



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP

Health Commissioner

Testimony

of

Dr. Jorge Petit

**Executive Deputy Commissioner and Director of Community Services for the
Division of Mental Hygiene**

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

before the

New York City Council

Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use

Committee on Children and Youth

Committee on Oversight and Investigations

On

**Oversight: The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health
Introduction 451-2026**

April 21, 2026

Council Chambers – City Hall

New York, NY

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, Chair Caban, Chair Krishnan and members of the Committees. I am Dr. Jorge Petit, Executive Deputy Commissioner and Director of Community Services for the Division of Mental Hygiene at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (the Health Department). I am joined today by Marnie Davidoff, Assistant Commissioner for Children, Youth, Families, and Intellectual Developmental Disabilities and colleagues from the Department of Youth and Community Development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

This is my second week on the job, having started at the Health Department just last week. I come to this hearing with more than 30 years of experience in public behavioral health as a community psychiatrist and physician leader – with a deep personal connection to the communities we serve. I previously served at this very agency as Associate Commissioner for the Division of Mental Hygiene from 2004 to 2007, and I am honored to return in this new capacity under Commissioner Dr. Alister Martin. I am also a father. Watching my own sons navigate a world shaped by social media has given me a ground-level view of what our data reflects: that the pressures young people face today are real, relentless, and deserve our full attention as public health leaders and as a city.

Adolescence is a pivotal period for developing the social and emotional habits that shape mental health and wellbeing. When children and youth have good mental health, they are empowered to realize their abilities, have fulfilling relationships, learn and work productively, and engage with their communities.

Before I speak to what we currently know about the relationship between social media and mental health, I will first describe the Health Department's work to promote and protect youth mental health broadly.

We strive for a city where all children, youth, families and communities have equitable access to the conditions, opportunities, resources and care they need for good mental health. Beyond treating a young person's mental health needs, we must also holistically support them to help them achieve their goals and live fulfilling lives.

We advance this vision by providing public health surveillance and insights, supporting a continuum of services, and providing technical assistance and guidance to our providers and communities. This includes behavioral health supports across the life span. From our perinatal mental health clinics to our programs supporting young adults with serious mental illness to live full, meaningful lives. As the local government unit for youth mental health services in the City, we play a pivotal role in understanding, shaping, and overseeing this landscape.

Public health research and surveillance allow us to glean insight into the state of youth mental health in our city. Unfortunately, many youth in NYC are reporting symptoms associated with poor mental health.

In an [Epi Data Brief](#) we published this month - 35% of public high school students said they had felt sad or hopeless for more than two weeks in the last 12 months. While we are encouraged that this is slightly lower than 38% reported in 2021, we see troubling inequities among youth by race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. High school students who identified as female were more likely to have felt sad or hopeless than males (45% vs. 26%). Latino youth were more likely than white youth to have felt sad or hopeless (41% vs. 33%). LGBTQ youth were more likely to report feeling sad or hopeless compared with non-LGBTQ youth (49% vs. 31%).

Another [Epi Data Brief](#) published in September reported that suicide-related behaviors have increased among New York City public high school students between 2013 and 2023. We are very concerned with this trend, along with the stark inequities by race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity we again observed. In 2023, public high school students who identified as Black, Latino, or multi-race, were more likely than white students to report suicidal ideation. 35% of public high school students who identified as gay or lesbian reported suicidal ideation in 2023, compared to 12% of heterosexual students.

This is painful information to hear. These are our families, children, and lives. While this is difficult to share - it is critical to do so with the public, advocates, our government partners, and Council so we can work on solutions together.

That brings me to the wide range of mental health services and supports that the Health Department provides for our City's children and youth. We work closely with the State Office of Mental Health, community-based organizations, and providers to administer a robust array of youth-focused mental health services across our city.

The Health Department's programs cover crisis intervention, suicide prevention, school-based mental health clinics, care coordination, family support, and more. We contract Children's Mobile Crisis Teams, home-based crisis intervention programs, and family-based crisis assessment and stabilization services. Our Caring Transitions program provides support to youth who have been hospitalized or seen at an emergency department for suicidal behavior within 24 hours, and for up to 3 months following discharge. Repeat suicide attempts are greatest within 30 days following discharge, so this provides follow up care during this critical time frame. And of course, 988 is a resource for every New Yorker – including our youth and children.

The Health Department also provides an array of non-clinical resources to assist youth and families in building community, emotional support, skills, and connections to resources. Our Family and Youth Peer Support Program empowers and supports parents and caregivers, as well as children and youth experiencing social, emotional, developmental, substance use or behavioral challenges. This network consists of partner organizations in each borough that provide an array of services, such as emotional support, assistance in navigating child-serving systems, information on mental health conditions and family rights, referrals to appropriate services and resources, skills

development, and recreational activities. All services are free and available for direct access. We also have Adolescent Skills Centers, which provide a range of strengths-based integrated services to address educational, vocations, and social-emotional needs of youth with Serious Mental Illness. Additionally, our technical assistance programs, such as Strong Families and Building Resilience in Youth, help community-based organizations build mental health awareness, counseling skills, and referral pathways.

Paramount to the success of these programs is the ability to center youth voices. This year marks the second year of our Youth Committee on Mental Health, where 23 young people between the ages of 15 and 24, representing all 5 boroughs, come together monthly to inform the programming, policies, and strategies of our youth mental health work. The subcommittees of this group include Suicide Prevention, Crisis Prevention and Services for Youth, and Social Media's Impact on Mental Health.

I'll now speak to what we currently know about the relationship between social media and youth mental health, and the guidance we provide to help families and communities navigate it.

Social media is increasingly shaping the lives of young people. There are some clear and observable ways in which the mental health of children and teenagers is impacted by social media. Some of these impacts show up in the data, while others show up in our everyday lives as parents, caregivers, and educators.

It's important to recognize that social media may have some positive impacts and ensure that we preserve those effects. Among teens, 12% say social media has a positive impact on their mental health and 4% say it has a negative impact on their mental health. The majority of teens (58%) believe social media has both a positive and negative impact on their mental health.

At the same time, between 2013 and 2023, there was an increase from 27% to 35% of public high school students who reported feeling sad or hopeless. Teens who used social media several times a day, or more than once an hour, were significantly more likely to feel sad or hopeless compared with teens who did not use social media.

In 2023, we released a special report on social media and youth mental health to publish the findings from a one-time deep dive into this topic. Following this analysis, we issued guidance for [parents, caregivers](#), and [leaders of youth serving organizations](#) to reduce the harm social media can pose on young people. It includes information to empower social media skill development, reducing exposure to harmful content, and advocating to make social media less harmful.

