

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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February 26, 2026

Start: 1:03 p.m.

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HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 3

B E F O R E: Althea V. Stevens, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Simcha Felder

Rita C. Joseph

Nantasha M. Williams

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

Linda Tigani, Chair and Executive Director for the New York City Commission on Racial Equity

Jess Dannhauser, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services

Winette Saunders, First Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children Services

Elvita Dominique, Executive Director of Equity Strategies at the New York City Administration for Children Services

Ina Mendez, Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services at the New York City Administration for Children Services

Joyce McMillan, Narrowing the Front Door

Nora McCarthy, Director of the New York City Family Policy Project

Fanta-Marie Johnson, impacted parent

Jesse McGleughlin, Staff Attorney at the Bronx Defenders

Jasiyah Gilbert, Client and Community Engagement Manager for the Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice

Mark Papish, Supervisor of Government and Community Affairs at the Center for Family Representation

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

Kearney Coghlan, Policy Fellow at Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

Sean Eagan, Policy Director for the Bronx Defenders Family Defense Practice

Jenna Lauter, Policy Counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union

Nila Natarajan, Director of Family Defense and Policy at Brooklyn Defender Services

Patricia Loftman, NY Midwives

Tanesha Grant, affected individual

Sitan Sako, Founder and Executive Director of TBS Charity Incorporated

Sharmeela Mediratta, Chief Wellness and Environmental Design Officer at Graham Windham

Georgina Gooden, self

Ruth Horry, self

Jennifer Nicole Alameda, self

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone check
3 on the Committee of Children and Youth, recorded by
4 James Marino in Hearing Room 3, in Hearing Room 3.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, and
6 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing on
7 the Committee of Children and Youth.

8 At this time, during today's hearing, no one
9 may approach the dais.

10 Please, everybody, shut your electronic
11 devices.

12 Chair, you may begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: [GAVEL] Good afternoon,
14 and Happy Black History Month to everyone. I am
15 Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair of New York City
16 Council Committee on Children and Youth. Before we
17 begin, I want to take a moment to thank Commissioner
18 Dannhauser for his years of dedicated service. Will
19 you give him a round of applause, too, because I
20 don't, I'd be all clapping and stuff up in here. I'm
21 not supposed to, but I think it is due for someone
who has been a dedicated servant, a dedicated leader
and administrator of the Children and Services. Over
many years and across different divisions at ACS, he
has shown a deep commitment to children and families

2 of New York City. We are grateful for your leadership
3 and the care he has brought to this work, and we wish
4 him all the very best in his next chapter. We really
5 appreciate the work that you've done. I mean, you can
6 always tell when there's a provider leading agencies
7 because the care that they bring to it. No shade to
8 nobody else, but I have a special place in my heart
9 for providers.

10 Thank you for joining us today on our
11 oversight hearing entitled Examining Racial
12 Disparities in the Child Welfare System. We will also
13 be considering the following three bills amending and
14 advancing family rights, improving services for
15 children, and involved in the child welfare system.
16 Introduction 242, I mean 424, I don't know why I kept
17 saying 2, 424 sponsored by Council Member Pierina
18 Sanchez would require the Commission of Health and
19 Mental Hygiene to establish and operate a pilot
20 program providing free mental health services to
21 children who've been returned to their homes
following removal; Introduction 449, sponsored by
myself, requiring child protective specialists to
provide certain information verbally to parents or
other legal responsible caregivers at the first point

1 of contact during an investigation of an alleged
2 child abuse or malnutrition; Introduction 466,
3 sponsored by Council Member Ung, which would require
4 ACS to produce multilingual disclosures from
5 distinguished citywide languages and make it
6 available during a child protective investigation on
7 its website.

8 For decades, oversight bodies advocated
9 and impacted families have documented racial
10 disparities in our child welfare system. Black and
11 Latinx families are more likely to be reported to
12 State Central Registry, more likely to be
13 investigated, and more likely to experience a trauma
14 of child removals and foster care placement. In 2021,
15 ACS began implementing structural changes in part
16 intended to confront these inequalities. These
17 efforts included shifting towards family-based foster
18 settings, strengthening preventative services, and
19 expanding supports for parents and caregivers,
20 enhancing mental health services, and reducing
21 unnecessary reports through mandated reporting
education. These efforts are commendable and
represent important steps forward.

2 However, ACS' own data demonstrates that
3 significant disparities persist. In Fiscal Year 2025,
4 Black children were overrepresented in emergency
5 removals and foster care entries compared to the
6 share of SCR intakes. Hispanic children also continue
7 to experience disproportionate involvement in key
8 decision points. By contrast, White children were
9 underrepresented in removals and foster care entries
10 relative to their share of reports. These patterns
11 raise serious questions about decision-making
12 throughout the system and whether recent reforms are
13 translating into more equitable outcomes.

14 Today, we look forward to hearing from
15 ACS about the progress being made, the measurable
16 impact of those reforms, and additional steps needed
17 to ensure fairness at steps within the child welfare
18 system. The legislation being heard today builds on
19 the agency's reform efforts and is intended to
20 further support the City's shared goals of protecting
21 children while strengthening and preserving families
whenever it is safe to do so.

 I'd like to thank the Committee Staff for
their hard work in preparing for this hearing, as
well as all of my team back in the sweet 16. I mean,

2 they keep removing the names because I say them
3 wrong, but I can say Elizabeth Arzt, so thank you for
4 your work. And Rie, what's your last name?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Ogasawara.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: What?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Ogasawara.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ogasawara.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, look at that. I
11 said your name. Y'all can put your names back in. I
12 can say the names.

13 With that, I will turn it over to
14 Committee Staff to swear in our first panel, and I
15 believe CORE is our first panel. I know you've been
16 here a long time, so we're going to get you in here,
17 so you can go. She had a hearing earlier today, too,
18 so.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Thank you.

20 We will now hear testimony from the Administration.

21 Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation.

22 Please raise your right hand. I will read
23 the affirmation once, then call on you to respond.

24 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
25 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this

2 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member
3 questions?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Thank you.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you.

7 Good morning, Chair Stevens and Members of the
8 Children and Youth Committee. My name is Linda
9 Tigani, and I have the honor of serving as the Chair
10 and Executive Director for the New York City
11 Commission on Racial Equity. I lead CORE in
12 partnership with 13 commissioners and 15 staff
13 members. New York City CORE is the product of a 2022
14 ballot measure to enshrine in the City Charter a
15 commitment to redressing longstanding racial
16 disparities in power, access, and opportunity enabled
17 and perpetuated, whether by design, implementation,
18 or impact through City law, regulation, policies, and
19 practices. To approach this goal, the Racial Justice
20 Commission proposed that a body be established for
21 the purpose of holding government accountable, for
advancing racial equity, and increasing community
voices to influence City decision-making through the
development of priorities for racial equity in
government operation. New York City CORE exercises

1 this accountability function first and foremost
2 through oversight of a citywide racial equity plan
3 outlining goals and strategies for reducing racial
4 disparities in social and economic well-being, and we
5 look forward to reviewing the plan developed by the
6 Administration for Children's Services.

7 Collectively, the 2022 Charter amendments
8 represent an understanding that the benefits and
9 burdens of government policies are not evenly
10 distributed across racial groups, and few systems
11 illustrate these disparities as starkly as child
12 welfare. In fulfilling its central mandate to propose
13 equity priorities and outcome indicators based on
14 needs identified by New Yorkers harmed by racism and
15 social injustice, New York City CORE spoke with
16 parents and children who experience ACS as punitive
17 rather than supportive and driven by personal and
18 institutional biases instead of genuine concerns for
19 safety. To them, and I agree, the child welfare
20 system is effectively a civil counterpart to the
21 criminal legal system, both in the degree of
discretion it affords and the potential for abuse of
that authority. In fact, it was at the urging of
community members that NYC CORE expanded a racial

1 equity priority pertaining to holding law enforcement
2 accountable for abuse of power and harm they commit
3 to include child welfare personnel. Community members
4 impacted by the system have reported not only being
5 targeted for lacking the means to meet their
6 children's needs, but also being profiled by virtue
7 of their race, a perspective all too consistent with
8 data revealing that almost 45 percent of Black and
9 Latinx children experience an investigation by age
10 18, and that Black and Latinx families do account for
11 90 percent of system-involved families despite
12 constituting only 60 percent of the city's child
13 population. By ACS' own account, Black families
14 compared to other families were disproportionately
15 separated, less likely to be mandated to receive
16 additional services instead of removal, and
17 experienced longer stays in the foster care system.
18 The carceral approach taken by ACS can be traced back
19 to chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and the legacy of
20 slavery, which will be addressed in NYC CORE's
21 forthcoming work in reparations, truth healing, and
reconciliation.

Although neglect allegations which drive
the vast share of cases are meant to be reserved for

1 parents who fail to provide for their children
2 despite having the means to do so, families report
3 being separated due to challenges meeting such basic
4 needs as housing, food, and child care. Meanwhile,
5 funding that might support the fulfillment of these
6 needs is invested in a foster care system that
7 consistently yields negative mental health,
8 education, and socioeconomic outcomes. NYC CORE is
9 also charged with responding to requests from City
10 Council and other government officials, and we're
11 honored to have been identified by former Deputy
12 Mayor Anne Williams-Isom as a government partner to
13 Narrowing the Front Door Working Group in its efforts
14 to advance the recommendations from its 2022 report
15 on stemming the pipeline into the child welfare
16 system.

17 I'm pleased to share that these
18 recommendations have recently yielded resolution
19 153-2026 calling on the City to acknowledge the harm
20 caused by a system conceded by ACS itself to be
21 marred by racism and classism and to commit to making
more equitable policy and funding choices moving
forward. As the City's racial equity oversight body,
NYC CORE is united with Narrowing the Front Door in

1 the understanding that our government leaders,
2 elected and non-elected, must acknowledge the City's
3 role in perpetuating these harms and commit to a path
4 of healing that truth-telling processes and
5 restorative practices teach us as possible. To
6 support this course correction, NYC CORE joins
7 Narrowing the Front Door in its call for a
8 community-run accountability council ideally
9 established by law and funded by City government
10 entrusted with developing a roadmap for reducing
11 family investigation and separation and investing in
12 the health and well-being of Black and Latinx
13 children and families including those currently in
14 the foster care system. Through such fact-gathering
15 activities as data collection and analysis, focus
16 groups and public hearings, the council would
17 identify corrective action steps and future
18 initiatives to end the harms of the current system
19 and redress past harms and prevent future harms.

17 Finally, NYC CORE echoes Narrowing the
18 Front Door's recommendation that City Council support
19 the provision of direct, unrestricted financial
20 support to families independently of the child
21 welfare system. Hold ACS accountable for the racial

1
2 disparities in the system and for the poor outcomes
3 for youth in foster care. Collaborate with advocates
4 to develop agency data and budget transparency
5 requirements. Dismantle pipelines to the foster
6 system that fuel racial disparities including
7 mandated reporter laws and hospital drug testing. Use
8 discretionary funds to support community-based
9 services as a foundation for community and
10 family-centered system of care. Fund attorneys and
11 advocates trained to support families with education
12 issues. And pass the parents' Miranda's bill
13 requiring ACS to inform parents of their rights
14 including their right to an attorney at the start of
15 an investigation. New York City CORE thanks Chair
16 Stevens for her stewardship of the latter bill as
17 well as resolution 153-2026, and we look forward to
18 working together to facilitate its swift passage.

19 I close with an invitation to City
20 Council, ACS, and City Hall to partner with New York
21 City CORE in its ongoing efforts to realize a city in
which Black and Latinx children are raised by their
parents and within their families in a city where the
Black family is honored, respected, and able to live

2 a life filled with joy, peace, and prosperity. Thank
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I would
5 like to acknowledge Council Member Felder, Williams,
6 and Joseph.

7 I have a couple of questions for you.
8 What reforms are necessary to meaningfully reduce
9 disparities in children removals and investigations?
10 I know you mentioned some of them in your statement
11 around like direct supports to families, but could
12 you go in detail as to what other reforms you believe
13 would help with some of this work?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Sure. The
15 statement goes into detail to uplift the reforms that
16 were identified by Narrowing the Front Door, and I
17 just want to first offer that those reforms take the
18 center stage for CORE. One, because they were
19 identified and created by people directly impacted so
20 parents and foster care families and institutions
21 that work with people who are directly impacted by
the system. Any reform that we move forward with as a
City must center their voices. We have worked very
closely with them to develop a accountability council
that would be community led, include 13 people which

1 would have representation from all five boroughs as
2 well as youth voice representation from all five
3 boroughs and really put power, access, and
4 opportunity in the hands of those impacted to provide
5 policy recommendations, and CORE would act as both
6 the home of the council so we would provide
7 operational support and the funding would go through
8 us but we think that it is best and important and a
9 sign of actually like true investment in Black and
10 Latinx families that City government provide the full
11 funding for this council. So, we would bring together
12 government leaders because we know that children go
13 into the child welfare system, families go into the
14 child welfare system by several pathways, everyone
15 from schools to hospitals to Department of Probation
16 to sometimes like our local counselors. And so we are
17 taking a whole of government approach to ensure that
18 the community members that would come on to the
19 council through a public process would be directly
20 supported by CORE as well as Narrowing the Front Door
21 that created, they conceptualized this particular
council which to our understanding would be the first
of its kind in the nation, and then they would
develop the policy recommendations, they would look

1 at the data with CORE staff. I also want to uplift
2 the Miranda Rights Bill which is essential for
3 families. There's no reason anyone in this country
4 should not be told what their rights are from the
5 start of an investigation. It is an affront to both
6 our constitutional rights as well as what we claim we
7 are as a city in our New York City Charter. And I
8 also want to uplift the support for provision of
9 direct and unrestricted financial support. We see a
10 lot of cases are coming through the pipeline
11 particularly because Black parents are being
12 criminalized for being parents and Black parents are
13 being criminalized for being poor and poverty is a
14 systemic issue. We created it as a nation, we created
15 it as a city. And so unrestricted funds that look
16 like a universal basic income program for anyone who
17 is experiencing struggle with respect to housing,
18 food, or education is essential, and that would go so
19 far as to ensuring that students who are experiencing
20 investigations, families who are experiencing
21 investigations then have the actual support that they
need to be the parents that they truly are, but the
system is preventing them from being that.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know even in
3 your recommendations, and I know you said like
4 working with Narrowing the Front Door, and I think I
5 heard you say something about like the youth, but how
6 do you also make sure that young people's voices are
7 also being heard? That is very important to me in
8 this process because I feel like a lot of times
9 adults are often talking around young people and
10 they're also part of this process, and so how are
11 they being integrated into this work and how do we
12 keep that separate and have the integrity of young
13 people's voices to also guide this work in
14 policymaking?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, hopefully
16 when established, the accountability council will
17 have 13 seats, three of which would be reserved for
18 interdisciplinary experts, and then 10 will be
19 reserved for two seats per borough, one seat for an
20 adult and one seat for a young person. We are also
21 going to be leveraging the community engagement
process work that the New York City Commission on
Racial Equity does for our own engagement. Right now,
we've completed a second cycle that yielded just
short of 10,000 voices and those voices include

1 people as young as 11 years old. And this particular
2 topic and conversation was raised to CORE by the
3 public in our first engagement cycle when we worked
4 with 4,212 New Yorkers. And the way that community
5 phrased it was they said we want a CCRB but for ACS.
6 And then former Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom
7 introduced us to both Jess Dannhauser as well as
8 Narrowing the Front Door, and Narrowing the Front
9 Door shared that community members have already
10 conceptualized what this can look like and they
11 needed a government partner. And that's really what
12 CORE is set up to do. It's to be able to partner with
13 members of the public, whether they're in an
14 organization or not, and be able to bring the public
15 solutions to public policy challenges to bear and
16 bring government as well as community together. And
17 we've been in conversation with ACS. We've gotten a
18 lot of support from Commissioner Dannhausner. And
19 we've worked hand in hand with Narrowing the Front
20 Door.

18 And the last thing I'll say is in every
19 single event we've done partnering with Narrowing the
20 Front Door, young people have always been centered.
21 Their youth voices have always been in the room. We

2 did have a public session where we introduced the
3 accountability council model to the public to say
4 before we bring this deeper into government, we
5 wanted to make sure more community voices were a part
6 of it. And young people were in the room and also
7 participated and engaged and were asking the same
8 questions you were asking. And so we went back in to
9 say, well, we have a model that brings up youth
10 voices. We also want to make sure that they are at
11 the table to influence the decisions that the council
12 will make.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no. That's
14 always going to be my first response because in this
15 work, people are always talking around children, and
16 young people are never the ones kind of coming up
17 with these solutions and, you know, we're supposed to
18 support them so that's always going to be something
19 that I'm fighting for and pushing for and making sure
20 is happening in government because it happens all the
21 time. So, that's very important to me and a priority
to make sure, especially as we're talking about
bringing in community, that community is also young
people because we're also talking about diversity,

2 but sometimes we forget that young people should be a
3 part of that.

