what often results in them declining and ending up in  
8 a nursing facility and without a strong advocate with  
9 a lot of time and resources, getting them home is  
10 often an impossible hurdle. One issue that I have  
11 seen for people all that ended up in this situation  
12 is that it is impossible to get a reasonable  
13 accommodation from NYCHA because maybe a wheelchair  
14 won't fit through a doorway or there is not  
15 sufficient space for a live in a. Sometimes the  
16 alternative to reasonable accommodation is to move  
17 somebody to a different apartment, but that is sort  
18 of the antithesis of aging in place. Another issue  
19 which the people have testified about is the  
20 condition and the habitability of the apartment. So,  
21 when seniors are being evaluated for home care or an  
22 increase in home care hours, the apartment has to be  
23 assessed by a managed long-term care provider to  
24 determine whether it is safe and habitable before  
25



2 they award home care hours through Medicaid and,  
3 sadly, given the state of many of NYCHA's  
4 developments, apartments don't pass the habitability  
5 requirements of a managed long-term care provider  
6 and, of course, these requests for repairs, if they  
7 are acknowledged at all, can take months, if not  
8 years to materialize. With respect to tenancy  
9 terminations and evictions, we often see seniors who  
10 are suffering from cognitive decline and up unable to  
11 manage their recertification's. They have trouble  
12 managing their finances including paying rent on  
13 time, and they can present with nuisance behaviors  
14 that are the result of underlying kinds of dementia  
15 and a lot of times these people also become victims  
16 of elder abuse where unauthorized occupants may move  
17 into their home--

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

19 BETH WILLIAMS: or a bad character  
20 steals funds they would otherwise use to pay rent.  
21 So, it would be really great for NYCHA to implement  
22 policies that, at a minimum, provide seniors with a  
23 guardian ad litem by right in any termination  
24 proceeding for seniors who are 60 and older. And I  
25 would like to say, just before I end, that while

2 legal guardianship isn't the first line of defense in  
3 ensuring seniors age in place in their community  
4 homes, we have been very successful in maintaining  
5 our clients in the community and I hope NYCHA  
6 administration would be open to ongoing training for  
7 their staff and decision-makers on these legal  
8 guardianship and the role of a legal guardian when  
9 there are no family or friends that are able to  
10 provide support to the senior residents. Thank you  
11 so much.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It looks like we  
13 have a question from Council member Rosenthal.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you so  
15 much. And I am confident, Council members Ampry-  
16 Samuel and chin know the answer to this, so this is  
17 for my edification. I really appreciate that  
18 testimony, Ms. Williams, and I'm wondering is there  
19 someone who you can speak with directly at NYCHA on  
20 these issues? Who is your contact?

21 BETH WILLIAMS: You know, we don't  
22 really have a person in the administration who we  
23 have reached out to. We generally deal with housing  
24 managers and housing assistance in the development  
25 where our clients live, but, generally, when we tried

2 to get through to NYCHA, we go through our contacts  
3 at HRA or APS and they are able to help us get in  
4 touch with somebody who can move on issues of  
5 habitability and accommodation, but it would be great  
6 if we did have somebody that we could speak with  
7 directly.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. I am  
9 seeing my liaison is on this call. This zoom, I  
10 think, although he may have just stepped away, but I  
11 don't know. It strikes me that this should be number  
12 one and pretty straightforward if we had a policy  
13 about it and, number two, a person who should-- who  
14 you should be able to work with.

15 BETH WILLIAMS: That would be great.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank  
17 you so much. Thank you, Chairs. I appreciate it.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah. I think we  
19 can connect you with the NYCHA leadership who is here  
20 today with Family Services so that you do have a  
21 direct contact. So, I guess, our committee counsel  
22 can help you connect. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.