As a city, we cannot limit our response to education and guidance alone. The Health Department has called on social media platforms to implement stronger default protections for minors, including limits on algorithmic amplification of harmful content, robust age-appropriate design standards, and meaningful transparency in how content is curated for young users. We have also urged our federal and state partners to advance legislative frameworks that hold

platforms accountable and invest in the research infrastructure needed to understand – and address – the long-term mental health impacts of social media on our children. We are pleased New York State took steps on the Safe for Kids Act. We are also supportive of efforts at the federal level, including the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), which aims to strengthen protections and accountability for minors online.

With that, I'll turn to Introduction 451, which relates to reporting on the effects that social media has on youth mental health.

The Health Department appreciates Council's interest in this important topic affecting young people, not only in this city but across the world. We think it is important to understand the effects of social media on youth, which we have begun doing through the biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS provides us with data we've used to inform our programming and creates a snapshot of the landscape around youth mental health more broadly. We would like to discuss this work with Council, and how we can meet the goal of providing more information to the public that is actionable and rooted in behavioral health science.

My colleagues from the Department of Youth and Community Development will speak to other pieces of legislation before the committees today.

The Health Department is deeply committed to promoting youth mental health and assisting families in navigating mental health challenges, including those associated with social media. I also want to thank our partner providers who carry out this important and challenging work every single day. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

**Testimony of Commissioner Samuel A.A. Levine
New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection**

**Before Joint Committees on Children and Youth, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and
Oversight & Investigations
Hearing on Introduction 450**

April 21, 2026

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairs Williams, Caban, Krishnan and members of the Committees. My name is Samuel Levine, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Introduction 450.

Protecting New York's Workers

The NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) is the nation's leading municipal enforcement agency charged with delivering economic justice. DCWP leverages its authority to bring New Yorkers real economic relief and protect them from predatory, deceptive, and unfair practices that violate their rights as consumers and workers. This includes pioneering cutting-edge protections, such as the City's Consumer Protection Law, Protected Time Off Law, Fair Workweek Law, and Delivery Worker Laws, including the Minimum Pay Rate for delivery workers. Through licensing more than 45,000 businesses in over 45 industries, DCWP ensures fair competition and a level playing field for responsible small businesses that are integral to New York City's vibrant communities. DCWP also provides essential services such as free tax preparation and financial counseling to ensure New Yorkers keep more of what they earn and can plan for their futures. DCWP is committed to making sure New York City is a fairer, more affordable place to live.

Introduction 450

Turning to today's legislation, Introduction 450 would prohibit social media companies from allowing youth to use social media for more than one hour per day, unless waived by a parent or guardian. Additionally, social media companies would be prohibited from promoting targeted advertisements or content to youth.

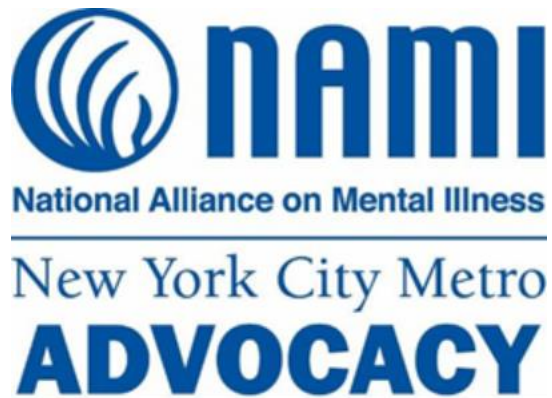
This legislation would address an urgent mental health crisis among young people – one fueled by tech giants raking in billions of dollars while showing little interest in protecting their users. Given DCWP's lack of expertise with adolescent mental health, and affordability-focused mission, we are not taking a position on this legislation. However, we commend the Council for its attention to this important issue.¹

I would note that Law Department is also currently reviewing this legislation.

Conclusion

¹ Note that the Law Department is also reviewing this legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the committee on today's bill. DCWP welcomes continued collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders and the Council.



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT HEARING

before the

Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use

Jointly with

the Committee on Youth and Children and the Committee on Oversight &

Investigations

on

Tuesday, April 21st at 1:00PM

Testimony By: Jonathan Chung, MPA

Director of Public Policy & Advocacy

National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC)

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairs Caban, Stevens and Krishnan, and members of the Committees. My name is Jonathan Chung, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this critically important issue.

OUR WORK

For more than 40 years, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, NAMI-NYC, has been a leading voice for the mental health community across New York City. Each year, we reach tens of thousands of New Yorkers through free education, support, and advocacy programs. We serve as a trusted front door to care, particularly for families and individuals navigating mental health challenges for the first time.

Our programs are evidence-based and peer-led, grounded in lived experience and designed to reflect the diversity of communities across the city. This ensures that those directly impacted by mental illness are not only served, but remain at the heart of everything we do.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

We appreciate the joint Committees' focus on the growing youth mental health crisis. Social media is now deeply embedded in how young people communicate, learn, and form identity, and its impact is both real and complex.

There is increasing evidence that excessive or unmoderated social media use can contribute to negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and exposure to harmful or misleading content. National data continue to show rising rates of persistent sadness and hopelessness among adolescents, and while social media is not the sole driver, it is an important factor in how young people experience and process the world around them.

At the same time, social media is not inherently harmful—it is a tool. For many young people, particularly those who feel isolated or marginalized, online spaces can provide connection, validation, and access to support. We consistently hear from youth who have found community online when they could not find it elsewhere. For LGBTQ+ youth, young people of color, and those living with mental health conditions, these platforms can serve as lifelines.

Because of this, the impact of social media on youth mental health cannot be viewed in a singular way, but how we equip young people to engage with it safely and in ways that support their well-being, and policy responses should reflect this complexity.

INVESTING IN PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

At NAMI-NYC, we have invested in peer-based, youth-centered solutions that meet people where they are. Our Youth Peer Support Program, made possible through funding from the New York City Council, is one such model. This program meets young people where they are, including in the digital spaces they already inhabit, while also creating pathways to in-person connection and sustained support.

Our Youth Peer Support Program combines several core elements:

First, peer support groups provide safe, non-judgmental spaces where young people can share openly about their experiences with others who understand them. These spaces directly counteract the isolation that social media can sometimes exacerbate.

Second, trained youth peer leaders serve as credible messengers. Young people are more likely to open up to someone who shares lived experience and speaks their language. Peer leadership builds trust in ways that traditional systems sometimes struggle to achieve.

Third, mental health education and skill-building equip youth with the tools to navigate both online and offline challenges—whether that means recognizing harmful content, setting boundaries around screen time, or managing stress and anxiety.

Fourth, family engagement and support ensure that young people are not navigating these challenges alone. When families are informed and supported, outcomes improve significantly.

Together, these components form a comprehensive, prevention-focused approach. We are seeing strong engagement from youth, particularly those who may not otherwise access traditional mental health services. These programs do not seek to eliminate social media from young people's lives; they help young people build the skills to engage with it in healthier, more informed ways.

CONSIDERATIONS

As the Council continues to examine this issue, we encourage a focus on solutions that are practical, scalable, and grounded in what we know works. This includes:

- Sustained investment in peer-led, youth-centered programs
- Expanding funding for school-based mental health services
- Support for family education and engagement models
- Collaboration with technology platforms to promote safer digital environments.

No single intervention will solve the youth mental health crisis. But by aligning policy, prevention, peer support, and access to care, we can build a system that truly meets young people where they are both online and in their communities.

These reflections are not meant to diminish the importance of any legislative proposals, but rather to ensure that any approach that is taken is practical, effective, and centered on the real experiences of youth and families.

CONCLUSION

Social media is a powerful force in young people's lives. Our responsibility is not simply to regulate it, but to respond to it thoughtfully, with solutions that reflect the realities young people are living every day.

NAMI-NYC remains committed to working with the Council and others to advance balanced, evidence-based approaches that strengthen youth mental health and support families across New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the impacts of social media and screen time on youth mental health. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Council.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Chung, MPA (he/him/his)
Director of Public Policy & Advocacy
National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC)

307 West 38th Street, 8th floor

New York, NY 10018

Office: 212-684-3365

Direct Dial: 212-417-0953

Helpline: 212-684-3264

www.naminyc.org

Comments on Oversight Hearing - The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth and Mental Health

Tech:NYC Comments

Chair Stevens and Members of the Children and Youth Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony as the Committee on Children and Youth explores the effects of social media and screen time on youth and mental health. Tech:NYC represents more than 550 technology companies—ranging from early-stage startups to global leaders—all of whom share a commitment to fostering a digital ecosystem built on trust, safety, and responsible innovation.

Tech:NYC recognizes the crucial importance of protecting children's mental health. As an organization that has spent years working with elected officials of all levels on various pieces of legislation promoting the safe and responsible use of social media, we appreciate the Council's engagement on these issues. However, as the Council considers Int. 450 and Int. 451, we urge a balanced approach that protects New York City's children without foreclosing the benefits and positive impacts social media platforms can provide.

Refining Int. 451: Ensuring a comprehensive study

Tech:NYC recognizes the value in further examination of social media's correlation with children's mental health and appropriate safety protections and parental controls. However, to ensure recommendations that take into account the full scope of social media and its impact on children, the language of the law should require the department of youth and community development, in consultation with the department of health and mental hygiene, to also examine the social media features and characteristics that children benefit from.

Similar requirements on social media platforms have been recently implemented at the state level here in New York, and more are currently being considered. For example, Governor Hochul has proposed the Safe by Design Act in her State FY 2027 budget, which would require social media platforms to implement default safety settings for minors such as ensuring parents have access to their children's friends list and integrating parental consent into chatbot features. The departments should also examine similar recently enacted laws and pending legislation to ensure the resulting recommendations do not create a social media landscape in New York City that conflicts with laws at the state and federal level, which could lead to New York City's children being at a disadvantage to children in the rest of the state and country.

Tech:NYC and its social media members acknowledge safety protections and parental controls are beneficial and important in protecting children online. As such, many social media companies are voluntarily investing significant resources into implementing parental controls and safety protections relating to minors. We recommend the study proposed in Int. 451 includes a review of current measures being taken by social media companies in this space, and corresponding recommendations as to how governments and schools can educate parents about how to take advantage of these tools.

Int. 450: Prematurely enacting statutory requirements and penalties

Int. 450 requires social media companies to limit children's social media use to one hour per day unless waived by a parent, prohibits targeted advertising towards children, and creates a private right of action for alleged violations of these provisions.

In 2024 New York State passed the Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation (SAFE) For Kids Act, which prohibits social media companies from providing certain unsolicited algorithmic feeds to users under the age of 18 without parental consent. This law tasks the New York State Attorney General to promulgate rules and regulations outlining allowable age verification methods social media companies must use to appropriately verify a user is a minor, the age of a parent, and the parental relationship between the parent who is giving consent and the applicable minor. To date, these rules and regulations have not been finalized, and once in place they will result in significant changes to how youth interact with social media, and the parental consents required for youth using social media. As this law has not yet been implemented but aims to address similar concerns brought up by this Committee, Tech:NYC encourages Council Members to review the impacts of this law prior to placing further regulations specific to only New York City.

The topic of establishing appropriate age verification methods has been a controversial one, as stronger methods of age verification present certain data privacy concerns. Requiring users to submit government identification to use social media could result in users having to decide between turning over potentially sensitive personal information or not having access to social media platforms. Absent requiring identification documentation, there are various forms of self verification currently being considered for implementation by the New York State Attorney General's office.

Regarding the proposed private right of action in this legislation, there are existing and effective statutes at the city, state and federal level that allows for government enforcement against unfair or exploitative behavior targeted towards children in this space. Tech:NYC agrees these types of behaviors should be monitored and acted upon where appropriate, but we also believe that current law provides sufficient and effective authority for all levels of government to do so.

Finally, many teens use social media to find community, and unfortunately many don't have parents or guardians who approve of their teen's preferred lifestyle. While requiring parental approval to access certain features on social media can be beneficial in many circumstances, it can also have negative consequences, like teens having to receive parental approval to access and engage with others in a particular community. The approach by which these parental controls are implemented

should not be rushed so children don't face unintended consequences, like the one mentioned above.

Effective governance begins with thoughtful research and public policy dialogue. Tech:NYC and our member companies stand ready to work with the Council to participate in discussions about appropriate approaches to protecting children on social media while also preserving children's access to positive use of social media.



Testimony at the Joint Hearing of Committee on Children and Youth and Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use and the Committee on Oversight and Investigation

April 21, 2026

OPPOSE: INTRO 660.

On behalf of The Center for Anti-Violence Education, which serves young people across the five boroughs, I urge you to oppose Int. 660. We support youth safety and take conflict among young people seriously. Youth-serving spaces are most effective when they are built on trust, relationship-building, de-escalation, and support. Young people need places where conflict can be addressed safely and constructively—not policies that undermine that trust or move community-based programs toward surveillance.

Intro 660 would significantly expand surveillance of young people by requiring all programs funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under 24, detail the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report whether an agency responded. This would impact over 120,000 young people, as DYCD funds afterschool programs (COMPASS), Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the Crisis Management System, runaway and homeless youth services, employment supports and more. Intro 660 also specifically calls for identifying strategies agencies can use to “monitor and identify” young people’s activity on online platforms in order to prevent altercations, as well as strategies to “counsel” youth regarding that activity. In addition, the bill would require a report listing specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response in machine-readable format.

Those requirements raise several serious concerns. First, the bill requires online surveillance of young people in DYCD-funded programs which will shift youth-serving spaces away from their core role as trusted places for mediation, support, and conflict resolution, and toward a monitoring role that can damage relationships between youth and staff. Second, the broad scope of the bill, including both “verbal or physical altercations” and “relevant” online activity would result in overreach and subjective interpretation. This would result in ordinary youth conflict, or reactive behavior receiving scrutiny instead of support. In many ways, this bill would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the gang database.

There are also serious data and privacy concerns with this legislation. It does not call for a general review of trends alone; it requires incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response, all in machine-readable form. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, it does not take any proactive steps to protect young people from having personally identifiable information released. Indeed, it is difficult to see how DYCD would report on the “details of the altercation” and “details of any relevant activity on online platforms by youth that led to the altercation” without providing identifiable information. This bill applies only to youth under 24 who attend DYCD-funded programs, meaning this scrutiny will fall on young people already connected to

city-funded support systems. Providers have reason to worry that this burden will not be felt evenly and will fall hardest on young people who are already subject to heavier surveillance and system contact. Finally, although this bill is framed as a study and report, it lays the groundwork for future monitoring practices by asking the City to develop strategies for identifying and tracking online activity in the name of prevention..

At CAE, we know that working with youth in community around safety means that we are trusted partners. They can come to us to identify solutions. This legislation would drastically change the role of the organization in relation to the young people it serves. Furthermore, the surveillance aspect of this bill should concern anyone who is concerned about any New Yorkers right to privacy.

For all of these reasons, we urge the Council to reject Int. 660 and instead support approaches to youth safety that strengthen youth programs as places for prevention, conflict resolution, healing, and care—without expanding online monitoring or building new systems for reporting on and tracking young people in the very spaces meant to support them.

To truly understand how online activities can drive conflict in young people's lives, the City should instead fund qualitative research that engages young people in both the study design and as experts to provide information on how this plays out in their own lives. Rather than surveilling youth, we would learn much more by talking with them directly about their own lived experience. By providing young people a space to share, and a role in the study design, the City would get in-depth and actionable information about how to improve youth safety and well-being. Additionally, this would connect young people to the world of research and improve their economic health by providing stipends for participation.



New York City Council
Committees on Children & Youth, Mental Health & Substance Use, and Oversight & Investigations – Hearing on The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health
Testimony submitted by Joanna Mendez, Assistant Director of Public Policy
Tuesday, April 21, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank the respective Committee Chairs and their members for the opportunity to submit testimony on the effects of social media and screen time on youth mental health.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people and no limits to their potential. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated employees serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted, neighborhood-based spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need.

Across our programs, including schools, afterschool programs, school-based health centers, and community settings, we have seen a steady increase in youth presenting with a myriad of mental health concerns including anxiety, depression, and attention related challenges. These trends are multi-factorial, shaped by pandemic-related disruptions, academic pressures, community stress, and broader social inequities. At the same time, youth themselves—along with families and frontline staff—increasingly raise concerns about the role of constant online connectivity, social media exposure, and device use, particularly when it is unstructured or unsupervised for younger youth. Our staff frequently report concerns related to sleep disruption, difficulty sustaining attention, heightened peer comparison, and online conflicts that spill into classrooms and community spaces.

While we strongly support continued investments to expand access to mental health services for children and adolescents, we believe it is equally important to elevate prevention. This includes building understanding among youth and caregivers about how digital environments may impact well-being and investing in accessible, high-quality out-of-school time programs. For many lower-income families, screens can become a form of inexpensive child care when affordable, reliable care is out of reach; recent survey data found that 49% of parents rely on screens daily to manage parental duties, including 1 in 4 parents turning to screens due to unaffordable care, and 34% when care is unavailable¹. Investing in child care and afterschool programming can help address that gap by providing structured, supervised and enriching spaces for young people while easing pressure on caregivers.

¹ <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/blog/screen-time-2025/> | Screen Time Statistics Reveal How Parents Use Screens as Babysitters, Educators, and Entertainment Tools | October 30, 2025 | Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago



As a provider of 19 afterschool programs in New York City, we see firsthand the impact of offering children and teenagers safe and engaging activities in their neighborhoods as an alternative to social media use. These youth enrichment programs not only support healthier technology habits but also build social emotional skills; last year, 89% of participants in our after-school programs (screened using DESSA) ended the year with typical or strong social emotional skills.

Recommendation to the Committees Children & Youth, Mental Health & Substance Use, and Oversight & Investigations on The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health:

- **Support balanced approaches that pair intervention with prevention.**
Access to high quality mental health services remains critical, but policies should also focus on prevention by promoting awareness, early education, and supportive environments. Helping youth and caregivers understand the impacts of constant connectivity can reduce harm before more intensive interventions are needed.
- **Invest in expanding access to high quality out of school time programs:** Accessible, high-quality afterschool and summer programs not only relieve child care burdens on caregivers but are also foundational to young people's academic and social development, particularly as an alternative to device use. We've been encouraged by the City's recognition of afterschool as a key priority for addressing affordability challenges and supporting youth development. Yet, the recent release of center-based COMPASS awards, which resulted in many community-based providers losing afterschool seats, has raised questions about the City's plans for afterschool expansion. We urge the City to reaffirm and provide transparency on its commitment to expanding the afterschool system.
- **Advance practical, school-based guardrails around device use.**
Children's Aid supports reasonable, age-appropriate guardrails on device use during the school day, paired with clear and consistent implementation. While New York State has a bell-to-bell cellphone ban, implementation varies widely across schools. At the same time, the expansion of one-to-one devices following the pandemic has introduced new challenges, because safeguards are limited and non-educational content remains easily accessible. And, we know the risks of unchecked technology extend far beyond social media: A Common Sense Media survey found that 73% of teens had seen online pornography, and nearly half of those exposed during the school day said it happened on school-owned devices². Furthermore, 80% of youth (ages 10-18) report monthly hate speech exposure³ and 3-8% meet gambling disorder criteria, as gaming blurs into online betting, affecting 1.1 million teens⁴. In addition, studies have linked problematic internet use to reduced attention span, diminished task persistence, and challenges with executive

² <https://www.common sense media.org/research/teens-and-pornography> | Teens and Pornography | Common Sense | 2022

³ <https://studyofhate.ucla.edu/smash-social-media-hate/> | UCLA Initiative to Study Hate | The Rise of Social Media Hate | various authors | December 20, 2024 |

⁴ https://morethanagame.nc.gov/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Problem-Gambling_-What-Communities-Need-to-Know-2024-1.pdf | NC Problem Gambling Program

functioning—skills that are critical for learning and long-term independence.⁵ Thoughtful guardrails can support focused learning, reduce social pressures, promote healthier school climates and equip our next generation for successful independence.

- **Ensure families, educators and youth workers receive guidance and resources.**
Any policy approach should be accompanied by practical, non-judgmental guidance for youth, families, educators, and youth workers. Caregivers, school staff, and youth workers are navigating these challenges in real time and benefit from realistic strategies and accessible information, not only restrictions. Equipping adults with tools and support strengthens their ability to guide youth effectively.

Comments on Specific Legislation

- **Int. 450-2026 (CM Stevens) - A Local Law in relation to restricting social media usage for youth**

We recognize the intent of this legislation to reduce potential harms associated with excessive or developmentally inappropriate social media use. We encourage careful consideration of how restrictions are structured to ensure they are age-appropriate and developmentally informed, equitable, and realistic for families. Any restrictions should be paired with education, parental engagement, and youth digital literacy efforts that go beyond online safety to help young people and their caregivers understand how digital platforms are designed to capture attention, their potential impact on developing brains and to explore developmentally appropriate alternatives that do not rely on social media.

- **Int. 451-2026 (CM Stevens) - A Local Law in relation to requiring the city to report on the impact of social media on the mental health of young people**

Children's Aid supports efforts to improve citywide data and reporting on the relationship between social media use and youth mental health. We recommend that this work includes perspectives from youth serving providers, educators, families, and youth themselves, and examines not only exposure, but also patterns and context of use—including school-day access, supervision and device type. To maximize impact, findings should be translated into clear, actionable insights that can guide schools, families, and community-based programs in shaping healthier environments for young people.

- **Int. 660-2026 (Deputy Speaker Williams) - A Local Law in relation to requiring a study and report on in-person altercations among youth and their associated activity on online platforms**

We appreciate the intent of this legislation to better understand and prevent conflict among young people and share the Council's commitment to youth safety. As an organization that serves young people across New York City, we take youth conflict seriously and address it through de-escalation, mediation, and relationship-based support. Further, we follow protocols for investigating, addressing and reporting bullying incidents (including those originating online) both organizationally and to DYCD.

⁵ Kaye AD, Islam RK, Tong VT, Sorrel ML, Allen KE, Nguyen ID, Miller BC, Sharpe M, Ahmadzadeh S, Griffin P, Shekoohi S, Varrassi G. A Narrative Inquiry Into Problematic Internet Use Among Young Adults: A Narrative Review. *Cureus*. 2025 Jun 10;17(6):e85705. doi: 10.7759/cureus.85705. PMID: 40642670; PMCID: PMC12244282.



However, we have significant concerns that Int. 660, as currently drafted, could unintentionally undermine the trusted role that youth providers play in prevention and conflict resolution. The bill would require providers to conduct extensive incident-level reporting on verbal or physical altercations and associated online activity which risks shifting community-based staff away from curating supportive, trust-centered spaces and towards a monitoring and surveillance role. We are also concerned about equity and privacy, as the bill requires machine-readable reports detailing specific incidents and related online activity without proactive safeguards to prevent the disclosure of personally identifiable information, and it applies only to youth connected to city-funded programs, potentially placing additional risks on young people already subject to disproportionate system involvement. Lastly, we are concerned about the administrative burden it would impose on our staff, with the potential to shift their time and energy away from serving young people and risking program quality. For these reasons, while we support the intent of this legislation, we urge the Council to reconsider Int. 660 in its current form and instead invest in approaches that strengthen youth programs as places of prevention and conflict resolution that engages young people as partners and centers their lived experience without asking youth providers to engage in online surveillance.

- **Int. 801-2026 (CM Stevens) - A Local Law in relation to creating apprenticeships for early childhood education**

Although distinct from the focus on social media, we strongly support investments in expanding paid employment, apprenticeship, internship, and credit-bearing opportunities in early childhood education through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Creating structured, paid pathways into the child care and early childhood education workforce can help expose young people to a field with significant workforce shortages while building practical skills and career readiness. To maximize impact, we encourage the City to ensure these opportunities include strong supervision, mentorship, and alignment with credentialing or postsecondary pathways, particularly for youth from communities with limited access to career pipelines.

Children's Aid appreciates the Council's leadership in examining the complex relationship between technology and youth mental health. We encourage a balanced approach that combines access to mental health care with prevention, practical and consistently implemented school-based guardrails, and data-informed policy making that translates into clear, actionable guidance for schools and families. Equally important is ensuring that youth, caregivers, and educators are supported with the tools, resources, and alternatives needed to foster healthier environments. We look forward to continued partnership to promote the well-being and healthy development of New York City's children and youth.

Please feel free to contact Joanna Mendez, Assistant Director of Public Policy, at jmendez2@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



New York City Council
Committees on Children & Youth, Mental Health & Substance Use, and Oversight & Investigations – Hearing on The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health
Oral Testimony presented Adria Cruz, Deputy Director of Health Programs and Integration, Children's Aid
Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Adria Cruz, Deputy Director of Health Programs and Integration at Children's Aid. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the effects of social media and screen time on youth mental health.

Across our programs, we see a steady increase in youth with anxiety, depression, and attention-related challenges. While multiple factors contribute, youth themselves—along with families and frontline staff—consistently point to constant connectivity and unstructured device use as a significant concern. We've noticed impacts on sleep, focus, and peer conflicts that start online and spill into school and community settings.

We strongly support continued investment in mental health services. Simultaneously, we must also invest upstream in prevention by addressing contributing factors before they escalate into clinical needs. This includes increasing awareness among youth and caregivers and investing in youth development programs that promote real-world connection.

As a provider of 19 afterschool programs, we see the value of safe, engaging alternatives to social media. In light of recent COMPASS awards, which resulted in many community-based providers losing afterschool contracts, we urge the City to reaffirm and provide transparency on its commitment to expanding afterschool.

We also support reasonable guardrails on device use during the school day and in afterschool and summer programming, as harmful technology use extends beyond social media: 73% of teens report exposure to online pornography, nearly half during school hours on school devices; 80% report encountering hate speech monthly; and between 3–8% meet criteria for youth gambling disorder, with up to 15% at risk.

Regarding the bills before you, we support the thoughtful approaches to youth safety and workforce development in Int. 450, 451, and 801. While we appreciate the Council's commitment to youth safety in Int. 660, its implementation remains unclear. We already follow protocols to report and investigate bullying and protect student safety and imposing additional monitoring risks undermining trust and program quality by shifting the role of youth providers toward surveillance.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth, the Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use and the Committee on Oversight & Investigations

April 21st, 2026

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Stevens, Chair Cabán, and Chair Williams and all the members of the City Council Children and Youth Committee, Mental Health and Substance Use Committee and the Oversight & Investigations Committee for holding this hearing today and hearing public testimony.

We greatly appreciate the City Council's attention to the impacts of social media and screen time on youth mental health, and support efforts to better understand, educate about, and regulate social media intake. For the purposes of this testimony, we will focus on Int. 660, which would require DYCD providers to monitor altercations between youth in their programs. Though well-intentioned, this bill has the potential to expand surveillance and criminalization of young people.

Oppose Int. 660

Every child and youth deserves access to enriching programs and quality services, including programming offered through the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) such as COMPASS and SONYC afterschool programs, the Runaway and Homeless Youth System, the Crisis Management System, summer programming, employment opportunities and more. Young people seek these programs because they are curious to learn, in need of housing supports, looking for meaningful community engagement, or looking for work. The common denominator is that these spaces are meant to provide care, support, and enriching activities.

We are concerned that Intro 660 would erode the trust that youth have in the providers and spaces offered by DYCD, impacting the lives of the over 120,000 young people engaged in programming. Intro 660 would expand surveillance of young people under the age of 24 by requiring all programs funded by DYCD to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under 24, detail the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report whether an agency responded.

Those requirements raise several concerns:

- The bill requires online surveillance of young people in DYCD-funded programs, which will transition youth-serving spaces from trusted places for mediation, support, and conflict resolution, to a monitoring role that can damage relationships between youth and staff.
- The broad scope of the bill, including both "verbal or physical altercations" and "relevant" online activity would result in overreach and subjective interpretation. This would result in ordinary

youth conflict, or reactive behavior receiving scrutiny instead of support. In many ways, this bill would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the gang database.

- There are also serious data and privacy concerns with this legislation. It does not call for a general review of trends alone; it requires incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response, all in machine-readable form. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, it does not take any proactive steps to protect young people from having personally identifiable information released.
- DYCD providers deal with late contracts, low rates, and budgets not coupled with inflation. This is an additional task that providers do not have the capacity to do.

This raises equity issues as well. It is likely that youth who are already subject to heavier surveillance and system contact will face more scrutiny. We again urge that city leaders meet young people with investments in supportive services, rather than criminalizing approaches.

For these reasons, we urge the Council to reject Int. 660 and instead support approaches to youth safety that strengthen youth programs as places for prevention, conflict resolution, healing, and care.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
New York City Council
Committees on Children and Youth, Mental Health and Substance Use,
and Oversight and Investigations
Oversight Hearing: The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental
Health
April 21, 2026
Paula Magnus, President
Northside Center for Child Development, Inc.

Good afternoon, Chairpersons and members of the Committees.

My name is Paula Magnus, and I am President of Northside Center for Child Development, Inc. Founded in Harlem in 1946, Northside now serves over 5,500 children and families across Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. As a New York State-designated Article 31 outpatient mental health clinic, we provide therapy to children from birth through age 21, the majority from low-income communities of color. Our programs include our main clinic in East Harlem and mental health services embedded in 23 New York City public schools. We also operate a therapeutic education program and three Head Start and Early Head Start sites that together serve 253 children. Every child in our therapeutic education and Head Start programs receives clinical services from Northside staff.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share what our clinicians and educators observe every day, and we support Int 450, Int 451, and Int 660.

What Our Clinicians See

These harms are not evenly distributed: children already carrying risk factors for mental health conditions are disproportionately affected. The following is what our clinicians observe on the ground.

- **Addiction and emotional dysregulation.** Our clinicians working with children as young as three report a pattern that goes beyond distraction: when phones are taken away, some children become severely dysregulated. That is not a bad mood. It is withdrawal.
- **Delayed social skills and emotional regulation.** Less face-to-face interaction leaves many children struggling to read social cues, resolve peer conflict, or build healthy relationships.
- **Bullying without escape.** Online harassment follows children home, eroding any sense of safety outside school hours.
- **Attention and academic struggles.** Compulsive device use crowds out focus, homework, and the routines that support healthy development. Experienced staff describe an across-the-board decrease in attention span and a rise in impulsive behavior that has intensified in direct proportion to the spread of devices with access to social media.

- **Social displacement and arrested development.** When clinicians ask child clients what they did over the weekend, the answer is frequently that they were on their phones rather than with family or friends. These apps are engineered for addictive engagement, and that engineering does not stand still: each generation of platform design is more sophisticated and more effective at capturing children's attention than the last. Extended use in place of real-world socialization delays development of the prefrontal cortex, the brain region responsible for judgment, impulse control, and long-term planning.
- **Delayed social skills and emotional regulation.** Less face-to-face interaction leaves many children struggling to read social cues, resolve peer conflict, or build healthy relationships.
- **Lowered self-esteem.** Image-focused platforms like Instagram and Snapchat fuel harmful social comparison, with measurable effects on adolescent self-image.
- **Worsened anxiety and depression.** Constant stimulation, social comparison, and fear-of-missing-out dynamics amplify pre-existing vulnerabilities. Children with depressive disorders are further isolated when online interaction replaces genuine human connection.
- **Bullying without escape.** Online harassment follows children home, eroding any sense of safety outside school hours.
- **Failure of parental controls.** Parents consistently report that children can and do defeat parental controls on their devices. This is not a failure of parenting. The platforms and device manufacturers have not designed their products with child protection as the priority, which is precisely why legislative intervention is necessary.
- **Exposure to inappropriate and exploitative content.** Our staff see children in fourth and fifth grade with explicitly sexual or violent content on their phones. In one case known to our staff, a fourth-grade child was coerced into taking a nude photograph and sending it to a classmate. This is not an isolated incident.
- **Predatory contact through gaming platforms.** Widely used children's games like Roblox include chat features that malicious adults have used to make contact with children in our programs. Parents and clinicians should understand that gaming platforms carry communication risks that extend beyond social media applications narrowly defined.

These patterns are driving families to seek care from providers like Northside. While our focus here is social media, we note that phone-based games create many of the same harms: addictive engagement loops, exposure to inappropriate content, disrupted sleep, and displacement of in-person socialization. Addressing social media access alone, while leaving unrestricted smartphones in children's hands, is an incomplete solution.

The Broader Evidence Base

Northside's clinical observations align with a growing body of national research. A 2024 nationwide survey of nearly 2,900 educators conducted by the National Education Association found that over 90 percent consider student mental health a serious

problem at their school, and nearly nine in ten report an increase in mental health concerns over recent years. Three-quarters identified social media as a serious problem. Their top concerns were cyberbullying, impaired social skill development, and disruption of instructional time,¹ mirroring precisely what Northside's clinical staff has observed.

The American Psychological Association has documented the mechanisms by which social media harms young people, pointing to the neurological hypersensitivity of adolescent brains and their susceptibility to the feedback loops, notifications, and harmful content built into platform design. These platforms are not neutral technologies. They are engineered to maximize engagement at the expense of the young users who are least equipped to resist their effects.²

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has documented a sharp, worldwide rise in adolescent anxiety, depression, and self-harm beginning between 2012 and 2014, precisely when smartphones and social media became pervasive in children's lives, and worsening steadily since.³ Our most experienced clinicians and teachers, who worked with children before that inflection point, confirm what his data shows. They watched this crisis arrive in their classrooms and on their caseloads in real time, and they have watched it deepen every year since. The platforms driving that harm are not static: each generation of design is more effective at capturing children's attention and harder to put down than the last.

Recommendations

We urge the Council to:

- **Pass Int 450, Int 451, and Int 660.** The City's approach should be informed by clinical expertise, account for the heightened vulnerability of children with mental health diagnoses, and examine the connection between online platform activity and physical altercations among youth.
- **Expand school-based and community mental health services.** Restricting harmful platforms is necessary but not sufficient. Children who have already been harmed need treatment. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has demonstrated that investments in early childhood development generate powerful long-term returns, with the highest returns going to the earliest interventions.⁴ The window for effective intervention is open now. We urge the City to invest in the mental health infrastructure, including adequate clinician

¹National Education Association, NEA Member Polling Results: Social Media, Personal Devices, and Mental Health (June 20, 2024). A copy of the NEA survey is attached to this testimony.

²American Psychological Association, Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence (May 2023), updated April 2024.

³Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (Penguin Press, 2024).

⁴James J. Heckman, *Giving Kids a Fair Chance* (MIT Press, 2013); see also heckmanequation.org.

staffing ratios and funding for community-based providers like Northside, that can meet the resulting demand.

- **Issue guidance on child-appropriate communication alternatives.** Many parents resist phone restrictions because they want to be able to reach their child in an emergency. That concern is legitimate and deserves a real answer. Children's smartwatches that support calls and texts to a parent-approved contact list, with no social media, no internet browsing, and no gaming, meet that safety need without the harms smartphones carry. The City can help families and schools by naming and promoting these alternatives, so restrictions do not force parents to choose between a child's safety and a child's wellbeing.

Conclusion

Our most experienced staff, having worked with children both before and after smartphones with social media access became pervasive, identify the harms we document above as unmistakably linked to these devices.

Social media platforms designed to addict children are a public health hazard. We urge city, state, and federal lawmakers to pass legislation restricting, and in some cases banning, algorithms that addict children, and to give regulators and plaintiffs straightforward statutory grounds to sue for damages substantial enough to deter them.

This Council has before it legislation that can begin to turn this around. Pass it. Fund the mental health services children need to heal.

Thank you.

Paula Magnus

President

Northside Center for Child Development, Inc.

1475 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10029

www.northsidecenter.org



April 21, 2026

New York City Council

Committee on Children and Youth
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

Testimony of Sebastien Vante, AVP of Streetwork Programs, Safe Horizon

Opposition to Int. 0660-2026

Good afternoon. My name is Sebastien Vante. I am the Associate Vice President of Streetwork Programs at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest nonprofit victim assistance organization. Each year, we offer a survivor-centered, trauma informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers impacted by violence, abuse, and exploitation. We offer unwavering support and advocate for systemic change. We envision a world where safety is a universal human right and we all share a collective responsibility to protect and uphold it. Streetwork operates a drop-in center, street outreach, and crisis shelter serving runaway and homeless youth - all funded through DYCD. I am testifying in opposition to Int. No. 660 as it is currently written.

I want to begin by acknowledging our valued partnership with the sponsors of this bill, especially Council Member Stevens, who has been a genuine partner to Streetwork and a real champion for the young people we serve. The concern behind this legislation - keeping youth safe - is one we share completely. Our opposition is not about intent. It's about impact.

This bill directs DYCD and its funded programs to develop strategies for monitoring youth online. For the young people who walk through our doors - many of whom have been over-surveilled by child welfare, law enforcement, and institutions their whole lives - that association alone is enough to make them leave. And when they leave, they lose access to food, healthcare, case management, and housing support. Surveillance doesn't prevent altercations among this population. It prevents youth from getting help.

Our clients include LGBTQ+ young people, undocumented youth, and young people with justice involvement, for whom online spaces provide safety and connection. Government-linked monitoring of those spaces creates risks this bill does not account for.

Youth conflict is driven by trauma, instability, and unmet need. We urge the Council to invest in conflict resolution, mental health services, and housing. We remain committed to working with this Council toward solutions that keep young people safe. Thank you.



I'm Nadia Chait, the Senior Director of Policy & Advocacy at CASES. At CASES, we serve about 750 young people annually, guided by our core belief that public safety comes from investing in people's potential, not their punishment. We are submitting testimony today in opposition to Intro 660, which will increase surveillance and system involvement from young people at the very moments when they are engaging in programs and services for their future success.

CASES holds two DYCD contracts, for the CRED and Summer Youth Employment Programs. These programs are both designed to connect people to employment pathways, so they can be contributing members of their communities. Although CRED serves a wide age range, we have many participants who are under 24. All of our Summer Youth Employment participants are under 24. Young people often act impulsively, without thinking through how their actions will impact their futures. Our programs work to help young people grow into responsible community members, with the tools to slow down, take a breath and think before they act.

Intro 660 goes directly against this work, by requiring CASES and all other DYCD-funded programs to report on in-person verbal and physical altercations involving youth under 24, and to also determine if online activity is related to the altercation. When an incident occurs in our programs, we respond with compassion, to identify what happened, how we can help the young people involved move forward, and ensure future safety. The reporting requirements of Intro 660 go directly against our work to provide places for conflict resolution, healing and care, and would instead break the trust that we work so diligently to build with young people.

We also have deep concerns about the privacy of young people impacted by Intro 660. By mandating incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity and agency response, it is easy to see how this bill would result in the release of personally identifiable information. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, much of this information is not covered by current law and the bill takes no proactive steps to protect young people's privacy.

To truly understand how online activities can drive conflict in young people's lives, the City should instead fund qualitative research that engages young people in both the study design and as experts to provide information on how this plays out in their own lives. Rather than surveilling youth, we would learn much more by talking with them directly about their own lived experience. By providing young people a space to share, and a role in the study design, the City would get in-depth and actionable information about how to improve youth safety and well-being. Additionally, this would connect young people to the world of research and improve their economic health by providing stipends for participation.



I urge the Council to reject Intro 660, and to instead invest in the services and supports that we know young people need. Please reach out to me with any questions at nchait@cases.org.

**Testimony before the New York City Council in support of Int 450, Int 451, and Int 660
Hearing on the Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health
April 21, 2026**

To the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth, Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use, and the Committee on Oversight and Investigations:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Intro 0450, Intro 0451, and Intro 0660, which provide support to parents/guardians to protect their children from the potential harms of social media and limits targeted advertising and content that may be unhealthy or harmful, require health agencies to support research on the impact of social media and youth's mental health, and ensure online platforms do not continue to serve as a place where violence can be organized. We are submitting this testimony as professors and research scientists in the Department of Population Health at NYU Grossman School of Medicine. Our research focuses on how digital technology affects decision making in youth, and two of us are trained as clinical psychologists. Together, we have received over \$7 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health, served on over 10 advisory boards, and published over 100 peer-reviewed articles on the role of media, advertising, and digital technology on the health of youth. We are grateful to the New York City Council for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

We have published numerous studies on the effects of social media advertising on teens. We use surveys and experimental studies to understand the effects that marketing strategies have on teenagers' willingness to buy and consume promoted products. Much of that work has examined how unhealthy food advertising targets teens by using celebrity endorsements, professional athletes, and other popular trends.

For example, in one of our studies, "Understanding the extent of adolescents' willingness to engage with food and beverage companies' Instagram accounts: experimental survey study" (2020), we examined how "likes" and comments affect teens' preferences for food ads on social media. In this online survey experiment, we asked 832 teens to view and rate food ads from social media. To understand how "likes" affect preferences, we used Photoshop to increase the "likes" on some ads:

- In Group 1, teens saw very few "likes" on ads (i.e., <100 "likes").
- In Group 2, teens saw a medium number of "likes" on the same ads (100-10,000).
- In Group 3, teens saw a high number of "likes" on the same ads (i.e., >10,000).

In addition, half of the ads had "no comments" while the other half of the ads featured some comments (e.g., "love this brand!"). Our analyses revealed that:

- Teens rated ads with medium or high numbers of "likes" more positively than ads with few "likes" ($P=.001$ and $P=.002$, respectively).

- When adjusting for the number of “likes” on the ad in the “comments condition,” heavy social media users were 6.366 times more willing to comment compared to light users ($P<.001$).
- When adjusting for the number of “likes” on the ad in the “no comments condition,” heavy users were 2.564 times more willing to comment compared to light users ($P<.001$).

That study tells us important information about how social media affects teens:

- High numbers of “likes” increases how much teens prefer ads.
- High numbers of “likes” increases teens’ willingness to “like” ads.
- High numbers of “likes” increases willingness to comment on ads, but only among teens who use social media more than 3 hours per day.

Tech companies may claim that data on social media are correlational, and therefore, do not show that social media causes harm in youth. However, there are numerous randomized trials that document the negative effects of social media on young people. Causal studies have documented the effects of social media on young people as well. For example, a study from 2021 compared a control group of college women to an intervention group where social media use was limited to one hour per day. They found that the intervention group reported higher body esteem and lower anxiety after limiting social media for four weeks compared to the control group that did not limit social media. Another study from 2024 showed that a one-week break from social media led to significant improvements in body image and self-esteem among young women. Many other studies have shown correlations between social media use and poor body image, but the aforementioned studies are just two examples of controlled experiments—meaning they provide causal data that decreasing social media use leads to improvements in body image and anxiety.

Studies have documented that teens are exposed to problematic content on social media platforms. As part of our newest research study that we are currently preparing for publication, we screen-recorded one hour of social media use from a sample of 80 teens ages 13-17 and found that they were exposed to 16.6 problematic posts per hour on social media. This is equivalent to one problematic post every four minutes. Problematic posts are defined as those that showcase profanity and crude humor, body exposure and sexualized behaviors, dangerous activities, shocking and graphic content, violence and criminal behavior, harassment and bullying, sexual abuse, hate speech, disordered eating and risky weight management, depression, and suicide. As part of this same study, we also collected screen recording data and survey data from a sample of 32 teens ages 13-17 from New York. All 32 of the New York teens (100%) self-reported using social media every day. In addition, 44% of them reported spending “too much” time on social media and more than half the sample (59.6%; $n=19$) reported that they have “sometimes,” “often,” or “very often,” tried to cut back on social media but did not succeed. These results are concerning because they demonstrate teens’ own concerns about their excessive social media use and difficulty cutting back on use—even when they want to.

Some opponents of social media regulation may claim that creating policies to limit access to social media may appear to take away consumer freedoms. However, the current design of social media platforms is built



on targeted marketing tools and design choices that consumers cannot control, which reinforces the need for stronger policies to make social platforms safer for youth.

We understand that parents play an important role in managing minors' access to social media. While it is true that parents and caregivers assume the role of protecting their children from any perceived harm, including social media, it is an unfair burden for parents and caregivers to take on the full responsibility of keeping children and teens safe online. Not only is social media deeply embedded in the daily lives of youth, but the tech industry has also created design features, like infinite scrolling and algorithmic-based targeting, that are incredibly challenging for any individual—let alone busy parents—to effectively guard against without the proper support. Int 0450 offers this type of support and will give parents the tools they need to effectively and sustainably protect their children.

Randomized trials have demonstrated that reducing or eliminating social media use causes an improvement in mental health. Our own studies have examined the powerful ways that advertising from social media platforms affects teens' preferences and perceptions. We strongly support the proposed policies as an important step in reducing harms teens face on social media platforms.

We want to thank the NYC Council for holding this hearing and writing these bills which are guided from a deep concern for this city's children. Please don't hesitate to reach out if we can be of assistance.

Testimony of Dr. Omni Cassidy, PhD; Dr. Roxanne Dupuis, PhD; and Dr. Marie Bragg, PhD

References

Lutfeali S, Ward T, Greene T, Arshonsky J, Seixas A, Dalton M, Bragg MA. Understanding the extent of adolescents' willingness to engage with food and beverage companies' Instagram accounts: experimental survey study. JMIR public health and surveillance. 2020 Oct 27;6(4):e20336.

Thai H, Davis CG, