



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS TO THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
AUGUST 13, 2019**

FOR THE RECORD

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairman Levin and the Committee Members of General Welfare for holding an oversight hearing on the client experience at HRA centers earlier this year. I would also like to thank them for working on a package of bills aimed at improving the experiences of our most vulnerable constituents seeking public assistance.

Intro 1389-A-2019 would specifically address this matter, as it seeks to report termination of denial of public assistance. Specifically, the Department of Social Security (DSS)/Human Resources Administration (HRA) would be required to post on its website a quarterly report of the instances where a recipient's public assistance is terminated or denied, disaggregated by:

- The type of ongoing cash or supplemental nutrition assistance cases;
- The reasons behind such terminations or denials;
- The council district that the case head lives in;
- The reported race, ethnicity, gender, and age category of the case head;
- Whether the case head has limited English proficiency; and
- Whether the case head has received a reasonable accommodation for a disability from the department.

Wrongful termination or denial of public assistance can have harmful effects on families and lead to extremely disdainful treatment at public benefits offices. As I am sure you know, Jazmine Headley is a young mother who had gone to the HRA office in Boerum Hill with her one-year-old last December to find out why her child care benefits had been cut off. While sitting on the floor, waiting to be seen by a caseworker, a security guard told her to move. When she refused – which was justified since all of the seats were taken – police officers were called, her baby was ripped from her arms, and she was arrested and spent four nights at Rikers Island.

Addressing wrongful termination or denial of public services, or even knowing the reasons behind why the services were terminated or denied, is essential to ensuring that many New Yorkers are able to feed their families, receive healthcare, and make ends meet. I urge this Committee to hold the DSS and the HRA accountable by mandating that these agencies issue a quarterly report on instances where applicants are terminated from or denied of their public assistance.

For those reasons, I urge the members of this Committee to vote “Aye” on Intro 1389. Again, thank you to Chairman Levin and Committee Members for taking up this issue.