4 My next question is, and I know my
5 Colleagues had a question as well. So what extent are
6 poverty and housing instability and mandating
7 reporting practices contributing to racial
8 disparities in child wealth and involvement? Do you
9 have any statistics or any of those things that,
because I know you guys have been working on that as
well.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, I have the
11 statistics that I had raised in my particular
12 testimony, but I'm happy to follow up with a deeper
13 report outlining what and how poverty is showing up
14 in particular cases. I do just want to honor that
15 folks, I know there are plenty of people who are also
16 going to be testifying to that data. I think what's
17 important to note is that there is a particular
18 criminalization of poverty within the Black community
19 that does not exist in other communities. And so it's
20 both, well, where are we seeing our community members
21 who are not able to make affordable housing prices,
which we are now seeing are actually in no way,
shape, or form affordable for New Yorkers, that when

2 our families are being judged by their income,
3 something that they really cannot control, prices
4 that they're forced to pay also that they cannot
5 control. There's an added piece of criminality that
6 comes into the decision-making process. And that's
7 not something that is new. This is, again, what we
8 are seeing as a growth from chattel slavery to Jim
9 Crow. Now we are living in the legacy of slavery. And
10 so, as the reforms are being made, we're really not
11 thinking as critically as we can about what role
12 poverty is playing in these decisions and how are we
13 looking at poverty differently from when it's a White
14 family to when it's a Black family to when it's a
15 Latinx family.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is the Commission
17 examining the roles of other City agencies like DOE,
18 NYPD, DYCD in contributing to the disproportionate
19 reports of Black and Latinx families?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes. So, those
21 are some of the agencies that we imagine will be a
part of the corresponding government council that
will be working and hearing from the accountability
council, and this is the whole of government
approach. We also believe that OMB should be on that

1 list and any agency, which includes DYCD, that is
2 working with a parent or with a child, with a foster
3 care institution. It includes agencies that work with
4 preventative services, investigative services, and so
5 we really do need the broader City government
6 agencies at the table to do this work.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Since 2021 foster
8 care redesign, ACS has launched intensive
9 initiatives, including family enrichment centers,
10 peer parent and advocates, extended therapeutic
11 services, expansion of CARES track. From the
12 Commission's perspective, have any of the reforms
13 measurable reduce racial disparities? And does the
14 Commission believe any of those strategies warrant
15 further investigation or scaling up?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So, we are in
17 the process right now of doing further investigation
18 on all of those strategies. I will say we have worked
19 as a Commission for the community equity priority
20 process. We did work with family enrichment centers.
21 We have spoken with the ACS leadership team about
this work. But we also consistently go out and talk
to community. And what I would like to raise is that
we are hearing and seeing two very different things.

2 I think we are seeing some of the data shifting very
3 slightly, but shifting, and we are seeing policy
4 reform. But when we go out and we talk to children
5 and parents, that is not their experience of ACS, and
6 it is not their experience of what it means to be
7 Black and Latinx in community. And so what CORE is
8 doing right now is looking to see how our
9 community-centered research approach will be
10 leveraged in the forthcoming accountability council
11 because we need to make both a clarity but also a
12 bridge between what the data is telling us on a
13 quantitative side and what communities are telling us
14 that they experience.

15 The last thing I will note is that in our
16 investigations, we have found that a consistent
17 problem is that all of the data is not made publicly
18 available, the data that we would need to be able to
19 make these determinations, and that when data is made
20 available, there is a lag between the data that
21 should be coming to us right now and then the data
that is produced by the City. That is not just on
ACS. It is a citywide problem. But as we know, we
need to be looking at the child welfare system as a
whole-of-government approach that has been taken

2 against Black and Latinx families that should be in
3 support of Black and Latinx families, and so we need
4 to look at the data across several agencies.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Does any of my
6 colleagues have questions?

7 All right. Well, that is all I have for
8 this panel. Thank you for coming in today, and we
9 appreciate your work.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you so
11 much. Thank you, everyone.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: So, we'll call our
13 next panel, I believe, which is ACS.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Good
15 afternoon. Panelists, please raise your right hand. I
16 will read the affirmation once, then call on each of
17 you individually to respond.

18 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
19 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
20 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
21 questions?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I do.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOMINIQUE: I do.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: I do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: I do.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm going to let it
4 slide, but you've got like 35 pages here for your
5 testimony.

6 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: A lot of them
7 are data. A lot of it's data. It's not all...

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm going to let it
9 slide because it's your last hearing with me.

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It's only 13
11 pages of actual testimony.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: 13 is a lot.

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I'll go fast.
14 I'll go fast.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: But again, it's your
16 last hearing, so I'm going to let you do your thing.

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you, Chair
18 Stevens.

19 Good afternoon to Chair Stevens, Council
20 Member Joseph, Deputy Speaker Williams. My name is
21 Jess Dannhauser, and I'm honored and privileged to be
the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's
Services. I'm joined today by Winette Saunders, the
First Deputy Commissioner; Elvita Dominique, the
Executive Director of Equity Strategies at ACS; and

2 Ina Mendez, the Deputy Commissioner for Family
3 Permanency Services. Thank you, Chair Stevens and
4 Members of the Children and Youth Committee for
5 holding today's oversight hearing. Good to be with
6 you as well, Council Member Felder.

7 Examining racial disparities in the child
8 welfare system. This is a critically important topic
9 and one that I, as well as my team at ACS, have been
10 focused on throughout my four years as ACS
11 Commissioner. ACS' mission is to protect the children
12 of New York City, a mission we take with the utmost
13 seriousness. Over the last several years, having
14 listened to youth and families with lived experience
15 and learned a great deal from the pandemic, we have
16 expanded our perspective on what this means. ACS is
17 responsible for both ensuring children are safe in
18 their homes and safe from harms that can come from
19 unnecessary system involvement. In our effort to
20 achieve both of these vital goals, we have carried
21 out a comprehensive set of initiatives. As always,
there is more to do.

I think it is important to start by
sharing the data with you. I'll walk you through some
of the data, and we're also including data slides at

1 the end of this testimony. As you know, if someone
2 suspects a child is being abused or maltreated, they
3 should make a report to the New York Statewide
4 Central Register. When the State accepts a report
5 about a New York City child, ACS responds to assess
6 the safety of that child. In 2024, a Black child was
7 eight times more likely to be in an SCR report than a
8 White child. A Hispanic child was six times more
9 likely in an SCR report and investigation than a
10 White child. More than 82 percent of the families
11 experiencing an ACS child protection response were
12 Black or Hispanic in 2024. In 2024, a Black child in
13 an investigation was 1.18 times more likely to be in
14 an indicated investigation than a White child. A
15 Hispanic child was 1.26 times more likely to be in an
16 indicated investigation than a White child. These
17 ratios have been stubbornly similar over many years.
18 This is similar at every stage of involvement,
19 including court involvement and placement in foster
20 care. However, what has changed is that today, far
21 fewer families are involved in a child protection
response to an SCR report. The number declined 16
percent from 2017 to 2024, from about 51,000 to about
43,000. For Hispanic families, this was a 3 percent

1 decrease. For Black families, this was a 19 percent
2 decrease. For White families, this was a 25 percent
3 decrease. And for Asian families, it was a 4 percent
4 decrease. Even more dramatically, the number of
5 families experiencing an indicated investigation fell
6 46 percent between 2017 and 2024, from 19,361 to
7 10,420 families. For Hispanic families, this was a 36
8 percent decrease. For Black families, this was a 51
9 percent decrease. And for White families, this was a
10 56 percent decrease. For Asian families, it was a 41
11 percent decrease. This reduction in half is
12 significant for families, as having an indicated case
13 can have longstanding ramifications, including when
14 seeking employment. Similarly, in that period, the
15 number of families experiencing court-ordered
16 supervision declined 63 percent, from 5,160 to about
17 1,900. For Hispanic families, this was a 55 percent
18 decrease. For Black families, this was a 68 percent
19 decrease. For White families, it was a 77 percent
20 decrease. And for Asian families, this was a 68
21 percent decrease. And the number of court filings
seeking foster care of abused and neglected children
declined 37 percent, from 2017 to 2024, from 1,959 to
1,227. For Black families, this was a 38 percent

1 decrease. For Hispanic families, it was a 32 percent
2 decrease. For White families, it was a 60 percent
3 decrease. And for Asian families, it was a 44 percent
4 decrease. In sum, we have significantly reduced the
5 likelihood of unnecessary system involvement, yet
6 serious disparities remain, which require continued
7 urgent attention.

8 Throughout my time as Commissioner, we
9 have been intentional about working to reduce
10 unnecessary reports to the SCR, thus reducing
11 unnecessary child protection responses, while
12 increasing family access to community-based supports
13 without the need for an SCR report. For the past
14 three years, ACS has been working closely with other
15 City agencies and systems to make better use of the
16 State's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline and to
17 provide earlier and more effective support for
18 families without the need for an SCR report or child
19 protection response. Since January 2023, we've
20 collaborated with New York City Public Schools,
21 Health and Hospitals, Department of Homeless
Services, the Department of Health and Mental
Hygiene, the Mayor's Office to End Gender-Based
Violence, and dozens of private hospitals, charter

1 schools, and social service organizations to educate
2 mandated reporters on how to help families get the
3 help they might need without calling the Child Abuse
4 Hotline, except when children are truly not safe. In
5 total, the ACS team has conducted over 435
6 presentations, reaching over 27,000 mandated
7 reporters. Entitled, The Evolving Focus of Child
8 Welfare, Addressing Overreporting, and Providing
9 Family Center Supports, the sessions provide guidance
10 on when a report to the SCR is necessary and when it
11 is not. We explain the shift underway in New York
12 State, which has moved its messaging, thanks to
13 advocacy from many in this room, to mandated
14 reporters from when in doubt, call the SCR, to you
15 can support a family without having to report a
16 family when maltreatment is not suspected. Our
17 sessions provide detailed information on ACS funded
18 and other supports and services available to families
19 in New York City and ways to build towards a culture
20 shift from reporting to supporting families with
21 successful engagement, relationship building, and
access to services. Many sessions include
presentations by local ACS funded community-based
organizations. As a result, we have seen a reduction

1 in reports and an increase in supports accessed
2 without the SCR. For example, in the past two years,
3 2025 compared to 2023, SCR reports from schools have
4 decreased by 16 percent, social service agencies by
5 16 percent as well, and health and mental health
6 personnel, mostly in hospitals, by 7 percent. In
7 2025, ACS received approximately 5,000 fewer reports
8 from these three sectors than it did in 2023. The ACS
9 support line now receives more than 4,000 calls per
10 year from families themselves and from schools and
11 others who are working directly with families.
12 Formally created in November 2023, the ACS support
13 line has the sole purpose of supporting the community
14 through engagement and connections to resources,
15 prevention services, and our concrete services. The
16 support line now receives an average of more than 300
17 inquiries per month, up from about 30 monthly in
18 early 2023. This increase is attributed to the
19 ongoing work to ensure our community partners and
20 families are made aware of how to access prevention
21 services and other resources outside of the child
welfare system in New York City.

With regard to family support services,
we have been very intentional about our efforts to

1 ensure families and colleagues are accessing these
2 services through community referrals and not just
3 after a child protective investigation. These efforts
4 are working, with more to do. Community referrals
5 have increased from 12 percent of prevention
6 referrals in January 2023 to 25 percent in December
7 2025. These past four years, we've also focused on
8 efforts to provide services and supports to families
9 as upstream as possible so that they never need to
10 come into contact with the child protection system.
11 This includes the launch of the school-based early
12 support program, the expansion of low-income child
13 care vouchers, the expansion of family enrichment
14 centers from three to 30 citywide, and our ongoing
15 child safety campaigns, each of which I will briefly
16 summarize.

17 Launched in 2024, the school-based early
18 support prevention model is aimed at providing
19 families with services and supports as upstream as
20 possible, preventing involvement with child
21 protection while keeping children safe. Each of the
16 new programs are required to partner with at least
three elementary and middle schools to help families
address stressors that may impact their well-being,

2 help families access concrete items, and strengthen
3 social connections within the school communities. The
4 model also includes a community pathway track that's
5 funded solely by CTL that does not require opening a
6 formal prevention case.

7 Starting in 2022, ACS rapidly expanded
8 child care assistance for low-income families,
9 providing vouchers that cover most or all the costs
10 of child care. This initiative has made child care
11 affordable for thousands more families across New
12 York City. Between the summer of '22 and the summer
13 of '25, the number of children enrolled in care with
14 the support of an ACS-issued low-income voucher
15 climbed by 900 percent, from 7,400 to more than
16 75,000. During this period, ACS has also expanded
17 access in communities historically underserved by the
18 program, namely the 17 community districts with the
19 highest poverty unemployment rates that have faced
20 inadequate access to child care. The number from
21 these neighborhoods enrolled in care with a
low-income voucher increased from just 1,500 to
nearly 22,000, a 1,300 percent increase. We also
increased support for families and communities by
expanding family enrichment centers from three to 30.

2 In fact, the contract for the 30th FEC just started
3 this past January. As you know, FECs are welcoming
4 family-centered spaces co-designed with parents,
5 caregivers, and community members to be places where
6 families with children come together. No two FECs are
7 alike, as they reflect the culture, strengths, and
8 identity of its neighborhood.

9 The ACS Office of Child Safety and Injury
10 Prevention focuses on reducing unintentional child
11 injuries among children, such as safe sleep,
12 medication safety, and window guards. The office is
13 often out in communities sharing information and
14 building awareness among caregivers and child-serving
15 professionals. ACS does this work with an
16 understanding that there can be fear associated with
17 our involvement.

18 In addition to significant efforts to
19 make our services more accessible, ACS is supportive
20 of efforts to create solutions outside of ACS that
21 obviate the need for child protective involvement. In
fact, it was going to be earlier today, but it will
be tomorrow, along with Deputy Mayor Arteaga and our
colleagues at DOHMH, Luisa Linares, is going to
announce Strong Foundations, a new partnership with

2 ACS is providing the Health Department with 20
3 million dollars over three years so they can expand
4 and enhance clinical infrastructure and the continuum
5 of perinatal newborn and early childhood services
6 without the need for ACS involvement with the family.
7 The funding will enable the Health Department to
8 expand eligibility for nurse-family partnership
9 called NFPx to pregnant people in their third
10 trimester and up until the birth of the child and for
11 those with more than one child, which has been a
12 serious limitation before more families will be able
13 to access this. The new partnership also expands
14 capacity in their perinatal and early child mental
15 health clinics and expands DOHMH training and
16 technical assistance in perinatal mental health to
17 build the capacity of the workforce.

18 At the same time that we've been carrying
19 out these efforts to reduce unnecessary system
20 involvement, we've also been strengthening our child
21 protective work and the vital effort to protect
children from maltreatment and abuse. It is critical
that our child protective staff have the tools and
skills needed to identify those children truly in
danger and connect families to services and supports

1 and foster care if necessary so children can be safe.
2 We have significantly reduced child protective
3 caseloads to 7.6, which is well below national
4 standards and enables CPS to have the time to provide
5 each family with the attention they deserve. In the
6 summer of '24, we added staff and units to the Family
7 Preservation Program, which is an intensive child
8 protection prevention model that enables children to
9 remain safely at home while ACS works with the family
10 to address immediate child safety concerns. FPP helps
11 families by accompanying them to appointments,
12 helping them navigate systems such as housing and
13 school, and arranging for services such as homemaking
14 or heavy duty cleaning. We've also made sure that our
15 CPS have access to those with expertise so they have
16 the tools they need to best assess safety. For
17 example, in the highest risk cases, CPS have coaches
18 and access to investigative consultants who are
19 former NYPD as well as child advocacy centers to help
20 assess for abuse. In January, we launched our new
21 clinical support program where licensed professional
support frontline child protective staff with their
expertise in mental health, substance abuse, and
intimate partner violence. Through this newly

2 enhanced program, this team of experts now engages
3 directly with families and offers hands-on support
4 and connections to services specific to each family's
needs.

5 We also have a number of quality
6 assurance mechanisms in place to help us continually
7 assess our practice and make enhancements when we see
8 they are warranted. ChildStat is a weekly meeting
9 focused on safety practice and child protection by
10 looking at both data and randomly selected active
11 cases from a different child protection borough each
12 week. The panel includes myself and other leadership
13 from across the agency, typically with 700 plus staff
14 in attendance, and is broadcast across the agency,
promoting a culture of continuous learning and shared
accountability.

15 In 2025, we launched a new
16 multidisciplinary review panel to bring experts
17 external to ACS into our fatality review process to
18 help identify systemic solutions to enhance ACS's
19 ability to protect children and deliver high-quality
20 services. This panel gives us a formal pathway to
21 incorporate the expertise of members such as those
with lived experience and experts in mental health,

1 substance abuse, homelessness, law enforcement, etc.,
2 into our policy and practice. The panel also aims to
3 help New Yorkers better understand our work as we
4 promote transparency and system accountability. We
5 will be incorporating the panel's recommendations
6 into our annual fatality reports released each June.

7 Another area where we see disparity is
8 the length of time children spend in foster care.
9 Black and Hispanic children placed in foster care are
10 significantly more likely than White children in care
11 to return home within their first year of placement,
12 but once they've been in care for a full year or
13 more, Black and Hispanic children are about 25
14 percent less likely to go home during that second or
15 later year. ACS is working with its foster care
16 providers and attorneys to reduce the length of time
17 to permanency for all children, and we're seeing the
18 number of long-stayers in care drop steadily. From
19 2017 to 2025, we've had a 38 percent reduction in the
20 number of children in foster care for two years or
21 more, down from over 6,000 to just under 4,000. We
have been intentional about our efforts to promote
family reunification and safely end ACS involvement
as quickly as possible.

2 ACS launched a new technical assistance
3 framework focused on permanency. The framework
4 examines and utilizes agency-specific and macro-level
5 data to identify best practices and inform business
6 process improvements. These efforts are designed to
7 support case practices to increase the likelihood of
8 children and youth can achieve safe and timely
9 permanency.

10 The Parents Empowering Parents Program is
11 where foster care agencies hire parent advocates with
12 lived experience to be a member of their
13 case-planning teams. The parent advocates have a
14 unique ability to build relationships with parents,
15 offer guidance on how to navigate child welfare
16 processes, and elevate parents' voices in the
17 case-planning process, all with the goal of
18 supporting timely reunification. Truly listening to
19 the voices of those with lived experience who have
20 been directly impacted by the child welfare system
21 has guided our work for the past four years.

The Parent Advocacy Council helped inform
our new discharge grant policy to better support
families when children return home, both by
increasing the amount of the grant to 2,000 per

2 child, simplifying the application and reimbursement
3 process, and expanding the items eligible for
4 reimbursement. Voices of youth in care helped us
5 develop and expand Fair Futures Coaches and Tutoring,
6 the College Choice Program now serving 460 youth up
7 from under 200 when we started, and our brand-new
8 Career Choice Program for youth choosing vocational
9 training or job readiness training.

10 I will use this moment to say thank you
11 to all the parents and youth who lived experience who
12 took the time and effort to open themselves up to me
13 and the ACS team. I have learned so much from all
14 those who opened up and shared their stories about
15 the impact of ACS' interventions on their lives.

16 Regarding the proposed legislation,
17 Intro. 424-2026 would require the Department of
18 Health and Mental Hygiene to establish and operate a
19 program to provide mental health services for up to
20 one year to children who have returned home from
21 foster care and then report to the Council on the
pilot. ACS strongly agrees that when children and
youth return to their families after foster care,
they should have immediate access to mental health
services without charge. Currently, when a child

2 youth is discharged from foster care, there are
3 provisions to enable continuity of services initiated
4 while the child youth is in care. Specifically, they
5 will be able to access all Medicaid services they
6 were receiving while in care for up to a year, so
7 long as the foster agency notifies the managed care
8 plan of the discharge. Young adults ages 18 and older
9 at discharge are eligible for Medicaid up to age 26.
10 In addition, older youth exiting foster care have
11 Fair Futures coaches who can connect them to support
12 services up to age 26, and all families in need can
13 access ACS-funded family support services. That all
14 said, we do appreciate that there are often
15 challenges for all children and youth in accessing
16 mental health services. ACS looks forward to
17 discussing this bill with the Council.

18 Intro. 466-2026 and Intro. 449-2026
19 require ACS to provide written and oral information
20 to parents about a number of items, including their
21 rights, at the start of a child protective
investigation. ACS strongly supports providing
parents with information about their rights at the
start of a child protective investigation. While no
State or City legislation has passed on this yet, for

2 the past two years we've been proactively providing
3 parents upfront with information about their rights,
4 that we need their permission to enter or a family
5 court's, that they can deny that, and that they have
6 a right to call an attorney at the initial point of
7 contact.

8 Intro. 466-2026 would require ACS to
9 provide a multilingual disclosure form to parents and
10 caretakers at the start of a CPS investigation, which
11 would include information regarding parents' rights,
12 resources available to parents, including legal
13 services and contact information for the Office of
14 Advocacy. ACS is supportive of this legislation. ACS
15 currently provides parents with information about
16 their rights, as well as an information package with
17 information about resources in their community,
18 including contact information for legal
19 representation.

20 Intro. 449-2026 lays out a proposal of
21 information for child protective specialists to say
verbally at the initial point of contact. While ACS
strongly supports sharing information with parents
about their rights, we have concerns about the
specific language in the previously proposed

2 legislation, which would equate the initial stages of
3 a CPS investigation with an arrest and custodial
4 interrogation, e.g. telling their parents they have a
5 right to remain silent. We worry that this would both
6 overly inhibit investigations into the safety of
7 children and create fear that a conclusion has been
8 reached before the investigation begins. We look
9 forward to discussing these bills with the Council so
10 that we can agree on language that would ensure
11 parents understand their rights while enabling ACS to
12 assess child safety.

13 As you can see from all this work, the
14 team at ACS works hard each and every day to get it
15 right for every single child and family who comes to
16 our attention. Our job is to promote safety as
17 holistically as possible so children are safe and
18 families have what they need, often from community
19 supports outside of ACS, so that they can thrive. I'm
20 grateful to the team at ACS for the compassion and
21 conviction they bring to this complex and difficult
work, and I remain deeply inspired by what they do.

I'd be remiss if I did not take a moment
to publicly thank Tyler James, ACS' Director of Race
Equity Strategies, who was a remarkable leader,

2 thought partner, and the force behind so much of this
3 work. Tyler passed away this past January, and while
4 his contributions to ACS and beyond remain with us,
5 we miss him every day.

6 And finally, a special thank you to the
7 Council, the Children and Families Committee, and
8 you, Chair Stevens, who successfully advocated for
9 the creation of this Committee. Your partnership,
10 collaboration, tough questions, and oversight have
11 made a tremendous difference for the children, youth,
12 and families of New York City. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, I'm going to
14 go on record for saying, again, thank you for the
15 work that you've done. When I was given ACS under
16 this Committee, I had so much to learn, and honestly,
17 your partnership was so instrumental in, like,
18 helping me grasp the depth of what this agency has
19 been. And so, honestly, I'm truly feeling like I'm
20 losing a partner in this work, but I'm sure you're
21 going to pop up somewhere, because that's how we do
in this work. We just change positions, but always
fighting for young people. So, it's been a real honor
to, like, work in collaboration with you, and I'm

1 actually really, really sad that you're leaving me,
2 but I'm going to go, I'm going to go.

3 I'm going to start with some questions,
4 just to even tie into some of CORE's testimony and
5 something that I've stated a number of times around,
6 like, I feel like you always had this vision and this
7 guiding star to have this information as far as the
8 racial disparities and, you know, trying to narrow
9 this work down, but it always felt like when you
10 would testify, we would hear your vision, and I would
11 understand your vision, and when we would meet, I
12 would hear the vision, but then when sometimes you
13 hear some of these numbers, there's a disconnect, or
14 when the families would come testify, there was,
15 like, a disconnect. So, I want to dive in a little
16 bit into that, and, like, according to ACS data, FY
17 2025, Black children represented 36.1 percent of the
18 SCR intakes, yet they accounted for 43 percent of the
19 emergency removals and 46 percent of the foster care
20 entries. By contrast, White children accounted for
21 6.3 percent of intake and only 3 percent of emergency
removals and 4 percent of foster care entries. What
explains the diversity in this, and after the
investigation stage, what factors does ACS believe

2 are driving the disproportionate impact of these
3 racial decisions points?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thanks, Chair
5 Stevens, and the disparities absolutely require
6 continued urgent attention. As I shared in my
7 testimony, there's been a really great shrinking of
8 system contact unnecessarily, but the disparities
9 that you're referencing still exist. In the instance
10 of this particular one, we've been diving in. It's a
11 complex question. I don't think there's a single
12 thing. We've been doing lots of work around implicit
13 bias and training both our staff and providers,
14 making sure that we have ways in which we're doing
15 decision-making that include parent advocates to
16 reduce this. One thing that is also interesting here
17 is that we saw in 2024 a pretty significant increase
18 percentage-wise of the children coming into foster
19 care. It started to increase from about 33 percent
20 teens to almost 40 percent. We've brought that back
21 down, and those teens were much more likely to be
Black than White, and so we're curious about whether
there's things going on with the mental health
system. We've been trying to advocate with OMH for
parents who are struggling with really meeting their

1 children's behavioral health needs. The children's
2 going to the hospital, and sometimes the parents
3 don't know what to do and don't feel like they're
4 getting the support that they need. Some of those
5 kids have been coming into foster care. Sometimes
6 they stay for a very short time. We built a teen
7 priority initiative to try to use respite instead, to
8 try to use some of the family therapies that we have,
9 but that mental health support is really needed.
10 We're trying to make sure that our decision-making is
11 eliminating bias. We're looking at ways in which we
12 can get the right services upstream. We have a
13 Developmental Disabilities Unit that works with
14 families who may have a developmental challenge,
15 either the young person or the parent. I don't think
16 we have the exact answer because it's a
17 multidimensional, so we need a lot of different
18 initiatives that we're trying to attack this with.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. Has ACS
20 analyzed whether decision-making practices, risk
21 assessments, or systematic biases are contributed to
disproportionate impact on Black families?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. We look at
3 this all the time. Again, it's not an easy sort of
4 evaluation to conclude.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Of course not.

6 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Our staff are
7 primarily from the communities that we serve. We look
8 constantly every week in ChildStat. We have our
9 family team conferencing with parent advocates, so we
10 have other people and voices in the room. We were
11 asked by the legal advocates a couple of years ago to
12 no longer hold a child safety conference after an
13 emergency removal, but go straight to court so that
14 families had their due process more immediately. We
15 adopted that recommendation. Obviously, the court is
16 a major decision maker in this as well, and so we're
17 looking at sort of every aspect of this.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: At what point of an
19 emergency removal decision, what oversight mechanisms
20 are in place to ensure decisions are free from bias
21 and based solely on imminent risk?

22 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. So, in
23 addition to the child safety conferences, which
24 include parent advocates, there is a work between our
25 CPS staff and our family court legal services who

1 very carefully examine the law to make sure that
2 we're following the law and pursuing filings. This is
3 part of how we have reduced filings so dramatically.
4 This past year, in 2025, there were fewer filings
5 than in 2020 during the pandemic, in 2021, by a
6 significant measure, and so we're looking at that
7 decision-making process, making sure that we're
8 following the law, and looking at all mechanisms that
9 can create and mitigate risk. Our new FPP expansion,
10 as I said earlier, sometimes children were coming
11 into foster care because of home conditions. Can we
12 do things to do heavy-duty cleaning, to help with
13 hoarding situations, etc.? If we look historically,
14 in 1997, 12,538 children came into foster care. This
15 past year, it was just about 3,000, and so the team
16 behind me who's been doing this work for 30 years is
17 the one who has really driven that change, and we are
18 trying to find the least intrusive way to make sure
19 children are safe every single time we do it. We have
20 a responsibility that we think is deeply important to
21 make sure they are indeed safe, but we want to find
ways to do that through services and other ways and
limit the use of foster care.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Does ACS have data
3 on SCR intakes by both race and by borough or
4 neighborhoods? If so, which communities in the city
5 and demographic group experience the highest rates of
6 emergency removals and foster care placements?

7 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We do, and I
8 have the breakdown for you here in a report that we
9 publish on a regular basis on our website. Jamaica,
10 Queens, is actually the highest number of child
11 protective SCR calls accepted. The Bronx has several
12 communities that are high on that list, and so we see
13 it in pockets where we know poverty exists. We see it
14 in the neighborhoods that we try to reach out to both
15 for the Family Enrichment Center and child care work,
16 and I have a complete list here for you.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In 2025, the MMR
18 states that the decline of kinship placements
19 conceded with rising family poverty and suggests that
20 relatives may be struggling to take in children. What
21 is the current payment structure for kinship and
non-kinship foster parents, and does ACS believe that
the rates are significant to support caregivers?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes. The rates
are the same, and they're based on the needs of the

1 child. We've also added a component for the time
2 period when a kinship foster parent is working with
3 an agency to sign up to have direct resources
4 provided to that kinship parent at that time. We've
5 had a steady increase over time around kinship
6 caregiving. Right now, we're about 43 percent of
7 children in foster care are living with a relative or
8 a close connection that we consider kin. We're
9 looking to continue to increase that. There has been
10 this decline. In ChildStat this morning, we were
11 talking about it in the context of Queens. We have
12 seen some families who are new to New York who have
13 fewer kin resources. We also, on the preliminary kin
14 work, sometimes are working to get children to family
15 members out of state or in different locations. We
16 have a border agreement with New Jersey, but
17 sometimes families in South Carolina. We're also
18 curious about demographic shifts that have happened
19 in New York. A lot of Black families have moved down
20 south, and so we're doing work to try to reconnect
21 them, but they might not be as local. So, every
single time a child needs to be removed, there is an
extraordinary amount of work to try to identify kin,
to talk to the young person, to look at the blue book

2 at school, to call teachers, to talk to parents, of
3 course, about where they feel their children will be
4 safe, and to make a decision that night. We do a
5 local clearance. We do not wait for 90 days. The goal
6 is that night. A little over a third of children that
7 night go directly to kin. We've seen, as a result of
8 that effort and many other efforts, a significant
9 decline in the number of children at the Children's
10 Center. Today, it's 48. We were averaging close to
11 100 for a long time. It's about 40 percent down
12 compared to last January, and we have one child who's
13 zero to four at the Children's Center this morning.
14 So, we're looking to really try to make sure,
15 especially our youngest children, never have to
16 experience an institutional setting, as loving and
17 supportive as our Children's Center staff are.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, it's good to
19 hear that the numbers are down in the Children's
20 Center. I actually haven't heard of that. I mean,
21 that's a huge accomplishment.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Like you said, I
know the staff works hard there, but it's not a place
where anyone wants to really be.

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We agree. And I
3 thank FDC for her leadership. She's built the
4 facility, and the staff, and the training that's gone
5 into them, and the work to support young people, she
6 deserves a lot of credit for.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Absolutely. Thank
8 you. Because, you know, that's an accomplishment for
9 you and your team, so appreciate sharing that.

10 Are Black and Latinx children as likely
11 as White children to receive permanency through
12 kinship or adoption? If the disparities exist, what
13 factors are driving them?

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. This is an
15 interesting dynamic that we're looking at. It could
16 be related to teens. It could be related to other
17 issues where Black and Hispanic Latinx children are
18 much more likely to go home in the first year. We
19 have seen an increase in reunifications. About 60
20 percent of our permanencies last year were
21 reunifications, many of which, you know, most, the
great majority of which work, and children are safe.
DC Mendez and her team are leading a whole series of
efforts. I mentioned the discharge grant in my

2 testimony. I'll give her a moment to talk a little
3 bit about the permanency efforts they're doing.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Hi. Good
5 afternoon.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Good afternoon.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, with
8 regards to permanency, when children come into care,
9 our goal is to make sure that they achieve safe and
10 timely permanency as soon as possible. So, we do a
11 lot of work. I mean, the providers do the brunt of
12 the work, because they're doing the case planning,
13 the permanency planning, supporting the parents and
14 the children, but we have put some structures in
15 place to provide technical assistance, so we use
16 data. We have a lot of data. We use data and talk to
17 providers about individual performance, looking at
18 their business process, how their data can inform
19 what they need to do to move cases forward. We give
20 agencies targets, so they have a little bit of a
21 goal. They're motivated to work towards reunification
or KinGAPs or adoptions. And then when agencies are
struggling, we bring them together, and we try to
leverage best practices to see what might be most
helpful. We have a lot of conversations with them

1 about permanency, so that is extremely important for
2 us as we support agencies to make sure they have
3 their eyes on permanency, which they do. We also give
4 them data that lists everyone that's in their care as
5 a permanency list, and they're able to see when
6 children are in that first year that the Commissioner
7 mentioned, if they're in the second year of placement
8 or third year of placement, because all of that then
9 guides whether we should be having conversations
10 about changing goals, should we be moving towards
11 KinGAP or adoption, because we really don't want
12 children to stay in care longer, so we want to make
13 sure we're looking at how long they've been in care,
14 what are their service needs, and how we can support
15 them and move forward. We also have a good
16 relationship with the Family Court Improvement
17 Project, and they help us work with the court to
18 leverage making sure when adoptions are filed, that
19 they get scheduled as soon as possible, so that the
20 finalizations can occur.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: According to ACS
19 2023 Racial Equity Assessment, Black children who
20 remain in foster care for two years or more are less
21

2 likely than White children to achieve permanency.

3 What factors do you believe are contributing to this?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: So,
5 we've been able to make a significant headway on
6 this. We're down from over 6,000 children in foster
7 care, two or more years, to 3,777. I think there's a
8 multitude of things that we need to try to solve
9 here. I also want to note, and I think that this is
10 appropriate, that the court process is quite
11 litigious here in New York City because families
12 rightfully have strong counsel, and so if
13 reunification is not happening quickly, it does take
14 some time to achieve other forms of permanency. I
15 think we want to make sure children are stable during
16 that time. We want to make sure that decision-making
17 and that children do experience permanency. We are
18 seeing a reduction in the number of children aging
19 out. We're under 400 this year. We obviously built a
20 lot of support for young people to age out with lots
21 of supports, but we never want that to be... that is
not the goal. The goal is to make sure that every
single child is with family.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. When
kinship is not an option, how does ACS consider

2 children's culture, background, religious
3 observations, and gender identity and sexual
4 orientation as an element of their identifying to
5 consider foster care placements?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, when
7 children come into care, there are assessments that
8 are done. We have child and family specialists, those
9 are licensed social workers, that meet with the
10 children, get the history, we work very closely with
11 the Division of Child Protection with the information
12 they gather. Within the Family Permanency Services
13 Division, there's the Office of Placement, and they
14 are able to review those materials. A lot of that
15 goes into what is called the placement module, which
16 is a part of the connection system. And then foster
17 care agencies have already proactively entered
18 information on foster parents. So, I'm a foster
19 parent, I'm willing to take teens, I can take three
20 or four teens. How do I identify myself? All of those
21 factors. And the placement module kind of does like a
matching process. There are follow-up conversations
with the providers, but the providers will get
referrals to say it looks like this child will match
with these parents that you have, they'll have

2 discussions, and then we often will facilitate
3 meetings, I'm not really a fan of all of the
4 meet-and-greets, but we have these, sometimes there
5 are meetings where foster parents can meet kids to
6 see how that'll go, and vice versa, the kids can meet
7 the foster parents to say this is a type of
8 placement. Ideally, these things are happening
9 quickly, but we do use whatever data we have,
10 conversations, sharing with the agency what we do
11 know about the child to match. And then, of course,
12 when children are older, we'll speak to them about
13 their likes, their dislikes, and that will also help
14 with the matching process.

15 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I'd also note
16 we're releasing our LGBTQIA-plus policy, before I go,
17 which has been updated to, and thanks to many
18 advocates who have informed that policy, including
19 Legal Aid and others.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. I know we had
21 a hearing on that last year, and I think that it's
really important because those things play a major
role in placement and need to be taken into
consideration. And I feel like that question
constantly comes up for me, and even making sure in

2 these spaces when we had a shadow day with foster
3 care youth, this was one of the things that they were
4 very adamant about, around like, well, we weren't the
5 same religion, and some folks was like, I identified
6 a certain way, and it did not work, and so race is
7 important, but other things need to also be taken
8 into consideration as well.

9 I'm just going to ask a couple more
10 questions, and I'll pass it to my Colleagues, and
11 then I'll come back.

12 ACS reports that it has been
13 collaborating with DOE and H and H and the
14 communities to eliminate biases in reports of child
15 abuse and neglect. The agencies have committed to
16 educating mandated reporters to better understand
17 when a report is required and when it is not. How
18 does ACS measure whether retaining mandated reporters
19 has reduced unnecessary reports to SCR, and have
20 reports from hospital, schools, or significant
21 professional categories declined since the
retrainings began?

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. Thank you
for this question. I think this is one of the places
where we have taken on a greater responsibility. I

1 think in the past, we too often said, you know, we
2 don't really have control of what calls come, we just
3 respond. We have control of how we speak about this
4 work. We have control about how we train folks and
5 talk about it. When we took a look at the trainings
6 that teachers and guidance counselors were getting,
7 they were very fear-based. They included names of
8 children who had died, and you've heard me talk about
9 my perspective on when I was first at ACS, a policy
10 we put in place, I think it's really important that
11 children are in school, but we cannot have a simple
12 measure for when to call the SCR. It has to be a
13 fact-based determination of whether a parent is
14 meeting the minimum degree of care or not. And so,
15 without any law changes, we went back to the law and
16 said, there's a lot more discretion and assessment
17 here. And so, I just want to give a huge shout out
18 to, among many others, Donna Brailsford at New York
19 City Public Schools, who has really been driving this
20 retraining with us, partnering with us. We've got
21 great partners at Health and Hospitals and some of
the private hospitals. We've reached out to many of
the major charter school networks, and we've also
been retraining shelter providers as well. As a

1 result, school reports are down between, comparing
2 2023 to 2025, down 16 percent. Social services,
3 including shelters, are down that same amount, 16
4 percent. And health and mental health settings are
5 down 7 percent overall, and that's led to a decline
6 of about 8 percent in calls to the SCR.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know you
8 specifically mentioned that DOE and H and H, and
9 especially with the new RFP that just came out for
10 DYCD, how are you guys retraining, and what does that
11 look like in that process, too? Because they play a
12 major role in this, and sometimes I feel like that's
13 kind of like left out. And have you guys done
14 retraining there, what does that look like, and how
15 are they a part of this conversation?

16 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. This is
17 something we need to expand, and I appreciate that,
18 Chair Stevens. We didn't start there, because they're
19 not the biggest source of calls, but they are, as you
20 point out, an important source of calls. We're also
21 going to be meeting with (INAUDIBLE) later today,
where we want to have a conversation in how we train
all providers in this, and so we think we want to go
directly to non-profits for this conversation. We've

2 started with the public systems, but this is an
3 important next step, and we're..

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. I would love
5 to make sure that we bridge that gap, and however I
6 can help support in that, because I think that it's
7 really important, and sometimes it even looks
8 different, and being on the provider side, a lot of
9 times when the school drops the ball, the non-profit
10 is the one that's coming in on the back end, trying
11 to scoop it up and figure it out. I mean, it looks a
12 little bit different, so again, we know you're
13 leaving, whatever.

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We have a great
15 team, and they're taking notes, and we got you.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I know. I love them,
17 too. They're great, too. They better not try to leave
18 me. But I just want to make sure that we are thinking
19 about what that looks like, especially with this RFP
20 coming out and this huge expansion, and there's going
21 to be a lot of new people coming in. I want to make
sure that they're also being trained in the new way,
because like I said, I had to take their training
every year for 20 years, so I still consider myself a
mandated reporter, because I will call.

2 Does ACS have mechanisms to ensure that
3 mandated reporters are adhered to in practices that
4 included as part of such training?

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Can you say that
6 again? I'm sorry.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Do you guys have
8 like mechanisms to ensure that mandated reporters
9 are, like they're actually doing their job in
10 practices that are included in the training, so in
11 the trainings, do you like have mechanisms for them
12 to know that?

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. So, the
14 State is responsible for the mandated reporter
15 trainings. They've done a few things, including a new
16 decision-making tree that's been helpful. They keep
17 the tracking of who, making sure that mandated
18 reporters have actually gotten the training. We are
19 exploring whether to become an approved provider. Our
20 trainings have been supplementary, but we think, as I
21 said earlier, that it's really important that our
voice be in the room and talking about all the ways
folks can get services. We've got a huge increase in
the number of families who are coming through our
preventive support line, but also an increase in

2 families who are accessing services directly,
3 voluntarily, about 25 percent up from 10 percent. But
4 back to your question, we don't track who has gotten
5 the mandated reporter training sort of generally
6 statewide, but we are tracking with anybody we're
7 engaging with, hospitals, schools, and shelters, and
8 soon, DYCD.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I'm going to hand it
10 over to Council Member Joseph. I know she has a
11 number of questions.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.

13 My questions are going to be along
14 KinGAP, how long it took me, and I always talk about
15 this. It took me about five years to get my boys. A
16 lot of meetings, a lot of training, it was very
17 traumatic, and I always talk to you about that. So,
18 my question around KinGAP and how do we make it
19 better, improve the system. I know you redesigned it,
20 but increasing KinGAP over congregated residential
21 care. So, in 2025, what percentage of children in
foster care were placed with kin? Can you share also
racial breakdown of youth placing kinship, including
the percentage who are Black, White, Asian, and
Latinx?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yes. First, the
3 number of children who were placed with kin is about
4 42 percent, up from 30 percent. We really would like
5 to get that significantly higher and have a number of
6 initiatives in place to try to drive that. Congregate
7 settings, 9 percent of children are in congregate
8 settings. There was a slight tick up in that this
9 past year due to the relaunch of our supervised
10 independent living program. These are young people
11 who are living in their own apartments with support,
12 so it's a different kind of residential, one that is
13 not sort of a more traditional congregate setting.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know earlier you
15 mentioned about sometimes the length of time it takes
16 for agencies to move, and you set goals. How is that
17 working? Because again, I mentioned it, it took me
18 five years.

19 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, I want to
20 say one thing before DC Mendez goes, if that's okay.
21 So, last year we changed the budgeting process. We've
got a different model for, it's not where it was in
the day where you get paid per diem, because we don't
want there to be incentives to keep kids in care. And
we are moving resources around based on permanency

2 results by agency, and so some agencies are doing
3 better as a result of that. Some agencies have to
4 step it up, and we're providing them support in that
5 way. And that moment was consistent when we started
6 to see a lot more placements come into care. We've
7 also looked at the agencies rightfully were concerned
8 about whether lawyers would take on the KinGAP cases,
9 and so we've looked at a way to increase resources to
10 make sure that there are folks who will take those
11 on. And again, there's been more appeals around
12 KinGAP, and we have to honor that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: The judges are
12 usually more lenient.

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We have to honor
14 that process, right, for important rights for
15 everybody.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, you asked
17 the first question was around how is that going in
18 terms of goals. So, what we saw in Fiscal Year '25,
19 we saw more reunifications than in Fiscal Year '24.
20 I'll give you the numbers when I put my glasses on.
21 KinGAPs also went up. So, in Fiscal Year '25, we had
396 KinGAPs compared to 347, but the number of
adoptions were less in Fiscal Year '25. We're at 522

2 versus 535. I can get you the actual target
3 attainment, so I can let you know, like, you know, of
4 that number, like, were they close to the target or
5 not as a system. Again, as I mentioned earlier, we're
6 constantly focusing on permanency, and when it comes
7 to KinGAP and adoption, it's really about the
8 business process, right, because once the goal is
9 changed, the KinGAP, there are steps that need to be
10 taken. And what is the agency's business process to
11 get those steps done?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is there a
13 timeline? Because five years is a long time, right?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: I think I
15 would like to actually hear more, if you don't mind,
16 like, later about what that timeline, when that was.
17 I do know, not to be too intrusive, but I think it
18 would be a good lesson learned to understand where
19 the missteps were. ACS now, I don't know when the
20 KinGAP for you happened. We actually are able to
21 review the documents and go in the system and approve
the KinGAP, so that is one thing. We as an
organization, FPS, has a business process, so once we
get the information from the agencies, we know what
we need to do. We try to process those as soon as

1 possible. We give agencies training on the various
2 documents that need to be submitted with the packet.
3 We really are trying to refine the process. I can ask
4 Associate Commissioner Soto-Aponte what the normal
5 timeline should be. I don't have that information.
6 The other thing I will say around KinGAP, because the
7 Commissioner mentioned sometimes they are contested,
8 the agencies brought that to us, and we talked about
9 how can we, A, try to make sure we're supporting
10 families, because if we see KinGAP is coming, and we
11 know, for example, two sisters don't get along, how
12 are we working that from a case practice process to
13 support them? We also talked to the Court Improvement
14 Project. They did a training on mediation, and we're
15 asking FCLS to say, let's go to mediation to help
16 mitigate some of those issues as well.

15 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Chair, I didn't
16 answer your question about the breakdown in kin, so
17 it's pretty consistent. Black children, Hispanic
18 children, and White children are all about 42, 43
19 percent in kin. The one outlier is that Asian Pacific
20 Island families, children, is 21.6 percent. It's a
21 much smaller number, but we're looking at that and
what we can do to increase that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. In your
3 2025 MMR states that decline in kinship placement
4 coincide with rising family poverty and suggests that
5 relatives may be struggling to take in children. What
6 is the current payment structure for kinship and
7 non-kin foster parent, and what does ACS believe
8 those rates are sufficient to support caregivers? I
9 know folks who mean well, but I can't afford to take
10 an extra child in. What does that look like?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Absolutely.
12 If kin is identified, let's say, during the
13 investigation process, we now have a mechanism. We've
14 increased the funding, so we're able to give those
15 kin parents cash on a weekly basis. Then when they're
16 assigned to the agency, they will receive the full
17 foster parent stipend. So, whether I'm a kin or a
18 non-kin, the amount is the same depending on the
19 needs of the child. We ask kin parents to become
20 certified, and they go through that process. So, once
21 they become a kin parent, they will receive the same
resources. In addition to the finances, they get the
same amount of case planning. The children receive
the same types of services, all of those wraparound
supports. I think what we're learning is that kin

2 parents need to come together so they can talk to
3 other kins. We're encouraging agencies to create
4 support groups, have mentoring programs, and really
5 do a lot, not only to identify the children, but to
6 support them and retain them. There are instances
7 when kin actually become non-kin foster parents. When
8 their kin are reunified, they want to stay as a
9 foster parent.

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I do want to
11 note, on the front end, we believe all families need
12 support. We reinvested about 8 million dollars to
13 help non-profits meet concrete needs for families to
14 keep children out of foster care. We also are
15 launching, with DSS, an economic and concrete
16 services that doesn't have to come through ACS, but
17 we want to make sure that when families are in
18 contact with us, they have all of their benefits,
19 someone to navigate them to that, so that they can
20 have that stability.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Just to
22 piggyback on your question around the timeline, if
23 things go as planned, it should take 10 to 12 months
24 for a KinGAP to be completed.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: We've got to talk
3 as to why it took five years for me to, from
4 beginning to adoption. For me, it took five years, in
5 and out of court. I don't ever want that to happen to
6 another parent who mean well, who wants to foster and
7 then adopt the boys, but it took five years in my
8 case, from beginning to end, until I got the boys. We
9 don't want to see that, and that's why I'm asking
10 what kind of reforms you're doing around that length,
11 because I know after 18 months, the State is supposed
12 to come in and start looking for permanency and all
13 of that. I did all of that, twice. I did two sets of
14 18 months before I finally got the boys. I want to
15 prevent that from the beginning for any parent who
16 means well, who wants to take in children, but five
17 years is a long... I ran out of days as a teacher,
18 because I went back and forth to court so many times.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Definitely,
20 we can make time to talk and hear more and figure out
21 the missteps and make sure they're not repeated.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: When you do
reunification with parents, what kind of support do
you provide when that child go back into the house?

2 Is there mental health support for everyone when that
3 child re-enters that family?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: With
5 reunification, it's almost like a two-step process.
6 Agencies are preparing families for reunification, so
7 that's where they're assessing. Maybe that's when
8 we're moving to overnight visits, and they're doing
9 that kind of work ahead of time. The Commissioner
10 discussed the discharge grant, because while
11 reunification is a time where the child and their
12 parents are coming back together, there's financial
13 needs. The discharge grant was recently increased to
14 2,000 dollars per child, and that will help the
15 parents plan for the children. The child may have
16 left. They were two. They had one size bed. Now maybe
17 they're three. They need a bigger bed. They need more
18 furniture. They need additional clothes. That, to me,
19 releases the stress. They don't have to worry about
20 the finances, so that's one aspect. Then when they
21 are reunified, we have trial discharge, so agencies
are still expected to provide service planning, case
planning, make casework contacts, assess how that
trial period is going. They report back to the court.
We have family team conferences that ACS facilitates

2 prior to trial discharge and prior to final discharge
3 to make sure the family is in a good place to close
4 out the case. To answer your question, yes, the
5 service plan will remain the same, so if it's
6 counseling, if the child needs counseling, maybe this
7 is the time where family counseling is introduced.
8 There's information that they're gathering just to
9 make sure everything is steady, things are going
10 well. The goal of trial discharge is to help continue
11 to provide as many services the family needs. We
12 often may make referrals to prevention at that time
13 to continue to support the family.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And I know at one
15 point, I know you are now currently in public schools
16 with a preventive. Do you plan to expand? Because I
17 know that's one of the things Council Member Stevens
18 and I talk about. We want prevention before a case
19 happens. We want to make sure the supports are in
20 place for parents and families. Do you plan to
21 expand, and how is that going, and how many schools,
just off the top of my head, I can't remember, how
many schools are you in, and do you plan to expand
the program until more families are aware of this?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: A couple things.
3 One is there's 16 contracts that serve about three
4 schools each, so it's just under 50 schools. It's
5 going well. They're just launched. There's no
6 expansion plan yet, but we've seen a lot more
7 families access services. And as I mentioned in my
8 testimony, we created this kind of pilot to test a
9 capacity for, to give providers resources to be able
10 to serve families with concrete needs and other
11 supports without opening a prevention case, because
12 obviously we've heard very often that folks don't
13 want to be a case, and so we're looking at all ways
14 we can do that. We've expanded the Family Enrichment
15 Center. There's also, I think, both in the mental
16 health space and generally in family support, we want
17 to be supportive of initiatives outside of the ACS
18 continuum, and so this work that we're doing with the
19 Health Department to help them expand NFPX, the work
20 that many advocates are doing to re-envision some
21 family wellbeing work, that's all conversation we
think is really important in this domain, whether
it's within the ACS continuum or outside of it.

 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I know we're
talking about the harm caused by ACS. How do we look

2 back for the families that were harmed 50 years ago?
3 How do we go back and fix a lot of that harm that was
4 done to communities of color?

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. So, as I
6 mentioned earlier, there's about 50,000 children in
7 foster care in 1996. There's been a lot of work to
8 change that. Related to harm that has been committed,
9 harm that is continuing to happen, I think I really
10 appreciate Commissioner Tigani's testimony. I think
11 we have to have ways to come together to have
12 different structures, whether that's the
13 accountability council or some other way. My hope is
14 that it's very diverse experiences with ACS are
15 represented. Absolutely young people, absolutely
16 families, parents. About 7 percent of families
17 experience of investigations, about 7 percent go to
18 family court, and so we know there's lots of
19 different experiences. We also know that intrusion
20 unnecessarily is a very harmful thing. And I think
21 something that I've tried to bring to this work in
all my conversations with the team and all of the
ways in which we're leading is you can do great, you
can make absolute strides and change people's lives
to the positive, or you can do harm in this work,

2 whether that's a young person who's unsafe, whether
3 that's a family that's disrespected. I really
4 appreciate my staff who put themselves at that nexus
5 and try to get it right. We have a huge
6 responsibility and whatever we do harm, it has to be
acknowledged, whether that's historical or current.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, Council
9 Member Joseph.

10 My next question is, neglect reported by
11 schools called by educator reporters are far less
12 likely to be substantiated than calls by other
13 mandated reporters in New York City, and calls by
14 education reported that alleged neglect only were
15 substantiated 89 percent of the time in 2023. More
16 than 82 percent of the children in those reports are
17 Black and Latino. ACS has trained 1,300 educators
18 that can directly support families instead of making
19 a report, and education reporters' calls have come
20 down 90 percent since 2023. However, educators still
21 called the hotlines 10,000 times in 2025. What is ACS
learning about education report calls, particularly
related to neglect, and how schools can more often
directly link families to resources?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I think there's
3 two important things here. One is that we've learned.
4 One is that the fear associated with not calling is
5 real. That is, whether that's concern about criminal
6 liability, whether that's concern about liability
7 related to licensure, or even just sort of in
8 community. The other piece is that folks didn't know
9 enough about where to get help other than, so it was,
10 we have the situation, let's call the SCR. And I
11 think our message used to be, when in doubt, let us
12 figure it out. And so, at the same time, more than
13 half of the calls from schools are not education
14 neglect only. And so, they involve concerns about
15 potential abuse, they concern a number of different
16 other factors. So, we want schools to call when they
17 feel a child is in danger, and we want them to get
18 help when they think a family needs support, and they
19 are well positioned, and I really, really appreciate
20 our colleagues at New York City Public Schools,
21 because they've taken this on as their mandate.
They're really well positioned to help. The State has
made a couple changes, which is that when they call
for education neglect only, they ask the school, what
have you done, and so, have you sent anybody out,

2 have you tried to solve this problem, have you
3 provided resources, and I think that's been an
4 important part in reducing the calls as well.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. I think that
6 piece is so important, because so often it's like,
7 how did you contribute to this, or did you find out
8 any more information, so, I think that is important.

9 The next question I have is also, and
10 Council Member Joseph kind of hit on this as well, is
11 the school-based early support program. And I know
12 this is something you've been championing, and I'm
13 really excited about having. Have you seen schools
14 making use of this program, and could you talk a
15 little bit about what this has been like from this
16 launch? What are some of the things that you've seen
17 to help support this, and the vision behind it?

18 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. It's been
19 really encouraging, and thank you to Deputy
20 Commissioner Linares for her leadership around this.
21 We have seen about a 20 percent increase in families
accessing services, if you look at the last six
months compared to six months previously. And over
the last few years, we've seen from about 10 percent
to 25 percent of families accessing preventive

1 services voluntarily, not through a child protective
2 route. And when they do, their records are protected.
3 They sit at the non-profits. They're not in the ACS
4 system of record, so it doesn't become part of a
5 potential subsequent child protective investigation,
6 and it's important families see that protection.
7 They're called advocates cases because the advocates
8 sued a quarter century ago to protect that from being
9 within the child protective system, and it's
10 something that New York City should be really proud
11 of. Each non-profit has been engaging schools. We've
12 had lots of success, trying to really make sure that
13 they know how to access the support through
14 school-based early support. I would also say, where
15 there were challenges in the beginning, and sort of
16 understanding that our New York City Public Schools
17 partners were really great to try to help us work
18 with the principals, work with the superintendents.
19 Each of the superintendents had to sign off on the
20 contract being submitted, and then we had to really
21 drill that down with the principals. There's very
regular convenings that we have with the schools and
with the providers together to make sure that we're
solving all those issues.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And with the 50
3 schools that this program is in, were you guys
4 looking at areas where there were high numbers of
5 reports, or how was the demographics broken up? Were
6 there a lot of calls in that school?

7 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Were you just
9 looking at poverty rates? How was that determined?

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It was rates of
11 poverty, it was rates of calls to ACS, it was rates
12 of unemployment, a whole host of things.

13 And Winette is telling me that we've had
14 1,077 families who are served through that model so
15 far.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And have you seen a
17 decrease in those areas that the schools are in now
18 because they have this new service?

19 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I think it's too
20 early to say, to see, you know, we can take a look. I
21 don't think an evaluation would be primed yet. We're
still in the first year of it, but that's the goal.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And so even with
the, thinking about even the enrichment centers, and
thinking about, because they've been, I know the

2 expansion happened, it's been like a year or so. Have
3 we seen a decline in those communities as well, with
4 the presence of enrichment centers in those
5 communities?

6 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We've been doing
7 so many...

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And I know all of
9 them haven't opened, so I know.

10 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah, but we've
11 been taking down lots of, you know, obviously we've
12 seen this decrease in the scope of the child
13 protective system, and it's across the city. I think
14 we've been doing a lot of different things at once,
15 and so I don't think we're yet positioned to
16 attribute it to one initiative or another, because we
17 have about a dozen things that we've talked about
18 going on at the same time, but it's something we're
19 really curious about figuring out.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. You came in
21 with a lot of ideas, so.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Well, I had a
lot of people in my ear, some behind me.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Listen, we
appreciate it.

2 Truancy and other attendance issues
3 reported as educational neglect in New York Times
4 reported in two pieces last week, half of the state
5 did not have educational neglect in their stature,
6 meaning that child protection is not called when
7 children are absent from school. What is ACS learning
8 from the nature of educational neglect reports
9 specifically through CARES cases, and what might ACS
10 see in the next steps in City efforts to address
11 attendance issues without a child protective
12 response?

13 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah, I think a
14 few things. One is, in educational neglect cases
15 only, whether it's CARES or a child protective
16 investigation, we really try to understand what the
17 root cause is. Sometimes there are challenges with
18 young people's behavior, lack of access to services.
19 Sometimes there is mental health challenges for the
20 parents. Sometimes there's a combination. And so, we
21 really try to understand what services can help. We
try to do meetings with the school to see if we can
work something out. Sometimes it's an inappropriate
school placement, or an IEP hasn't been done, or
there's school phobia. There really is not a single

2 one, which is why we have to make sure we understand
3 and do a careful assessment.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: CARES is an
5 alternative response to child welfare investigation
6 for low and moderate risk reported concerns of child
7 abuse and maltreatment. Can you explain why CARES is
8 a core strategy for combating racial disparities?

9 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. I think
10 it's key because if we can solve a problem without
11 having a family have an indication of maltreatment,
12 even if there has been some concern, that is not
13 going to saddle them with an economic hardship where
14 they can't get certain jobs. When a young person is
15 not going to school and the parent has not been able
16 to express a minimum degree of care in that moment,
17 if we can help them get, in some cases we see parents
18 who are experiencing depression or going through some
19 trauma themselves. We want to make sure we can help
20 families without then making it harder for them to do
21 well. The indication or unsubstantiation is an
administrative decision. It doesn't really drive the
next steps. I think it's a tool that I think we
should really be examining because it doesn't
indicate just because there's an indication you have

1 to go to court. The real question is what's the risk
2 and how do you mitigate it in the least intrusive
3 way? That's the goal that we are trying to rally
4 around. One of the reasons I think CARES eliminates
5 that indication or not conversation and allows for
6 more trust and more conversation to be had because
7 families don't have to have fear that they're going
8 to get that indication if they tell a story that
9 might include some mistakes.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: According to ACS
11 data in FY 2025, White and Asian families were
12 referred to CARES at higher rates than Black and
13 Latinx children. What strategy or mechanisms is ACS
14 considering to address this disparity?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: It's
16 pretty close, but we've got to narrow it even
17 further. We look at this in ChildStat constantly. We
18 look by allegation, by race. We think there's some
19 difference in allegation by race, and CARES is driven
20 by allegation, so there are certain things you cannot
21 go down the CARES track with if they're alleged.
We're trying to narrow that gap to make sure we're
looking geographically. It's one of the key
indicators in our CARES ChildStat work, and we're

2 always trying to examine with each borough, each
3 neighborhood, each zone to make sure we understand
4 the distribution. A lot of this, the determination
5 for CARES is a few steps. The State labels it FAR
6 eligible, Family Assessment Response. We call it
7 CARES here in New York City. It's then looked at by
8 our applications team, which does a quick look at the
9 allegation and the history, and then it is initially
10 tracked down one way or the other. You can go back
11 from an investigation to CARES within the first seven
12 days, so we're also working with staff to identify
13 places where that initial track towards an
14 investigation could be re-evaluated.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: In New York State,
16 hotline screens for far fewer calls than most states,
17 which contributes to high investigation rates of New
18 York City's for Black and Latino families. This
19 suggests that many CARES cases would not be referred
20 to children protective responses in other states.
21 What types of cases does the agency believe could be
22 handled in other ways? For instance, materials needed
23 in hardships, ACS investigators, frequently fined
24 food assistants, baby supplies including cribs,
25 strollers, diapers, clothes, child care vouchers, and

2 connected to benefits and screening for parents. How
3 might stronger community pathways to family supports
4 prevent ACS involvement? I know a lot, even with the
5 enrichment centers, that is something that you guys
6 have really been using to create community solutions,
7 but are there other things that we should be looking
8 to do to try to just kind of help? I know CORE
9 mentioned a universal basic income, or are there
10 other things that you think should be implemented?

11 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I think every
12 way we can help families have the security that they
13 need, we should be pursuing. At the State level, I
14 know there's a lot of conversation about reforming
15 the SCR, and OCFS is very engaged in that. I think
16 one thing that we could do is to create a state law
17 that allows for local discretion around having cases
18 be closed before the seven-day period. Often,
19 especially around malicious reports, someone can
20 call, make an allegation, we might have been in the
21 home two days before, there might be a series of
malicious allegations. The work that we have to do,
sometimes we call the State and say, can you take
this back, but they have to make the decision by
current law, sort of based on the allegation, if it

2 was true, if it was credible, it would constitute
3 maltreatment. We sometimes know a lot more than they
4 do. If we had that discretion at a local level, our
5 idea, and we've been talking to various folks around
6 that, would be to create, in state law, the capacity
7 for localities to have that discretion, and then
8 maybe have localities submit a plan to the State like
9 we do for CARES. They created discretion around
10 different tracks. This could be almost a third track.
11 If we got a very similar call to something we've just
12 investigated, we don't believe the credibility of the
13 caller, maybe we do a virtual visit, and then we
14 close it out, or maybe we pursue support in a
15 different way. I think New York City needs more
16 discretion in that regard.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That's a good
18 recommendation. We'll definitely note that.

19 What is the current budget for preventive
20 services, and how has it changed since 2021's foster
21 care redesign? Could you provide context on any
shifts in funding priorities or allocation over this
period, and what aspects of preventive services are
the most costly?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: So, I'll get the
3 exact number, I forgot I was in a budget hearing, so
4 it's 300 million dollars plus. But we have been doing
5 a lot of work in preventive services actually to
6 examine the whole system. Last year, we took a look
7 at chronic underutilization, where families really
8 were not voting with their feet to access those
9 family support services. We took that down, but we
10 reinvested that money into helping non-profits on
11 workforce, and helping non-profits meet concrete
12 needs. The most expensive of the preventive services
13 are the treatment modalities that are evidence-based.
14 But we've been putting more and more money in
15 services that are most accessible.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: According to 2025
17 data, despite representing a significant share of SCR
18 intakes, Black children account for a smaller share
19 of preventive services cases opening. What criteria
20 guides referrals to preventive services, and how does
21 ACS ensure the criteria are applied equitably?

 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. I mean,
this is something that is less about the referral
differences, and more about families where they want
to get services. And so, we more often see Black

2 families wanting to get services from community-based
3 organizations, from where they trust in the
4 community, and not have an ongoing preventive
5 services case. This is something we're trying. It's
6 one of the reasons we are extending this different
7 type of preventive service, where you do not have to
8 open a case through the school-based early support
9 process, but we really do want to respect family
10 voice and agency. We got to make sure our services
11 are ones that folks trust and are strong. And so,
12 we're seeing this new wave around more and more
13 voluntary families coming to preventive services,
14 which we're encouraged by, but we do want to make
15 sure if a family has a community that can support
16 them, we shouldn't override that.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah, no. I mean,
15 absolutely we shouldn't, but, you know, we want to
16 make sure that it's not a repeat thing, and so, how
17 do we keep track of that, so I would love for us to
18 think about, well, not you, but us, the rest of us,
19 figure out how to keep track of that. Because I think
20 it is important for us to make sure that, yes, they
21 can say they're going to get the services, but what
does the follow-up look like?

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: And, Chair, if I
3 may, just the last year's, 372.4 million is in
4 prevention services.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: When a parent
6 proactively seeks preventative services because
7 they're struggling with child behavior challenges,
8 including violence or high-risk behavior, what is the
9 average time between referral and the start of
10 services? Are there differences in wait times based
11 on borough provider or level of need?

12 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: There's no wait
13 list. We're able to provide services right away.
14 Sometimes, it does take a few conversations and
15 visits to begin, you know, and engage that work. And
16 so, it can take up to a couple weeks, but that's
17 really based on a family reaching out voluntarily. We
18 don't have any wait list in any part of the city.
19 We've also created this, as I was referencing
20 earlier, this teen priority initiative. When a
21 hospital calls us, sometimes on the weekends, we get
calls from the court after a young person's been
arrested and the parent can't pick them up. That
should not be a foster care entry and, too often, it
has been. And so, we're creating this process where

2 immediately, we can get the family services, work
3 with those systems, not have that child enter foster
4 care, use respite more often, which we're building
5 out. But I really want to emphasize that we need the
6 help of the mental health system. And this should not
7 be the child welfare system's responsibility. A
8 family should not have to have an intrusive model
9 like that. So, we're working with the Office of
10 Mental Health at the State level, asking them if, you
11 know, they're building a number of services coming
12 out of this consent decree. But families should be
13 able to walk in and get the help that they need. And
14 the system is not designed for young people who are
15 struggling the most. Part of the reason we're seeing
16 too many young people in detention. It's part of the
17 reason we saw an increase in teens. We're going to do
18 everything we can to serve those families when they
19 come to our attention. But I think it'd be great to
20 pay as much attention to figuring out ways in which
21 those services are actually accessible, not just
through an emergency room. But if you have an ACT
team responding to a crisis of a teen, that teen
should be eligible for all the services that they
need, intensive outpatient, day treatment, whatever

2 it is that they need in a culturally competent way.

3 And we have a long way to go to do that.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No. I mean, I 100
5 percent agree. I think that that is probably one of
6 the biggest issues where it's like, it's nowhere else
7 to put it. So, let's just put it with ACS, and we
8 haven't been doing real comprehensive work around the
9 mental health services. And I will say this, young
10 people have been advocating since literally for the
11 last four years. That has been one of the number one
12 things they've been asking me for is jobs and mental
13 health services...

14 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Amen.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And young people
16 have been very clear about this. But for some reason,
17 the adults have not been listening. And so, I agree
18 and want to keep making sure that I'm fighting and
19 pushing that and uplifting that young people say they
20 want more services, mental health services, and they
21 want jobs. But, you know, we're not listening.

I actually have a lot more.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Career choice is
coming.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You said career
3 choice is coming?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It's here.
5 Sorry. Sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: As we discussed at a
7 previous hearing, advocates have worked with the
8 Mayor's Office of Policy and Planning on the concept
9 of the office of family well-being that would
10 strengthen community planning for family's life and
11 invest in grassroots organizations to support
12 families. How could it help reduce racial disparities
13 in ACS involvement to build up the family support
14 capacity of grassroots groups?

15 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: I think it's a
16 wonderful idea to have a City entity that's focused
17 solely on family wellness. I think it's important
18 that our child protective specialists have at their
19 fingertips supportive services, talked about FPP,
20 talked about preventive services, lots of other
21 things, that there's not just sort of a binary choice
for them about sort of removal or not. And so, I do
think some things should be connected to the child
protective system or at least very easily accessible,
but the more that we can put in a place where

2 families feel less stigma, I absolutely support that.
3 It is complicated. You know, all the procurement
4 stuff, all the contracting, you have to be a local
5 district of social services, but I see no reason we
6 shouldn't urgently kick off a planning process to
7 look at what an office of family well-being would
8 look like.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. I mean, I
10 think we definitely need to get to a place of like,
11 what does it look like to support families in a real
12 way, and not always as punitive. I think that, again,
13 under your leadership, there has been a real push
14 around trying to have other mechanisms so, it's not
15 always punitive, but I want to be clear, because of a
16 lot of the harm and what has been done in the past,
17 why would now these same families want to trust and
18 say, okay, I want to have a case. And it's still a
19 lot of work that needs to be done there.

20 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: And, Chair, if
21 I... even if we have a perfect system...

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: If you walk with
the power to remove a child, that is fear-inducing,
period, right, and so, we have to walk with it with

2 integrity, and follow the law, and make sure we're
3 doing a job to protect those children, but we also
4 have to acknowledge that that is something that
5 families are not going to want to walk towards.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No. Absolutely not.
7 Why would someone sign up for it? And again, I think
8 also, too, again, I know that it's been this big push
9 to say we want other avenues to get into ACS without
10 having to be punitive, but how are you even doing
11 that rebranding? How are families supposed to know? I
12 know we've talked about this a number of times, but
13 could you talk about some of the work that you guys
14 have done to try to let families know that there has
15 been somewhat of a shift, but still with the
16 understanding of why families would still stay away?

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. I think
18 there's a few things happening here. One is we've
19 really tried to allow, whether it's the Family
20 Enrichment Centers or the Community Partnerships, to
21 develop them outside of ACS branding, or even the
non-profits branding, so that they are driving sort
of a community visioning process. The Preventive
Support Line has proved very successful as well in
this regard. We're working to try to get out more

1 messaging. We worked very hard when we were expanding
2 child care to get out messaging around that. In local
3 communities, we went through both for Promise and
4 other services, went through community-based
5 organizations that families trust. There's also the
6 culture shift at ACS, and if I could give a minute or
7 two to Elvita Dominique, our Director of Equity
8 Strategies, and FDC Saunders, just to talk about some
9 of the ways in which we're creating a culture of
anti-racism within ACS as well.

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: So,
11 good afternoon, Honorable Chair and Honorable Members
12 of the Youth and Family Committee. It is my pleasure
13 today to talk to you about the Office of Equity
14 Strategies. It was established in 2018, and it was
15 moved under my purview, the Office of the First
16 Deputy Commissioner, in 2021 to ensure and broaden
agency-wide reach.

17 With that being said, there are three
18 units that comprise our office. One is LGBTQIA-plus
19 Equity Strategies, two is Race Equity Strategies, and
20 three is our new Office of Fatherhood Engagement. We
21 work really hard to support all branches of our
agency in their efforts to eliminate disparities and

2 address disparities and disproportionality that
3 impact the families and children and staff that we
4 serve and work with. Some of the things that we've
5 been really focused on... well, let me say, in four
6 different ways we really, these are the primary ways
7 we engage. So, one is improving policy and practice
8 and advancing equity, two is developing initiatives
9 and strategies that eliminate and address these
10 inequities, three is developing a culture and
11 shifting the culture where family voice and youth and
12 parent voice are elevated and respected, and the
13 fourth one is really creating an inclusive
14 environment for our workforce. With that being said,
15 many of the things that our Commissioner mentioned
16 with regard to the expansion of CARES, the launch of
17 early school supports have been mentioned. But there
18 are other things such as training, and we talked
19 about it a little bit through some of the discussions
20 that was had earlier this morning, but our policy
21 refresh, as you know, we've had a policy on LGBTQIA
and the promotion of a safe environment, but it was
done in 2012. We know that there is a need for a
modernization of those policies and making sure that
we include the voice of young people and parents and

2 families. So, we are very much in tune with making
3 sure that we're elevating parent and youth voice. You
4 might know that we actually created a couple of years
5 ago a family engagement specialist that works with
6 the entire agency. Just recently, we've embedded a
7 parent advisor in the Family Services Division. In
8 addition to that, we have a Parent Advocacy Council
9 that weighs in on policies and different protocols
10 that are currently in place or things that they bring
11 to our attention that they want to discuss and they
12 want to elevate. We also have a Youth Leadership
13 Council that also has a voice in the practice and
14 protocols that are happening at ACS. With that being
15 said, there are so many things that I can talk about,
16 but I really want to give an opportunity to our
17 Executive Director, Elvita Dominique, to really
18 discuss some of the work that she leads.

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOMINIQUE: Thank you
20 so much, FDC. You've been so thorough actually
21 already.

22 I just want to add just a few things.
23 With regard to the race equity work, I think today we
24 spent a lot of time talking about our services and
25 the ways in which we're really trying to embed race

1 equity into those services. Some of that work has
2 already been highlighted. FDC mentioned it, the
3 Commissioner mentioned it. We're talking about
4 expansion of CARES, expansion of the Family
5 Enrichment Centers, expansion of childcare
6 assistance. All of that we consider a part of our
7 race equity strategy work within ACS.

8 I'll focus a little bit more on what
9 we're doing internally in terms of the culture shift.
10 There's a lot of investment going on in terms of
11 staff training. We have actual trainings developed by
12 ACS, such as understanding and undoing implicit bias
13 that's mandated for ACS staff. This training helps
14 staff identify and mitigate bias. But then we also
15 supplement that with additional trainings that we
16 make available to staff as well, such as undoing
17 racism, which we partner with the People's Institute
18 for Survival and Beyond to help staff address how
19 racism operates in large systems. And then to really
20 further allow them to develop that equity lens, we
21 also provide reflective practice and we also provide
healing circles. The reflective practice allows for
facilitated spaces so staff can kind of take what
they've learned in these trainings and really think

1 about how they can incorporate it into their work.
2 And the healing circles really allow folks to kind of
3 manage the stress that is really involved in doing
4 this work really well. Further to that, in terms of
5 our internal work, ACS has rolled out a scoring tool
6 for interviews agency-wide and all interviews are
7 required to follow a structured interview process to
8 allow for more fairness in our hiring processes. We
9 also have developed internally again an equity
10 checklist that's a tool for staff that they can use
11 to self-reflect and achieve an equity lens before any
12 interactions or meetings. ACS also has an ACS Racial
13 Equity and Cultural Competence Committee, which was
14 founded in 2006 and is actually very influential in
15 the promotion of race equity at ACS and the
16 development of our office, the Office of Race Equity
17 Strategies. The General Committee of the REECC is
18 open to all staff from every level and every
19 division, as well as representatives from provider
20 agencies and the child welfare advocate community. We
21 also have a robust group of resource groups that are
open to all staff that include the African American
Heritage Committee, the Latino Heritage Committee,
the Pride Alliance, and many others. We've developed

2 also an agency framework, which really identifies
3 what our overall focus is as an agency, and within
4 that framework really has advancing equity as one of
5 the main purposes, so staff can kind of understand
6 how all of our work really is leading towards this
7 greater goal of success for children, youth, and
8 families. So, we're really looking at how all of
9 these tools can really promote the culture shift that
10 we're looking for as an agency.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. That was
12 a lot.

13 And I know in the conversation we did
14 talk about the parent advocates, and so I know
15 there's about 150 parent advocates with lived
16 experience to help provide mentorship and advocacy
17 for parents with children currently in the foster
18 care system. Are those parent advocates, are they
19 compensated for that work, and what are the rates for
20 families who receive PEP support compared to, what
21 are the unification rates of families who receive PEP
supports compared to those who do not, and does ACS
determine which families receive a parent advocate,
and how do you ensure that they deploy equitable?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, regarding
3 the Parents Empowering Parents Program, that's within
4 the foster care agency, the foster care continuum, I
5 lost my voice, sorry. So, they are staff, they are
6 hired by the foster care agency, so yes, they are
7 absolutely compensated, they are full-time staff,
8 they are trained by RISE, but they have other
9 on-boarding training, so they're a modified employee
10 of the foster care agency that they work for. They're
11 embedded in the case planning teams. They're the
12 units. So, each unit is a unit of four case planners
13 and a supervisor, so that's about 40 cases, and
14 ideally they are assigned new cases that have a goal
15 of reunification. So that's how they're kind of
16 assigned. I think you asked a question...

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: About timing. We
18 don't... yeah, okay.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: I got that,
20 right, but you asked something else about the parents
21 that get the parent, the PEP, so.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. How do you
determine the parent advocates, how do you ensure
that they are deployed equitably?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, they're
3 embedded in their unit, and we usually, based on new
4 cases, those cases, or cases that are in need, or if
5 a parent has asked for a parent advocate, they are
6 given. So, the goal is for each unit to have their
7 own parent advocate, so that one advocate isn't
8 spread too thin.

9 In terms of being able to track, like,
10 the permanency rates, we're not able to do that at
11 this time. We have been in conversations with OCFS to
12 create a field and connections, for example, so that
13 we could pull that data to see, like, the time it
14 took that particular case to achieve permanency and
15 if there was a parent advocate, but we don't have a
16 way to track that in connections yet, but we'll
17 continue those conversations, and we're hoping,
18 that's definitely data we want to look at.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. And also, how
20 can we use that in other spaces, right? I think it's
21 important to people who have those experiences to be
there to support.

Beyond the work that you've talked about,
ACS will continue to reduce racial disparities with
child welfare. Are there external factors that other

2 agencies or other agencies should address to support
3 these efforts?

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Yeah. I think
5 we've talked about a few of them. I think one of the
6 things is that the child welfare system by law and by
7 responsibility has been imbued with this urgency.
8 That's not necessarily the case in other systems that
9 are helping systems, and so we want to make sure
10 there's as much urgency to get families help to
11 mitigate risk, to provide that kind of help. I think
12 we talked about that, whether that's the mental
13 health system, we're really grateful for the
14 colleagues who have engaged with us around this, both
15 in the mental health system and the hospital system,
16 shelter schools, etc.

17 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. I'm going
18 to move on to the legislation.

19 I know you've already said that you love
20 the legislation that I'm putting forward. That's what
21 I heard.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Sort of.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And Intro. 449 and
Intro. 446 would require ACS representatives to
inform parents or guardians that they are not

2 required to consent to a home visit, search, or speak
3 to ACS staff. Does ACS anticipate that providing this
4 advancement could affect the levels of voluntary
5 cooperation for families?

6 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: It could. But
7 let me back up, if I may. A couple years ago, we
8 began providing families with information at the
9 front door about key rights. We share with them that
10 we're there as a result of a call alleging
11 maltreatment. We share with them that we are seeking
12 permission to come in, that they can deny that
13 permission, that if they deny that permission, we
14 have to find the best way to assess the safety of
15 their children, which may include seeking permission
16 from a family court. We also let them know they can
17 call an attorney at any time during the
18 investigation, and we have a packet for them with
19 attorney information in it. That has not changed the
20 rate of which we've been able to carry out
21 assessments and work with families within their home.
The legislation, so I think that's really important.
We're the only place in the state that is doing this,
one of the few places in the country. Some of the
additional expectations in the legislation, we're

1 interested about. I am concerned that given that
2 about 7 percent of families go to court, and that
3 moment of starting the investigation is not
4 consistent with custodial interrogation or arrest,
5 which is when Miranda's ran in law enforcement, that
6 we could, in using that language, actually strike
7 more fear that we are further along. We don't know
8 what would happen to family court. Family court is
9 accessible 24/7. I have a hypothesis that it would
10 increase the number of times we have to seek for an
11 order to produce or an entry order. The current State
12 law and regulation requires that we make an attempt
13 before we seek court intervention, and so that could
14 create challenges in assessing child safety. My view,
15 again, is that we sort of have to narrow the ubiquity
16 of our system but be able to assess child safety when
17 children truly may be in danger, and to make sure
18 we're protecting so, we really hope to continue this
19 conversation about exactly what to say at that front
20 door.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: No, I mean, I agree.
19 Listen. My guiding star is always to keep young
20 people safe and children safe, and so that's always
21 my guiding star, but we want to make sure that

2 parents know their rights and understand their
3 rights, right? And I also believe if you're already
4 doing it, I'm all about codifying, because as we can
5 see, there can be someone at the head that's really
6 good, but they don't stay, so we have to codify the
7 things that we believe are necessary so that when the
8 next person come in, that that policy can't change.
9 And so, I'm very open to amending this and hearing
10 feedback, but I do think that it is important for us
11 to figure out what makes the most sense, especially
12 because you're already testifying that this is
13 something that's already being done to families.

14 My next question is, if a parent refuses
15 entry to ACS, how would Intro. 449 change ACS process
16 for assessing imminent danger during the initial
17 contact?

18 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We're not sure.
19 The current practice that we are pursuing has not
20 changed that. We have staff on all through the night.
21 The court is available, so if we do need to get an
entry order, we work to pursue that. Sometimes that
escalates things further than might be necessary, so
I do worry about unnecessary court involvement, but I

2 don't want to suggest that we have experience with
3 what that would do.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: My next question is,
5 does ACS have data on the number of families where
6 the parents or legal guardians of children who are
7 subject to investigation have limited English
8 proficiency?

9 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We do. 12,383
10 parents in investigations had a primary language
11 other than English, and we fulfilled 146,441 requests
12 for interpretation. This includes for Child
13 Protective, Families in Prevention, and Foster Care,
14 as well as the Children's Center.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And what does those
16 interpretation services typically consist of?

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: They consist of
18 Language Line, where there's an on-the-phone..

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. I heard
20 Language Line is terrible.

21 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We've had..

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: That's what folks
have complained to me about.

COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Say it again.
I'm sorry.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Folks have
3 complained about Language Line in a number of ways,
4 and so, you know.

5 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: We have new
6 contracts going into place. This is something that
7 it'll be the first time ACS has our own contracts. I
8 think we've seen a lot of success with them, but I'd
9 love to hear any of the concerns. Yeah. They have
10 in-person, which we typically use for conferences and
11 other kinds of.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: And Intro. 424 would
13 require DOHMH to establish an operative pilot program
14 to provide mental health services at no cost to
15 children who have been returned to their families
16 following removal by ACS. Approximately, how many
17 children are returned home following an Article X
18 removal each year and what percentages receive mental
19 health services? And my question is, it was my
20 understanding that when young people are
21 transitioning out, there's typically a transition
plan, and there's usually services that's already
provided. So is this something... I'm trying to figure
out what gap we're trying to fill here.

2 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: There's two
3 things going on here. One is families who are
4 unifying. Many of those children are much younger,
5 and we have the capacity to continue to serve them
6 for up to a year. Some families want that, some
7 families don't. We do not have the capacity to track
8 what services that they access for some good reasons,
9 HIPAA laws and otherwise, but it would be helpful if
10 we could get more data from OCFS, maybe de-identified
11 from OCFS about children in foster care and the
12 Office of Mental Health as well, just to be able to
13 see how much treatment is being provided. Agencies
14 have all built Article 29Is where they can provide
15 that treatment, both medical and mental health. For
16 young people who are aging out of care, which is a
17 little less than 400 each year, there is, as you
18 know, the coach, there's mental health services that
19 they can attach to. They've also... DC Mendez can talk
20 for a second about, because I know she would love to,
21 about Soul Care. This is something that young people
created.

 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Oh, yes. I remember
this. You told me about this in a hearing before.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Yes. So, Soul
3 Care is a public-private partnership we have with
4 Public Policy Lab and a wellness collective, Melody
5 Santana was part of that, and we're really looking at
6 how to provide alternate supports, therapeutic
7 supports, but not your traditional therapy. Because
8 many of our young people have done the CBT, they've
9 done the didactic training.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: They said they don't
11 want it. Listen, I hear the kids. That's why I keep
12 saying young people need to be in these spaces,
13 because we keep coming up with things they're like,
14 nah, that's not what we asked for.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, Soul Care
16 is a small pilot, but we are going to continue moving
17 forward, and so we're able to offer boxing, there's
18 hip hop therapy, there's other things. We're working
19 with an organization called Art Pharmacy. So, we
20 really are trying to support young people to, you
21 know, reach their best potential, but also support
them in ways that they want to be supported. And so,
we have some funding, we're in the process of trying
to expand the pilot, and then we'll probably try to

2 look at how we can make sure this is baselined and
3 offered.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Is that one of your
5 new needs this year? Because it is budget season.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: It will be.
7 We're not there yet, but it will be, yes. I think
8 we're going to probably do that. We need to get the
9 evaluation as well, just to make sure it's effective
10 and continue it.

11 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: It's music to my
12 ears when you say you're doing a pilot and an
13 evaluation, because government doesn't do that
14 apparently so, I appreciate that.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: So, yeah. So,
16 we're going to try to see, but we really are hearing
17 good things from the pilot.

18 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I just have one more
19 question before I wrap up. ACS testified that
20 children can continue Medicare services up to one
21 year after discharge from foster care agencies
notifying the management care company. Even with the
Medicare eligibility, are there provider shortages or
long wait lists that prevents timely access to care?

2 Because that was something that we heard from young
3 people from some of the roundtables we've done.

4 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: For this
5 particular population, they are able to access it
6 ongoing through the same care that they've been
7 receiving while they're in care, but yes, there are
8 absolute needs for greater mental health access in
9 the community.

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Yeah. That was one
11 of the things that we were hearing, that even when
12 they do have a plan and have Medicare, there's still
13 long wait lists or limited options, and so, that is
14 definitely something we will be working with Chair
15 Cabán on to figure out how do we continue to do the
16 expanded services.

17 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: There is a pilot
18 that we're doing with Northwell, for young people who
19 are interested in being part of their Healthy Home
20 Continuum and accessing services, we gave them
21 stipends to learn more about it and just to see if
there's a way to create a health community for them.
So, something else that we might be learning from in
the future.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Well, with that, I
3 don't have any more questions, and so this is our
4 last hearing together. We so appreciate your services
5 and really look forward to working with you again in
6 the future, because that's what we do in this work.
Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you for
8 your support.

9 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you to your
10 team. Thank you, guys, for the work that you do. And
11 from this, it seems like we still have a lot of work
12 to do around addressing these racial disparities, and
13 this will be something that's at the top of my
14 priorities to continue to get these numbers down and
15 work with you guys to see how this works, because it
16 seems like there's a lot of things in play, but
17 sometimes this moves a little short, but I only got
four years, so we're going to have to move a little
bit faster, so thank you guys for the work that you
do.

18 COMMISSIONER DANNHAUSER: Thank you.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Thank you.

20 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE) ACS I know it's not
21 important for you guys to stay and hear (INAUDIBLE)

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: They actually do
3 stay, because you'll see them, they'll be in the
4 front, so they typically stay in the front. I know,
5 but I'm telling you... well, you're not supposed to
6 make noise in the room, but ACS actually do stay in
7 the room, and they actually stay at all of the
8 hearings. They'll be right here in the front
9 listening. Stephanie, who is actually going to be
10 staying here and moving forward, is here to listen,
11 who has been at all of my hearings to the end, and
12 typically the lone survivor with me at, and so, I
13 just want to make sure that it is known they're not
14 leaving. She's sitting here right in the room, and
15 she does a lot of good work, so.

16 I now open the hearing for public
17 testimony. I remind publics that this is a formal
18 government proceeding, and that decorum shall be
19 always observed. As such, a member of the public
20 shall remain silent at all times.

21 The witness table is reserved for people
who wish to testify. No radio recordings or
photographs allowed at the witness table. Further,
members of the public may not present audio or video
recordings at testimony, but you should submit

2 transcripts of such recordings to the
3 Sergeant-at-Arms at the conclusion of the hearing.

4 If you wish to speak today, please fill
5 out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and
6 wait to be recognized. When recognized, you have two
7 minutes to speak today on today's hearing topic,
8 Examining Racial Disparities in the Child Welfare
9 System.

10 If you have a written statement or
11 additional testimony you want to submit for the
12 record, please provide a copy to the
13 Sergeant-at-Arms.

14 I will now call the first panel. You can
15 call them.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Nora
17 McCarthy, Joyce McMillan, and Shalonda
18 Curtis-Hackett.

19 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Did she have
20 testimony you wanted to read for her, or are you?

21 NORA MCCARTHY: We'll send it in after.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Okay, no problem.
Thank you.

NORA MCCARTHY: You want to go?

JOYCE MCMILLAN: No. Go ahead.

2 NORA MCCARTHY: No. You go.

3 JOYCE MCMILLAN: Thank you for the
4 opportunity to testify about the steps that New York
5 City and ACS can take to address racial disparities
6 in how Black and Latinx families are treated by the
7 child welfare system.

8 First, I want to speak about Miranda. ACS
9 is investigating and separating thousands of families
10 every year but keeping them in the dark about their
11 rights. Families are facing the high risk of
12 permanent separation and need Miranda protections.
13 When the government exercises its power to
14 investigate families, parents must be clearly advised
15 orally and in writing in their primary language of
16 their right to remain silent and their right to have
17 an attorney.

18 Second, I want to talk about the Office
19 of Family Well-Being. CAPTA, the Child Abuse
20 Prevention and Treatment Act, is a federal law that
21 established the core functions of the Child
Protection Agency. These are clear and limited. To
investigate allegations and to take legal action when
children are in danger. Let's be clear, those are
policing functions. We must be honest about what ACS

2 is and what it is not and what it is actually
3 responsible to be. ACS is not a social services
4 agency. It is an investigative and a prosecutorial
5 agency, and so ACS is not the appropriate container
6 or home for providing social support services and
7 resources like family enrichment centers, child care
8 vouchers, and all the other things they seek to do.
9 Social support services and policing are different
10 functions and those functions are governed by
11 different principles. And right now, we are
12 conflating these two functions and it's very
13 dangerous. Parents understand this and, rightfully
14 so, don't trust ACS. If we want ACS (TIMER CHIME) to
15 function properly within the law, we must realign it
16 with its core mandate and strip it of its social
17 service add-ons. This does not mean families should
18 not receive support. Families should receive support
19 from community support. Narrowing the Front Door and
20 the Coalition co-chair recommends the City create new
21 office of family well-being to support community-led
planning that supports families, builds up the
community supports, and reduces the risk of child
welfare involvement.

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

2 NORA MCCARTHY: Hi. Thank you so much.

3 Good afternoon. I'm Nora McCarthy, Director of the
4 New York City Family Policy Project and member of the
5 Narrowing the Front Door work group. Thank you for
6 your attention to the issue of racial disparities and
7 child welfare involvement.

8 I want to add to Joyce's testimony about
9 how we can, thank you, invest in a new approach so
10 that fewer Black and Latino families in particular
11 end up facing crises and ACS involvement. As you
12 know, the Narrowing group and the innovation team and
13 the Mayor's Office of Policy and Planning have been
14 planning a new approach to create an office of family
15 well-being that would anchor a community approach to
16 family support. Thank you for your questions and
17 comments about it earlier. We heard the
18 Commissioner's support. This fall, our group spent
19 time listening to what parents say they need. Parents
20 who rely on City programs and services report needing
21 navigation support that is cross-agency, supportive,
and peer-centered. The barriers they named included
mistrust, stigma and shame, fear of judgment and
consequences including ACS involvement, and resource
and time scarcity. The solutions they named included

1 trusted messengers, peer-based models, neighborhood
2 proximity and proactive outreach, and word of mouth
3 is how parents say they learn about resources through
4 the people and organizations they trust, as you know.

5 A neighborhood strategy that invests in grassroots
6 organizations and the social fabric can ensure that
7 families find the support they need and that crises
8 don't build. A new City office of family well-being
9 can centralize and support family supportive

10 programming, support community-led planning, create
11 new restorative approaches to family safety that
12 prevent and de-escalate family crises, build up
13 networks of peer support to improve access to
14 existing services and resources, and prioritize

15 investment in capacity building in grassroots
16 organizations that families trust. Moreover, we can
17 invest millions in City savings from reductions in
18 ACS spending from the drops that we heard about

19 today. I want to invite all of you on this Committee
20 to a legislative breakfast next month to learn more,

21 and we hope that this Committee and your champions

(TIMER CHIME) on the Council more broadly will
champion this plan for families. Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much.
3 Yeah. I spoke to someone yesterday about the
4 legislative breakfast. I believe it was (INAUDIBLE)
5 but yes, I look forward to hearing more about that in
6 the upcoming future.

7 I do not have any questions for this
8 panel, and thank you for submitting your questions
9 for today's hearing.

10 NORA MCCARTHY: Thank you. It was a
11 pleasure.

12 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you so much.

13 We're going to call the next panel.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: The next
15 panel will be Jesse McGleughlin, Fanta-Marie Johnson,
16 and Jasiyah Gilbert.

17 FANTA-MARIE JOHNSON: Thank you. Good
18 afternoon. My name is Fanta-Marie Johnson, and I'm
19 here to talk about the Family Miranda Rights. Thank
20 you to the Chair and the Council for conveying this
21 hearing on providing Family Miranda Rights and racial
disparities in New York City's family policing
system, sometimes referred to as the child welfare
system. My name is Fanta-Marie Johnson, and I am an
impacted parent. I am here today to speak about the

1 harm the family policing system has caused to me and
2 my children, and to call for the passage of the City
3 Family Miranda. When my second son was born in
4 December of 2019, we were drug tested at the hospital
5 without my consent. When we tested positive for
6 cocaine, the hospital reported me to ACS. I was
7 unable to bring my little baby, who looked like the
8 cutest old man who I named Papa, home from the
9 hospital. When ACS came to my home, that's when my
10 life changed forever. The caseworker did not tell me
11 my rights, nor told me that I had the right to a
12 lawyer. We need Family Miranda because parents like
13 me deserve to know our rights when an investigation
14 begins. Had I been informed of my rights and received
15 supportive services early, my son would still be in
16 my care. At every stage of my case, like so many
17 other Black and Latin parents, ACS responses should
18 have been better. I should have been asked, what can
19 we do to support you. Pregnant women go through so
20 much. I should not have to be feared or to fear to
21 tell my truth to my healthcare professionals and ACS
caseworkers for fear that my son should be taken out
of my care. This system punishes Black families. I
went to a Mother and Baby Me program and tested

1 negative for drugs and alcohol (TIMER CHIME) for the
2 13 months. While I was there, I received glowing
3 reports from my service providers, yet my son was not
4 placed in my care. Later, my third son was removed
5 from my care after an individual, likely my husband,
6 who had previously committed domestic violence
7 against me, made a false report and manipulated me in
8 the system. This time, I tested negative for all
9 drugs and alcohol, but my son was not placed in my
10 care. I've been sober for years. I finally have
11 overnight visits with my third son, but it should
12 have not taken this long. My sons should have never
13 been removed from my care. I'm fighting for my
14 children, but I am not supported. I'm being punished.
15 This system keeps Black babies and Brown babies in
16 the system to make money. What am I supposed to tell
17 my sons when they grow up? I'm scared.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: You can take your
17 time. I'm not going to cut you off, but everybody
18 else, you will be cut off, but you can take your
19 time.

19 FANTA-MARIE JOHNSON: Thank you. I'm
20 scared they're going to become statistics. I'm their
21 mother. I deserve to parent them. They deserve to be

2 parented by me. I call on the City Council to pass
3 the City Family Miranda and to end the practice of
4 surveilling and separating Black and Latina families.

5 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you for
6 sharing. We really appreciate it.

7 JESSE MCGLEUGHLIN: Thank you for
8 convening this hearing. My name is Jesse McGleughlin,
9 and I'm a Staff Attorney at the Bronx Defenders and a
10 steering committee member of the New York Informed
11 Consent Coalition. I work with Fanta-Marie on that
12 coalition. Our coalition includes people impacted by
13 the family regulation system, along with organizers,
14 activists, doulas, physicians, nurses, social
15 workers, public defenders, and civil rights and
16 reproductive justice organizations. We support
17 policies that improve prenatal care and birth
18 outcomes and that prevent family separation. One of
19 those policies is the Maternal Health Dignity and
20 Consent Act, which would ensure consistent statewide
21 application of clinical best practices by requiring
informed consent before drug testing or screening a
pregnant or postpartum patient or their newborn
unless an emergency situation requires otherwise. I'm
here to speak about the harms caused by the test and

1 report practices in New York City hospitals, which
2 lead to family separation. This practice
3 disproportionately impacts Black and Latina families
4 who are reported to ACS often when there's a positive
5 drug test. We urge the Council to invest in
6 non-punitive and affirming care for pregnant and
7 postpartum people with substance use disorders so
8 that hospitals are places of care, not sites of
9 surveillance. And we know that this works. Nora, who
10 was on the panel earlier from the New York City
11 Family Policy Project, has analyzed ACS data from
12 2020 to 2024, and that data shows that in 2020, when
13 New York City Health and Hospitals began requiring
14 providers to obtain informed consent before
15 administering a toxicology test on a pregnant
16 patient, an 80 percent drop in ACS investigations
17 alleging parental drug use for mothers of newborns
18 and a 90 percent drop for Black birthing people took
19 place, a 37 percent drop in newborns removed by ACS
for any reason, which meant that more newborns stayed
at home with their families (TIMER CHIME) and the
data did not show that any negative impact...

CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Ten seconds.

2 JESSE MCGLEUGHLIN: On child safety from
3 the reduced number of ACS investigations. So, these
4 results show that care, not punishment, is the path
5 that we should be taking to support families. Thank
6 you.

6 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

7 JASIYAH GILBERT: My name is Jasiyah
8 Gilbert. Good afternoon. I'm the Client and Community
9 Engagement Manager for the Legal Aid Society's
10 Juvenile Rights Practice, and I'm here both as a
11 professional working in the child welfare space and
12 as someone who was once the subject child of an ACS
13 investigation.

12 When people hear the phrase child
13 protective investigation, they often imagine help
14 arriving at a family's door. But for many families,
15 especially Black and Latino families, it feels far
16 more like an interrogation. As a child, I watched the
17 adults around me panic when ACS showed up, not
18 because there was abuse, but because no one explained
19 their rights. They didn't know what they could
20 refuse. They didn't know when they could ask for a
21 lawyer. They didn't know that saying yes to
everything out of fear could permanently change their

1 lives. By the time legal representation entered the
2 picture, the damage was already done. That was my
3 experience as a child, and it is an experience far
4 too many families in this city know all too well.
5 Children are removed. Families are fractured. Trauma
6 sets in. In the criminal legal system, we understand
7 a basic truth. Rights only matter if people know they
8 have them. That's why Miranda warnings exist. But in
9 the family policing system, where the consequences
10 include family separation and lifelong trauma,
11 parents are rarely informed of their rights at the
12 outset. Instead, they are asked to open their homes,
13 surrender private information, and make life-altering
14 decisions under fear and confusion. Intro. 449 is not
15 about stopping investigations. It's about preventing
16 unnecessary harm before the system starts grinding
17 families down. If parents are informed of their
18 rights early, before court involvement, before
19 removals, families have a real chance to protect
20 themselves and to ask for help. Because once a case
21 enters family court, once children are removed, once
trauma compounds, no service, no therapy, and no
court order can undo that harm. As someone who lived
through an ACS investigation as a child, I can say

2 this plainly. Miranda-style notice for parents is not
3 radical. It's humane. It's preventative. And it's
4 long overdue. We'll also be submitting written
5 testimony that further expands on these points. If
6 the goal of this system...

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

8 I don't have any questions for this
9 panel. Thank you for your support on this
10 legislation, and I look forward to continue working
11 with you guys to get this passed. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: The next
13 panel will be Nila Natarajan, Kearney Coghlan, Mark
14 Papish, Sean Eagan, and Jenna Lauter.

15 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Someone can start.

16 MARK PAPISH: Good afternoon. Thank you,
17 Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee, for the
18 opportunity to testify today. My name is Mark Papish,
19 and I am the Supervisor of Government and Community
20 Affairs at the Center for Family Representation. CFR
21 is a public defender's office representing families
investigated by ACS in Manhattan, Queens, Staten
Island, the Bronx, and we have been so vigorously
since 2003. As you have heard and will hear, the
question of a disparate racial impact on communities

1 and families of color by ACS in the family policing
2 is not up for debate. It is in fact, borne out not
3 just by the stats that we are now all used to
4 hearing, but indeed by ACS themselves, with multiple
5 former employees speaking out that they feel
6 complicit in the harm that ACS can cause Black and
7 Brown families. Again, ACS work is racist, and this
8 is not debatable. Under Commissioner Dannhauser, ACS
9 made efforts to reduce Article X filings, and yet I
10 can tell you from the experience of our clients and
11 staff that the reduced number of court filings
12 increased in cases placed at the CARES Tract did not
13 result in any kinder or less racist treatment when
14 facing an ACS investigation. ACS is at its core a
15 policing entity. This cannot be changed. Indeed, even
16 members of the NYPD are surprised by the sheer
17 audacity of ACS investigations, with less than 0.2
18 percent of ACS investigations proceeding with
19 warrants, singling a commitment to potentially
20 unconstitutional searches that is horrifying. Such
21 radically racist and inequitable treatment of our
clients and their families cannot be chipped away at.
In a time of great strife, it is important that the
City rise to the challenge by flipping the narrative

1 on its head and standing with families. Per Chief
2 Justice Rowan Wilson, New York State's top judge,
3 these problems are not made by family court and
4 cannot best be addressed by family court.

5 Accordingly, CFR stands with impacted parents, our
6 colleagues at other defender offices, and allies to
7 say the following. The Council should immediately
8 pass the Family Miranda Rights Act. The courts have
9 spoken loud and clear. They are not the fix for the
10 issues facing our clients. The best way to keep
11 families out of court is by educating them of their
12 rights. Furthermore, the Council must demand the
13 future of ACS not be one of continued incrementalism
14 but rather one of true institutional change that will
15 begin to address centuries of racism that is embedded
16 at the core of the family (TIMER CHIME) policing
17 system. And finally, I want to go on the record and
18 say, we know that ACS is not in compliance with Local
19 Law 29 of 2025, requiring them simply to give out our
20 contact information. So categorically, ACS cannot be
21 trusted to weigh in on which rights should be
required in a Family Miranda hearing, and we
appreciate any efforts to hold them accountable to
Local Law 29 and also respectfully request that they

2 not be included in conversations about Family Miranda
3 moving forward. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

5 KEARNEY COGHLAN: My name is Kearney
6 Coghlan, and I'm a Policy Fellow at Neighborhood
7 Defender Service of Harlem. I want to thank Chair
8 Stevens and this Committee for holding this hearing.
9 To address the harm of the family separation system,
10 we have to reckon with its racist impact and
11 implement real solutions, and this is why we must
12 pass Family Miranda. I want to tell you about an NDS
13 client who I will call Miss Knox. She's a pediatric
14 nurse practitioner and a devoted mother to Ella, her
15 16-month-old, who was born premature and had
16 respiratory and feeding issues. Miss Knox has been a
17 fierce advocate for Ella to get the care she needs,
18 strictly following the prescribed feeding plan and
19 coordinating all the PT and OT visits that her
20 daughter needs to thrive. Miss Knox was offered
21 homemaking services through ACS, which she declined
because she already has a visiting nurse and a home
health aide who describes her as a wonderful mother.
To understand what happened next, it is important
that you know that Miss Knox and her baby are Black.

2 ACS kept coming to her apartment, and Miss Knox kept
3 telling them she was not interested. She brought Ella
4 down to the lobby so the caseworker could confirm she
5 was safe, but wasn't comfortable with the worker
6 coming into her home or disrobing her baby or
7 accessing her private medical records. For a month,
8 ACS workers continued to harass her and spread rumors
9 to neighbors and building management just because
10 Miss Knox declined what ACS holds out to be a
11 voluntary program. Eventually, ACS called in a case
12 against her and got the court to order them access.
13 It was only at this point that Miss Knox was given a
14 piece of paper with a number for legal assistance.
15 Ella was ripped from her mother for a week, and
16 during that time, ACS didn't take Ella to her medical
17 appointments and didn't give her the prescribed
18 formula that Miss Knox provided. Ella lost weight and
19 had multiple respiratory issues when she was finally
20 returned to her mom. ACS dared to tell Miss Knox that
21 she was a poor mother and then proved that they
couldn't do half as good a job as her.

 This kind of treatment by ACS is all too
common for Black and brown parents who are
villainized (TIMER CHIME) for protecting their

1 families and knowing and asserting their rights. Ella
2 was safe and well cared for until ACS took her from
3 her mother. Family Miranda is needed to mitigate the
4 racist harm ACS enacts on families because respecting
5 rights is part of what keeps children safe. Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

8 SEAN EAGAN: My name is Sean Eagan, and
9 I'm the Policy Director for the Bronx Defenders
10 Family Defense Practice. I want to thank Chair
11 Stevens and the Members of the Committee for
12 providing the opportunity to testify today.

13 The most immediate step the Council can
14 take to protect families from the racism of the
15 family policing system is to pass the provisions in
16 both Intro. 449 and Intro. 466 to ensure families can
17 exercise their fundamental rights. The Commissioner
18 stated ACS opposes Intro. 449, which simply requires
19 ACS to verbally inform parents of their rights to not
20 consent to a search of their home or to force their
21 child to speak to ACS and that they have a right to
an attorney. He suggested that this is because
providing parents verbal warnings of their rights
would give the impression that ACS is conducting a

1 policing investigation where a final conclusion has
2 been reached. I ask the Council to understand Bronx
3 Defenders clients already experience ACS
4 investigations as policing investigations where a
5 conclusion to remove their children has been reached
6 or that it will be reached if they say just one wrong
7 word. It has been six years since ACS was compelled
8 to release an internal audit where ACS staff
9 described ACS as a predatory system that specifically
10 targets Black and Brown parents and applies a
11 different level of scrutiny to them, creating a
12 system where safety is a privilege of race and race
13 is used as an indicator of risk. It is a true bare
14 minimum for parents to be informed of their rights in
15 the face of such a system. Consider two examples of
16 Bronx Defenders clients' experiences from our 2025
17 report, *This Wound is Still Fresh*. On a Saturday in
18 2024, ACS separates a Black family, removing a
19 12-year-old from her mother and placing her in the
20 children's center based on an allegation the child
21 witnessed a fight between her mother and girlfriend.
ACS does not file a case for five days, refuses to
allow the mother to see her child the entire time. A
case is filed in court on Wednesday, Bronx Defenders

2 is assigned, and the family is quickly reunified
3 after a week of family separation.

4 In Thursday, 2023, a similar situation
5 happens where a Latino father is told at his door
6 that he must leave his home by ACS. He is informed
7 court is not going to be held on Monday, but it is in
8 fact held, and by the time (TIMER CHIME) he finally
9 gets to court, it takes a week for him to be reunited
10 with his family. The only thing that can be
11 immediately done to prevent this from happening is to
12 inform parents of their rights, so I ask the Council
13 to pass Intro. 449 and 466 immediately. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

15 JENNA LAUTER: I'm Jenna Lauter, a Policy
16 Counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union. The
17 NYCLU views family regulation as a core civil
18 liberties issue that directly implicates the
19 constitutional rights to equal protection, privacy,
20 and family integrity, and undermines the promise of
21 reproductive and racial justice. The family
regulation system almost exclusively targets Black
and Brown families. This is by design. It was created
as backlash to the civil rights movement, a tool to
punish Black poverty, and stems from our country's

1 legacy of devaluing Black motherhood. It also
2 reflects a culture within ACS as described by their
3 own staff that views Black families as inherently
4 less fit and more suspect. Racial disparities deepen
5 as a family regulation case progresses. This means
6 that families of color are not only more likely to be
7 reported, but also more likely to be treated as
8 incompetent or blameworthy and suffer the most severe
9 outcomes. ACS is fundamentally an investigatory and
10 prosecutorial agency that puts families under a
11 microscope and can have a profoundly destabilizing,
12 devastating effect on their lives. Investigations and
13 family separations inflict stress and trauma that do
14 more to harm than to help children's well-being. The
15 data bears this out. This punitive approach is
16 especially unwarranted given that over 75 percent of
17 ACS cases stem from circumstances related to poverty,
18 not intentional maltreatment. These are loving,
19 caring families that are being ripped apart. To
20 genuinely improve child welfare, the City should
21 immediately enact Intros 0449 and 0466 to ensure
parents know their constitutional rights when
government agents come to their door. Parents must be
told their rights verbally in real time so they can

2 make informed decisions in high-stakes moments. The
3 City should also invest in programs like universal
4 childcare, affordable housing, and cash assistance to
5 help families break intergenerational cycles of
6 poverty and trauma and truly thrive. ACS just
7 acknowledged that parents fear engaging in services
8 provided by an agency with the power to take their
9 children away. This includes the CARES program. The
10 City should disentangle resource provision from ACS
11 and ensure that all families can freely access
12 supportive (TIMER CHIME) programs with zero ACS
13 involvement. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

15 NILA NATARAJAN: Thank you. My name is
16 Nila Natarajan, and I'm the Director of Family
17 Defense and Policy at Brooklyn Defender Services. We
18 thank the Committee on Children and Youth and Chair
19 Stevens for this opportunity.

20 As so many have named today, the deeply
21 harmful impact of ACS investigations on families of
color is well-known and well-documented. Brooklyn
Defender Services Family Defense Practice is the
primary provider of representation to families
experiencing those ACS investigations in Brooklyn.

2 Our offices collectively have represented thousands
3 of families investigated by ACS and have assisted 85
4 to 90 percent of those families stay together and out
5 of court. When families know their rights and are
6 able to effectuate them, they stay safe and intact.
7 We commend Chair Stevens and Council Member Ung for
8 sponsoring Introduction 449 and Intro. 466 and deeply
9 appreciate the Chair for bringing these vital bills
10 before this Committee.

11 For nearly a decade, families who have
12 experienced these investigations have asked for the
13 provision of family rights at the first point of
14 contact with ACS. This legislation was conceptualized
15 and is now championed by the very families we are
16 naming have been harmed by ACS's practices. Should
17 this Committee want to move our city beyond naming
18 these harms and bring us to a place of action to
19 empower and support families, it must continue to
20 move this legislation forward.

21 Intro. 449 ensures that agents of ACS
retain all existing legal authority to conduct
investigations while verbally providing parents with
the information and transparency they need to protect
their families from any unlawful abuse of that

2 authority. This is straightforward legislation, and
3 it doesn't create any new rights. Ensuring that
4 parents have knowledge of their existing rights
5 during an ACS investigation will allow parents to
6 make informed decisions for their family and minimize
7 the harm of confusion of ACS investigation. Like in
8 all other parts of life, better informed parents can
9 make better decisions for their children. Given the
10 current escalation in government surveillance and the
11 increased fear of family separation amongst our
12 city's most marginalized communities, it is vital
13 that we immediately take action to protect family
14 integrity.

15 The last thing I'll note (TIMER CHIME) is
16 we ask that Introduction 466 be amended to include
17 the full provision of rights that's listed in 449 so
18 that two bills parallel each other. Thank you very
19 much.

20 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you.

21 Thank you for your support of the bill.
We're working through it in my hopes to get it
passed, so thank you and continue to work with you
guys on your advocacy so we can get it passed. Thank
you.

2 We'll call the next panel.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: The next
4 panel will be Patricia Loftman and Tanesha Grant.

5 PATRICIA LOFTMAN: Yeah. I'm going to
6 respectfully request some indulgence as a senior and
7 a senior midwife. I'm going to be a little.. just
8 please.

9 Good afternoon. My name is Patricia
10 Loftman. I am a certified nurse midwife, the former
11 Director of Midwifery Service at Harlem Hospital
12 where I cared for Black and Brown women, infants and
13 families for 30 years, specifically caring for women
14 with substance use disorder in the early days of the
15 crack epidemic. I am also a founding member of the
16 New York City Mortality Review Committee in 2018 and
17 was a member of the newly created New York City
18 Council Maternal Health Steering Committee under the
19 leadership of City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams.
20 Consequently, I have extensive experience on the
21 issue of which I testify today.

I speak in support of Intro. 0424. While
considerable information exists regarding ACS's
historic negative impact on family separation and
disintegration, not widely known is the role ACS

1 family policing system contributes to maternal
2 mortality and morbidity. The largest driver of
3 maternal health in New York City is maternal illness,
4 overdose, and suicide. Throughout chart reviews, ACS
5 consistently appears to be a negative factor in the
6 women's lives and subsequent death. Social and
7 emotional stressors were key contributors to these
8 deaths, including lack of housing, domestic violence,
9 and involvement with child protective services. Based
10 on the latest New York City DOHMH data, one-third of
11 all women and birthing people who died from maternal
12 death were CPS involved. The full breadth of ACS
13 involvement and examination of intergenerational
14 sequelae, including maternal death, is imperative to
15 understanding the issue in a holistic way that
16 results in data-driven, empathetic, and resource-rich
17 change. Although the MMRC has repeatedly (TIMER
18 CHIME) requested that ACS share its data with the
19 MMRC, to provide the MMRC with information that would
20 holistically enrich our analysis and recommendation,
21 ACS has refused to share this data with the MMRC.
Consequently, the members were alarmed to learn about
the implementation of a yet-to-be-unveiled ACS/DOHMH
partnership under the banner of Early Childhood

2 Partnership. A copy of the presentation is included.
3 ACS will fund this over three years to financially
4 support an expanded Nurse-Family Partnership Program.
5 The issue is that as New York City Department of
6 Health wants to encourage individuals to use the
7 health system to improve their health, it cannot
8 engage with a family policing system which has the
9 potential to destroy clinician-women's relationships
10 and prevent them from coming into care. I am hoping
11 that you will absolutely read all of the information
12 I am providing because this now, in addition to
13 family disintegration, we're now talking about
14 maternal morbidity and mortality and the
15 relationship.

16 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you. Thank you
17 for this information.

18 TANESHA GRANT: To the Honorable Chair
19 Stevens and Members of the City Council Youth and
20 Children's Committee, my name is Tanesha Grant, and I
21 am an individual directly impacted by the child
welfare system starting from my own birth. My
organization made up of lived experience experts and
impacted people and I stand in full support of Bill
449 and Bill 424. We also support a family engagement

1 center that will really center the community inside
2 of CORE. The Family Miranda's rights as its
3 principles should have long been codified within our
4 City laws. Born 50 years ago, I was immediately
5 separated from my biological family. I often pondered
6 the consequences had my biological mother been aware
7 of her rights. Perhaps circumstances would have
8 differed and I would have been spared the enduring
9 harm resulting from separation from my family roots.
10 The Family Miranda Rights legislation is essential
11 for protecting families today and acknowledging the
12 insidious nature of tearing Black families apart.
13 Chair Stevens, I cannot overstate the profound and
14 lasting psychological and emotional damage inflicted
15 on both children and parents when families are
16 separated. This separation also frequently results in
17 further institutional involvement across various
18 agencies. Every agency has touched my life because I
19 went from foster care to a failed adoption to back
20 into foster care to the juvenile justice system.
21 Again, I'm 50 years old. We are often treated as mere
chattel within these systems and families are
frequently blamed for expressing natural distress and
confusion that accompanies an investigation by the

2 Administration for Children's Services. It is a
3 fundamental human instinct for parents to defend
4 (TIMER CHIME) themselves, often unaware that anything
5 that they say will be used against them. As a former
6 child of the system, this reality significantly
7 influenced my own experience as a parent. My oldest
8 child is 31 and, throughout her upbringing, I endured
9 multiple investigations. ACS investigators would
10 request actions such as drug tests, framing them as a
11 means to prove innocence against other unfounded
12 reports. I lived in a constant state of defensiveness
13 while raising my children, a vigilance that persists
14 today concerning my grandchildren. Black families
15 live in constant fear of ACS, perpetually focused on
16 surviving the system. It is time for Black families
17 to move beyond mere survival to thriving. This bill
18 represents a crucial step towards restoring power to
19 these families.

20 In closing, finally, I wish to address
21 the issue of co-option and inclusion regarding
advocacy efforts. We dedicate considerable effort to
providing support and developing innovative care
models only to see our ideas consistently
appropriated. Furthermore, we are often excluded from

1 the resulting policy discussions, which demonstrates
2 a profound disrespect for the work and lived
3 experience of many impacted advocates striving to
4 reform the system. Family enrichment centers serve as
5 one example. I understand the Committee supports
6 these centers, but I have encountered a family
7 enrichment center in Washington Heights that exhibits
8 practices I would characterize as anti-Black. My
9 assessment is based on being invited to events
10 unrelated to Black culture. Specifically, they hosted
11 a Dominican heritage event, but failed to organize a
12 Black History Month event during our 100th year
13 anniversary of recognition. Given the
14 disproportionate impact of child welfare on Black
15 families, it is concerning that the agency lacks the
16 accountability to ensure Black families feel
17 genuinely welcomed. As an organization frequently
18 denied funding, it is deeply disheartening to observe
19 ACS and foster care agencies such as Children's Aid,
20 who handled my adoption. The organizations that
21 handled my own foster care years ago continue to
receive funding despite their role in perpetuating
harm. I urge you to consider this reality while
allocating funds to agencies and systems. And I'll

2 say this last thing. You know me out there. You know
3 that I work on the intersection of ACS and schools
4 and how that harm perpetuates in schools. We don't
5 get any type of support for it. And all those people
6 that set up here from ACS, I have never known or met
7 with any of them. So, when we talk about working with
8 the grassroots, ain't no more grassroots than Tanesha
9 Grant and Parents Supporting Parents, New York. And
10 this has affected my life for three generations.
11 Please consider that. Thank you for listening to my
12 testimony.

13 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you for
14 sharing, Teresa (sic).

15 Thank you. I have no questions for the
16 panel.

17 This concludes the in-person portion of
18 our public testimony.

19 We now move to remote testimony. If you
20 wish to testify remotely, please listen for your name
21 to be called.

Once your name is called, a Member of the
Staff will unmute you. You may then start your
testimony once the Sergeant-at-Arms sets the clock
and cues you to begin.

2 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Sitan Sako, you may
3 begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

5 SITAN SAKO: Good afternoon, Chair and
6 members of the Committee of Children and Youth. My
7 name is Sitan Sako, and I am the Founder and
8 Executive Director of TBS Charity Incorporated, a
9 Queens-based non-profit organization serving youth
10 and families with limited or no support systems.

11 I am here today to speak about the need
12 for community-based afterschool and emergency
13 childcare services for children and youth ages 0 to
14 17 in Queens. Families across our communities
15 prioritize their children's safety and well-being,
16 yet many experience temporary gaps in care due to
17 limited availability in flexible program hours or
18 unexpected life circumstances. TBS Charity provides
19 safe, structured afterschool services and emergency
20 childcare support designed to ensure children and
21 youth remain in supervised, nurturing, and trusted
environments during critical hours and transitional
periods. Our programs support families who lack
extended family or informal support networks and rely
on trusted community-based care options. Our approach

2 is family-centered, flexible, and trauma-informed,
3 promoting stability for children and caregivers while
4 supporting positive youth development. These services
5 contribute to youth well-being, family stability, and
6 community safety. I respectfully urge the Council to
7 continue prioritizing investments in afterschool and
8 emergency childcare services for children and youth
9 ages 0 to 17.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
9 expired.

10 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Sharmeela Mediratta,
11 you may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

13 SHARMEELA MEDIRATTA: Thank you. Good
14 afternoon, Chair Stevens and Members of the
15 Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
16 today. My name is Sharmeela Mediratta. I serve as
17 Chief Wellness and Environmental Design Officer at
18 Graham Windham, a non-profit organization partnering
19 with New York City children and families since 1806.
20 We support more than 8,000 young people and their
21 families across Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx
through mental and behavioral healthcare, academic

1 and workforce success, co-created community-based
2 supports, and foster care and preventive services.

3 We are here today because racial
4 disparities in New York City's child welfare system
5 are real, persistent, and harmful. At Graham, we see
6 daily how poverty, structural inequities, and trauma
7 intersect with child welfare involvement,
8 disproportionately impacting Black and Latino
9 families. Addressing these disparities requires
10 substantive investment in supports that reduce harm
and strengthen families and communities.

11 Intro. 424 is a meaningful step in that
12 direction, providing no-cost, trauma-informed mental
13 health services when children return home is
14 essential to stability and healing. Children who
15 return home following removal carry significant
16 trauma. Parents carry their own trauma from the
17 investigation and removal as well. Healing must
18 intentionally center both the child and the full
19 family. When high-quality, culturally responsive care
20 is consistently available to all, young people and
their families are more likely to thrive. We strongly
support Intro. 449 and have supported the State
version of the Family Miranda Rights Act of 2023.

2 Together, these two proposals will help families and
3 caregivers access understandable and actionable
4 information in their own language about their rights
5 and obligations in these pivotal moments and equip
6 families and caregivers to recognize and resist
7 unlawful or unwarranted intrusion into their lives.
8 As investigations disproportionately affect Black and
9 Latin communities, codifying these protections is an
10 important racial equity measure. These bills
11 represent practical steps toward a child and family
12 well-being system..

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
14 expired.

15 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Georgina Gooden, you
16 may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

18 GEORGINA GOODEN: My name is Georgina
19 Gooden. I am a mother, a Brownsville community
20 member, a graduate student, and the Early
21 Intervention Advocate with United for Brownsville. I
am sharing my testimony as both a parent and an
advocate who works closely with families navigating
systems that too often destabilize rather than
support them. In Brownsville, the child welfare

1 involvement is not an exception. It is a reality that
2 changes the daily lives of families. In 2023, one in
3 seven families in Brownsville had an ACS case. That
4 is compared to one in 20 citywide. This level of
5 surveillance creates lasting fear and trauma in our
6 community. Families live with constant anxiety that
7 asking for help could lead to investigation,
8 judgment, or separation. Parents also deserve to know
9 their rights. Currently, families are not
10 consistently informed of their constitutional rights
11 when ACS initiates contact. Many parents do not know
12 they have the right to speak with an attorney or even
13 decline entry without a court order. Ensuring
14 families are informed to protect their dignity,
15 strengthen trust, and promote community fairness.
16 Ending racial disparities in child welfare requires a
17 shift from surveillance to stabilization. It requires
18 investigating a preventative support that is not
19 connected with ACS, stabilizing trusted community
20 organization, and creating pathways for families to
21 access help safely and without fear. The proposed
Office of the Family Wellbeing should be a
community-led pursuing and resource grassroots that
families trust. In a community gathering last

2 November, Brownsville residents were asked what ideas
3 they have to make a change in Brownsville. Some
4 simple commonsense solutions were community guidance
5 after school, yoga in the park, grants to the corner
6 store, laundromats that can support families to do
7 their laundry. (TIMER CHIME) This proposed...

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
9 expired.

10 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Ruth Horry, you may
11 begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

13 RUTH HORRY: Hi, everyone. Thank you for
14 the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ruth
15 Horry. I am a mother, former Brownsville resident,
16 affected youth, and I have been working in
17 Brownsville for the past eight years alongside
18 families navigating City systems. I'm here to speak
19 about how ACS over-policing impacts families,
20 particularly Black and Brown families in
21 neighborhoods like Brownsville. My experience with
22 ACS was not about protection. It was about
23 surveillance. In 2012, I took in a child who had been
24 removed from their home. After the biological parents
25 learned my address, they began calling ACS

1 repeatedly, sometimes three times a week. The pattern
2 continued for five years. ACS kept coming. Even when
3 allegations were unfounded, the investigations did
4 not stop. My home was repeatedly entered into the
5 system. My children were questioned, and our lives
6 were disrupted over and over again. The agency that
7 once protected me as a child became a source of harm
8 for my own children. What should have been protection
9 turned into chronic surveillance. When ACS shows up
10 at your door, sometimes accompanied by police, it
11 does not feel like help. It feels like enforcement.
12 Families are rarely told they have rights. They are
13 not told they can request a court order or consult an
14 attorney. The interaction is framed as mandatory
15 compliance. In neighborhoods like Brownsville, this
16 is not rare. This is patterned. Nearly 45 percent of
17 Black and Latinx children in New York will experience
18 an ACS investigation by 18 years old. If we're
19 serious about protecting children, then we need to
20 stop responding to poverty with surveillance. I
21 support the recommendation to create a new office of
family well-being that centers community-led
planning, strengthens trusted neighborhood supports,
and reduces the risk of unnecessary child welfare

2 involvement before families ever reach a crisis
3 point. Thank you.

4 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Jennifer Nicole
5 Alameda, you may begin when the Sergeant starts your
6 clock.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Hello, everyone. My
9 name is Jennifer. I'm here today to (INAUDIBLE)
10 leadership for the parents. I myself am a parent. I
11 humbly have three children that have been in the
12 foster care system about five years now, humbly due
13 to a medical accident of a concussion and memory
14 loss, 12 months. So generally, the State took the
15 children into care as the second parent. So that is
16 not the issue. Thank you, guys, for everything you've
17 done. As of today, February 2026, unfortunately, the
18 children have been officially adopted, and we want to
19 hopefully get the situation clarified. I submitted
20 federal documents to the federal court, the judge for
21 the family system, to have my children returned
hopefully soon. I am your first federally trained
female U.S. president. I've been here nine years,
assisting in the Senate Congress as an immigration
defense. I here represent New York, the poor

2 community. I am managed by the Food Stamps Welfare
3 System. And I assist with the White House as we speak
4 every day on the news. So, hopefully we can assist
5 the foster care system in updating the laws in
6 Congress that are more humane and helpful to keeping
our children and families together. Thank you.

7 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: Christopher Leon
8 Johnson, you may begin when the Sergeant starts your
clock.

9 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello,
10 Chair Stevens and the Committee. My name is
11 Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm here to support each
12 and every last one of these bills. But I want to give
13 my commendation to a State Senator who has my State
14 Assembly District now, Jabari Brisport, but I'm not
15 his constituent. I wish he was the State Senator.
16 Jabari Brisport for having a bill that was passed by
17 the Governor to remove anonymous reporting when it
18 comes to filing complaints with ACS, which will that
19 will help out a lot of Black families because
20 anonymous complaints will always, if you had
21 anonymous complaints, it hurt Black families. I hate,
I hate anonymous (INAUDIBLE) But I think that you,
Chair Ms. Stevens, need to start working with the

1 State and start pressuring the State. I know that the
2 budget is over in the State. But next year, next
3 year's budget, you should try to get this into the
4 State budget when it comes to bills like this,
5 because in the City Council, I don't think it's going
6 to go through because they have.. the thing is that
7 when it comes to like giving out the rights, I
8 support the rights. We have the thing that the City
9 Council need to start calling out is that the police,
10 when they are with these ACS agents and these ACS
11 workers, they help them impede on people's rights.
12 And I know that this Police Department is ran by
13 Jessica Tisch, so they scared to piss off Jessica
14 Tisch and our Mayor is scared of pissing her off. So,
15 this is going to be a big time hurdle when it comes
16 to stuff like this, because the main start when it
17 comes to rights being impeded are with the NYPD. I
18 know that this example does not relate to children
19 and youth, but there's a lot of children and youth
20 when they go off their days, they don't pay their car
21 fare on the buses. But when Eagle Team start trying
to checking for tickets for kids of youth, probably
under 24 years old, the police be right there with
them. And it's a thing that's called false

2 imprisonment. And the cops, if they're there, they be
3 impeding those kids' movements when they don't pay
4 their fare, and that creates a problem. And that's a
5 thing. The City Council need, I think one.. next time.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
7 expired.

8 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I know. Can we
9 get 30 more seconds, please?

10 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: 30 seconds.

11 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: 30 more
12 seconds. So, when they have a City Council going
13 forward, need to have a hearing with the NYPD, ask
14 them like, well, why do you guys work with the Eagle
15 Team to impede children's movements? It's really the
16 same thing when it comes to ACS. Why do you help the
17 ACS violate the parents' rights when it comes to
18 accessing their homes and not allowing them their
19 rights? So, thank you so much and enjoy your day.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: Thank you, Chris. I
really appreciate it. And just so you know, I'm
working very closely with Jabari on a lot of these
issues so thank you for bringing that up. We'll
continue to monitor that.

2 POLICY ANALYST ARZT: I'm going to call
3 the remainder of Zoom registrants, Amy Donahue,
4 Lettice Lane, Norma Ginez, Akelia Maitland, and Henry
5 Robinson.

6 Not seeing them on Zoom, I'll turn it
7 back to the Chair to close out.

8 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: If there's anyone
9 present in the room who hasn't had the opportunity to
10 testify but wish to do so, please raise your hand.

11 Great. Seeing there's no one else who wishes
12 to testify, I would like to take this time to adjourn
13 this hearing. Thank you all for attending, and I look
14 forward to continue to monitor the situation to
15 ensure that there's true equity within the child
16 welfare system. [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 March 18, 2026