24 We will now hear from Brianna Paden Williams followed  
25 by Leo Asen.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

3 BRIANNA PADEN WILLIAMS: Thank you.

4 Hello. I'm Brianna Paden Williams, the  
5 communications and policy associate at Live On New  
6 York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
7 today. Live On New York's members include more than  
8 100 community-based nonprofits that provide core  
9 services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our  
10 community as we age. In New York City, NYCHA  
11 represents one of the greatest providers of  
12 affordable housing for low income seniors. Currently  
13 38 percent of NYCHA households are headed by an older  
14 adult age 62 and older. Just as the buildings are  
15 aging, so I the tenants that occupy them, making the  
16 need for quality and safe services in NYCHA paramount  
17 to the success of the community. Unfortunately,  
18 providers of services such as senior centers and  
19 NORCs that operate in NYCHA community spaces, face  
20 daily challenges just to keep the doors open. While  
21 an emphasis must be placed on improving the living  
22 conditions of residents living at NYCHA developments,  
23 it's also important to acknowledge senior service  
24 providers have not been immune to the challenges  
25 during the pandemic. Prior to the onset of the

2 pandemic and potentially exacerbating the pandemic's  
3 impacts, inadequate conditions in NYCHA developments  
4 including poor ventilation systems, broken elevators,  
5 and leaking roofs are just one of the many challenges  
6 providers have worked to alleviate. While working to  
7 mitigate these repairs, providers are frequently  
8 faced with fines and violations, in addition to  
9 lengthy approval processes by [inaudible 02:35:27]  
10 and exacerbate the timeline for repair. The impact  
11 of these fines and conditions are not only monetary.  
12 Instead of spending critical time providing critical  
13 services for NYCHA residents and the surrounding  
14 community, providers are forced to become experts in  
15 the nuances of repair systems outside of their job  
16 description in order to simply stay afloat. This  
17 impact cannot be understated as these nonprofit  
18 providers worked tirelessly to provide high quality  
19 services to those who need it most. Now, in the  
20 midst of the pandemic, it's critical that these  
21 repairs and conditions are addressed as they pose an  
22 even greater risk for residents and staff as we look  
23 ahead to the resume in person services and  
24 programming. In response to these difficulties, Live  
25 On New York recommends the city must work to continue

2 to increase capital funding for public housing to  
3 support ventilation upgrades and other critical  
4 infrastructure improvements, redirect fines to ensure  
5 nonprofits are not penalized for violations that are  
6 out of their control, and fully fund the indirect  
7 cost rate initiative, which is critical to ensuring  
8 nonprofits operating in NYCHA remain viable in the  
9 future. In addition, Live On New York strongly  
10 supports Intro number 1827 that would provide a  
11 dedicated NYCHA liaison within DFTA. To ensure there  
12 is a clear and consistent line of coordination, there  
13 should be an individual within DFTA whose sole focus  
14 is to coordinate with NYCHA on matters impacting  
15 older adults. We also support Intro number 1415--  
16 415, excuse me-- that would require NYCHA to report  
17 annually on senior--

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

19 BRIANNA PADEN WILLIAMS: within NYCHA  
20 buildings as we look to create better solutions for  
21 older adults who rely on senior centers for critical  
22 services, receiving an annual report from NYCHA would  
23 provide senior services and community based  
24 organizations with the necessary information to  
25 create evidence-based solutions. And all just close

2 on, as we look ahead to warmer seasons when senior  
3 centers located in NYCHA will act as cooling centers  
4 for those in need, NYCHA developments in DFTA fiscal  
5 must work to accelerate the approval process for  
6 repairs and replacements of poor HVAC systems.  
7 Further, as DFTA moves towards reopening of in person  
8 senior services, funding and flexibility for budget  
9 amendments must be prioritized to ensure senior  
10 centers in NYCHA can proactively address leaks and  
11 other issues. Thank you for the opportunity to  
12 testify.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I would  
14 now like to welcome Leo Asen to testify followed by  
15 Molly Krakowski.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

17 LEO ASEN: Chairs Chin and Ampry-Samuel  
18 and members of the city Council Committee on Aging  
19 and Public Housing, my name is Leo Asen and I am the  
20 president of AARP New York representing 750,000  
21 members of the 50+ community in New York City. NYCHA  
22 plays a significant role in providing affordable  
23 housing and critical services for a large portion of  
24 New York's older population. 21 percent of NYCHA  
25 residents are 62 years or older, however, the health

1 and well-being of NYCHA tenants have suffered as a  
2 result of the consequences stemming from years of  
3 disinvestment and, as a result of this neglect, NYCHA  
4 residents have too long gone without heat and hot  
5 water in winter months, faced adverse health  
6 conditions stemming from poor indoor air quality, and  
7 even been trapped in their apartments when elevators  
8 are out of service. These issues have only been  
9 compounded by the Covid 19 pandemic as residents have  
10 been left more vulnerable to contracting Covid 19 due  
11 to old and outdated air ventilation systems, as well  
12 as elevators that are routinely out of service and  
13 often cause crowding. The city, state, and federal  
14 government need to act immediately with strong  
15 policies and funding in order to address these  
16 issues. AARP fully supports City Council Intro 1827  
17 which would create the NYCHA liaison within the  
18 Department for that Aging. AARP also supports Intro  
19 415 in order to develop mechanisms that would help  
20 city leaders better understand the scope and services  
21 offered at NYCHA senior centers. NYCHA senior  
22 centers are a critical component of the city's  
23 infrastructure and will be critical to addressing the  
24 needs of older NYCHA tenants that have been  
25



2 exacerbated by the pandemic, especially regarding  
3 food insecurity, social isolation, healthcare, and  
4 other related social services. We also believe that  
5 the city should expand funding allocated to NYCHA  
6 senior centers in order to support the efforts amid  
7 the cities recovery from the pandemic. AARP also  
8 calls on the city, state, and federal government to  
9 decide funding that would address NYCHA's 31 billion  
10 worth of capital infrastructure needs, especially  
11 regarding elevator maintenance and air filtration  
12 projects in order to protect the health and well-  
13 being of NYCHA's aging residents. Thank you for the  
14 opportunity to testify today.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I would  
16 now like to welcome Molly Krakowski to testify  
17 followed by Suhali Mendez.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

19 MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: Hi. Good morning. My  
20 name is Molly Krakowski. I am the senior director of  
21 government affairs JASA. I would like to thank Chair  
22 Ampry-Samuel and Chair Chin and the members of the  
23 committees for hosting today's important hearing.  
24 JASA have served New York as one of the largest  
25 organizations and trusted agencies serving older New

2 Yorkers for the last 50 years in the Bronx, Brooklyn,  
3 Manhattan, and Queens. We are very appreciative of  
4 the New York City Council's continued focus on the  
5 needs of the most vulnerable New Yorkers throughout  
6 the pandemic and a spotlight on this population and  
7 older New Yorkers must continue as the budget  
8 negotiations for FY 22 move forward. JASA has a  
9 long-standing partnership and productive partnership,  
10 approximately 40 years with NYCHA. We have five DFTA  
11 contracted senior centers located in NYCHA sites.  
12 Throggs Neck and the Randall Balcom Houses, Sue  
13 Ginsberg and Pelham Parkway Houses, Bay Eden and the  
14 Bay Chester Houses in Williamsburg, and Williamsburg  
15 Houses in Cooper Park and that Cooper Our Houses. In  
16 addition, JASA provides NORC supported service  
17 programs in Bushwick Highland and Surfside [inaudible  
18 02:42:19] Gardens developments. Two communities are  
19 now part of the PACT program. Bay Eden which is in  
20 the Baychester, Murphy, and Williamsburg. Many NYCHA  
21 residents are also assisted by JASA case management,  
22 our elder abuse programs, and a variety of other DFTA  
23 funded programs. NYCHA has proven a strong and  
24 supportive partner to JASA and our NORC programs and  
25 our senior centers participating in community events

2 and providing support to help JASA secure additional  
3 funding, including very competitive funding from New  
4 York State Office for the Aging and the last RFP for  
5 the N ORC programs. I want to just skip ahead.

6 Unfortunately, NYCHA has demonstrated a commitment to  
7 helping its senior residents aging in place is

8 seriously challenged by the aging facilities

9 infrastructure and limited maintenance capacity at

10 this negatively impacts program operations, as well as

11 the experiences of individual tenants. Typically,

12 issues include broken doors, flooding caused by rain

13 and leaks, out of service elevators, uneven

14 sidewalks, building security, and other needs and

15 concerns and they are often long wait times for

16 service ticket response and multiple tickets needing

17 to be submitted. So, we welcome Intro 1827 which

18 would see the creation of the much needed liaison

19 between NYCHA and facilities and matters impacting

20 older adults. Skipping to Covid 19 response, JASA

21 has obviously been making thousands of phone calls

22 within NYCHA and two older New Yorkers. In addition

23 to just checking in and doing wellness calls and

24 supporting connectivity to the resources in the

25 community, we have also been working to assist with

2 vaccination appointments. We applaud the city's  
3 outreach and providing the technology, the OATS--

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

5 MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: and the tablets. That  
6 being said, we would like to see, if this moves  
7 forward, the connection between tablet distribution  
8 and service providers in NYCHA. It would have been  
9 and it could be very beneficial to have connectivity  
10 between senior service providers who are already  
11 existent in the community and those who are receiving  
12 the tablets to build on their benefit to the  
13 community. And, finally, JASA is working closely  
14 with the city to outreach, like I said, to set up  
15 vaccination, but also we are serving in partnership  
16 with NYCHA as pop up clinics in a number of our  
17 sites, as well as our Bay Eden senior center, which  
18 is going to be a longer-term clinic for Covid  
19 vaccinations. We are also identifying homebound  
20 NYCHA residents who are in need of vaccinations and  
21 the sites that we serve as part of the latest  
22 vaccination campaign for the homebound. We look  
23 forward to continuing our collaboration with New York  
24 City Housing Authority, DFTA, and the New York City  
25 Council. Thank you very much.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I would  
3 now like to welcome Suhali Mendez to testify followed  
4 by Melissa Sklarz.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

6 SUHALI MENDEZ: Good afternoon. My name  
7 is Suhali Mendez and I'm a senior advocate at New  
8 York Lawyers for the Public Interest disability  
9 justice program. New York Lawyers for the Public  
10 Interest is a civil rights organization with a robust  
11 disability rights practice which also has a housing  
12 advocacy for people with disabilities and this is a  
13 very important part of our work. We represent  
14 tenants and matters including the need for reasonable  
15 accommodations such as apartment and, in area  
16 retrofitting, transfers to accessible apartments and  
17 protection in the use of service animals, as well as  
18 other housing discrimination issues such as source of  
19 income discrimination. We appreciate the opportunity  
20 to provide testimony regarding this matter and we  
21 want to commend the work of the Introduction to the  
22 bill 415, sponsored by Council member Chin and the  
23 introduction 1827, sponsored by Council member Ampry-  
24 Samuel. It is important that the New York City  
25 Housing Authority create accessible resources and

2 spaces for it senior citizen residents and people  
3 with disabilities. In order to meet the needs of  
4 seniors that live in NYCHA developments, as well as  
5 all New Yorkers with disabilities, NYCHA must take  
6 immediate action to increase the number of accessible  
7 apartments within NYCHA's portfolio making reasonable  
8 accommodations and modifications for existing NYCHA  
9 tenants, as well as vastly decreasing the amount of  
10 time that tenants with disabilities must wait in  
11 order to obtain accessible housing and/or reasonable  
12 accommodations within their units. NYCHA must  
13 increase its accessible housing stock in order to  
14 meet the needs of NYCHA tenants who are senior  
15 citizens and/or have disabilities. In order to  
16 facilitate some of the needs of tenants who are  
17 senior citizens and or people with disabilities, it  
18 is imperative to have the appropriate resources  
19 available and have accountability on the  
20 effectiveness of these resources. Over the years, we  
21 have received calls from people with disabilities who  
22 occupy not just housing spaces and waited months,  
23 even years, for reasonable accommodations or even to  
24 be transferred to a accessible apartment. We hear  
25 frequently from NYCHA tenants that they report that

2 elevators are in woeful disrepair and continuously  
3 breaking down, leaving them trapped and isolated from  
4 their communities. Accessible features such as  
5 elevators must be maintained and in working order so  
6 that they can be readily used for all individuals  
7 within NYCHA. As documented in the New York City  
8 Accessible NYC Report, approximately 11 percent of  
9 New Yorkers, over 1 million people, disclose living  
10 with disabilities. Furthermore, as noted in the  
11 Mayors Housing Report--

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

13 SUHALI MENDEZ: Oh, sorry. I will wrap  
14 up. Residents who are at least 65 years old are  
15 projected to increase 40 percent between the years  
16 2010 and 2040, so nearly 40 percent of NYCHA  
17 households are headed by residents who are 62 years  
18 or older. New York City has reportedly promised to  
19 build more senior housing on existing NYCHA land  
20 which the far has been wholly insufficient to address  
21 the crisis of people with disabilities who live in  
22 these residences. And in order to meet the needs of  
23 these tenants, NYCHA and New York City must make  
24 immediate action to address the needs of senior  
25 citizens and tenants with disabilities. We implore

2 that the city Council, as well as the Mayor's Office,  
3 to take steps to match the supply of accessible NYCHA  
4 housing for the needs of public housing population.

5 Thank you so much for your time and I hope that this  
6 information was well received. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I would  
8 now like to welcome Melissa Sklarz to testify  
9 followed by Bonnie Lumagui.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

11 MELISSA SKLARZ: Hi. Good afternoon.

12 My name is Melissa Sklarz. I am a senior government  
13 relations strategist at SAGE. SAGE was founded in  
14 1978. It's the oldest and largest organization  
15 dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older people  
16 in New York. I want to thank Chairs Ampry-Samuel and  
17 Chairs Chin. It's always great to be with friends.  
18 Housing is a basic need in New York. New York City  
19 housing needs are critical. Data shows that there  
20 are 3.2 million people in New York State over the age  
21 of 65 and 1.1 million over the age of 65 in New York  
22 City. The estimates would be 200,000 LGBT elders in  
23 New York State and 100,000 LGBT elders over 65 in New  
24 York City. As of today, there are 230 units of LGBT  
25 welcome affordable housing in New York City and that



2 is our SAGE housing. In 2019, we opened Stonewall  
3 House in For Green with 145 affordable units of LGBT  
4 friendly affordable housing. This year we are  
5 opening the Crotona Pride House in Freemont with 83  
6 units. People are moving in as we speak. Of course,  
7 our schedule was delayed by a year of Covid. In  
8 Stonewall House, 25 percent were set aside for  
9 formerly homeless and did Crotona, 30 percent were  
10 set aside for formerly homeless. Both buildings are  
11 anchored by SAGE centers-- state-of-the-art centers  
12 that will be begins for not only residents that live  
13 in these buildings, but for elders throughout the  
14 community in the neighborhood. They will provide  
15 services and programming for everything that elders  
16 will need to navigate being in New York. So, the  
17 irony right now is we have the Stonewall generation--  
18 the people that gave us the Stonewall Riots are at  
19 risk for stigma discrimination, lack of security, and  
20 health needs. What we have shown is that case  
21 management and support services diminish healthcare  
22 and costs and reductions in ambulatory care. SAGE  
23 and the city Council can show the way nationwide for  
24 LGBT friendly affordable housing services. With  
25 Covid, we have transitioned into our programming to

2 online. We have over 100 programs and we have also  
3 created SAGE Connect which allows volunteers to help  
4 and reach out to our constituency where isolation is  
5 the biggest need because of their thin support  
6 networks. SAGE requests more access to technology.  
7 SAGE supports purchase of technology, better  
8 broadband and Wi-Fi access in public housing. We  
9 hope that older adult centers must be included in  
10 this plan. We are always grateful to our  
11 relationship with our friends in the city Council.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

13 MELISSA SKLARZ: We need more housing,  
14 more access to technology programs and services.  
15 Thank you for this opportunity.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I would  
17 now like to welcome Bonnie Lumagui to testify.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

19 BONNIE LUMAGUI: Thank you. Good  
20 afternoon. I want to thank Council member Margaret  
21 Chin and Council member Ampry-Samuel for today's  
22 hearing. It's an extremely timely topic of senior  
23 centers in public housing. Hamilton Madison House  
24 has long been deeply dedicated to supporting seniors  
25 in Manhattan, especially in the neighborhoods of the

2 lower East side and Chinatown. In particular, we  
3 extend services to low income and immigrant seniors,  
4 many of Asian descent and residing in NYCHA. Most  
5 relevant to this hearing is the Smith NORC located in  
6 the Smith Houses in NYCHA on the lower East Side of  
7 Manhattan. Perhaps more than any other population as  
8 we have discussed throughout this hearing today how  
9 devastating the effects of Covid 19 have been on the  
10 senior population, especially those residing in  
11 NYCHA. As is well known, a large majority of seniors  
12 sadly died due to Covid 19 and has compelled many  
13 seniors to remain at home to avoid contact with  
14 others and creating isolation, mental health  
15 difficulties, and other struggles. Closing of senior  
16 centers, in particular, has created serious  
17 challenges and that these programs serve as the hub  
18 city and the safety nets for so many seniors with  
19 multiple essential purposes: meals, translation  
20 services, access to so many other vital programs. To  
21 compensate for the loss of senior centers, Hamilton  
22 Madison House has preserved alternative methods for  
23 supporting our seniors and we thank Trinity Church  
24 and Common Pantry for providing pantry to our seniors  
25 because the food many of our seniors felt they were

2 receiving from the Get Food program was just not  
3 adequate for their needs. We are also delivering  
4 meals made available from organizations like Recap  
5 thank that provide culturally competent meals to our  
6 members. We look forward to the day we can reopen  
7 the Smith Center and we intend to work with DFTA and  
8 others to ensure the reopening occurs in a manner  
9 that maximizes safety for seniors that allows for the  
10 most satisfying possible experience. The other thing  
11 that we really need to talk about is the support for  
12 immigrants. Ensuring that all seniors serving  
13 immigrant populations are fully equipped to respond  
14 to the unique post-Covid 19 needs of the population  
15 with respect to matters like nutrition, health,  
16 culture, and language needs. And also to support  
17 seniors who feel anti-Asian another anti-immigrant  
18 sentiment makes them unsafe to travel independently.  
19 Our recommendations to DFTA for comprehensive safety  
20 measures. Issue safety and screening protocols and  
21 procedures and extend the resources necessary to  
22 comply, including staffing, to manage screening and  
23 temperature checks. Extend resources to allow for  
24 proper ventilation, adequate cleaning, and crowd  
25 control. Recommendations. There are other

2 recommendations that I have met her in the testimony  
3 that I submitted, as well. Recommendations regarding  
4 meal provision. Grab and go can be done and it was  
5 done effectively in the beginning of the pandemic and  
6 we would need to make sure that there are efforts to  
7 ensure social distancing. In established criteria  
8 for meal recipients who may accept meals on behalf of  
9 seniors. I also want to point out that the upcoming  
10 NORC and senior center RFPs, we strongly urge the  
11 delay of the RFPs until senior centers reopen to full  
12 capacity. To complete our proposal for multi-year  
13 contract requires time and attention that is not  
14 presently available as organizations are focused on  
15 meeting the increased means that the pandemic has  
16 created. We also find it impossible to plan and  
17 develop programming in our current situation with  
18 Covid who do not have a clear timeline for reopening.  
19 If the new RFPs issued, we recommend that a new  
20 concept paper that reflects the leaders circumstances  
21 and affords direct service organizations the  
22 opportunity to, and, thereby, share perspectives  
23 about the ways in which the environment has been  
24 altered by the pandemic and how, accordingly, program  
25 should be shaped for the future. Thank you, again.

2 Hamilton House will be pleased to partner with the  
3 city Council and DFTA to ensure a safe and productive  
4 reopening the senior centers in NYCHA.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. This  
6 concludes the public testimony. If we have  
7 inadvertently forgotten to call on someone to  
8 testify, please use the zoom raise hand function now  
9 and we will try to hear from you at this time.

10 Seeing no hands, I will now turn it back to Chairs  
11 Ampry-Samuel and Chin to close the hearing.

12 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you so  
13 much. I first want to recognize all of the  
14 suggestions that were made during the public  
15 testimony. It's been very helpful in some great  
16 suggestions that should be incorporated-- I didn't  
17 even touch that. The suggestions that have been made  
18 are greatly appreciated and we should be utilizing  
19 that information in our conversations with the  
20 administration. I will end with this: we should be  
21 proactive. We should be proactive and not reactive.  
22 Instead of waiting to be told what to do and waiting  
23 to be told about next steps, we should be working  
24 together and dictating policy and procedures and how  
25 we are working with our seniors and I hope that this

2 hearing spoke directly to the issues and how we can  
3 actually work better together on behalf of our  
4 seniors. So I want to personally thank Chair Chin  
5 for your partnership and your ongoing advocacy on  
6 behalf of our aging New Yorkers. So, thank you.  
7 Thank you to NYCHA for your testimony. To the  
8 advocates and to DFTA. And, with that, I will turn  
9 it over to Chair Chin.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah. Thank you. I  
11 wanted to thank you, Chair Ampry-Samuel for  
12 cochairing this important meeting and for your strong  
13 advocacy for our residents in NYCHA. It is so  
14 critical that we have these hearings and that we hear  
15 what is going on in NYCHA and in DFTA and then also  
16 hear from the suggestions from our advocates. And  
17 what the take away is that you hear from the  
18 providers and they are ready. They are ready to  
19 reopen safely. All they need is the go ahead and  
20 also the resources to make sure that there are  
21 resources for the deep cleaning and everything that  
22 needs to be in place and that is why we are  
23 demanding, from the administration, plan has to be in  
24 place and we have to get our centers open back up and  
25 address, you know, the needs of our seniors and are

2 growing senior population. And we know that, from  
3 the pandemic, there are a lot of seniors who were  
4 never connected to senior centers and actually found  
5 out about our senior centers because they were the  
6 ones that were helping them with the Get Food program  
7 and helping them with other needs that they have.

8 So, I just wanted to really thank all the advocates  
9 who came with your suggestions. Borough President and  
10 all the staff and the sergeants who helped make the  
11 hearing successful. And we will continue to follow  
12 up with you because right now is the budget process  
13 and we have to make sure these critical programs are  
14 funded by the administration and, as I said earlier,  
15 this time there is no excuse for no money because  
16 there is money coming down from the federal  
17 government and hopefully also from the state  
18 government. So, we have a more robust budget this  
19 year and we've got to make sure that critical  
20 programs and repairs are being funded and our NYCHA  
21 developments are taken care of. So, thank you,  
22 again, everyone, for coming today and I will turn it  
23 back to you, Chair Ampry-Samuel, to close up.

24 CHAIRPERSON AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you.

25 And that will conclude our oversight hearing with



1 COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON  
AGING 145

2 the Committee on Public Housing and the Committee on  
3 Aging titled Seniors Aging in Place in NYCHA During a  
4 Pandemic. Thank you so much, everyone.

5 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 7, 2021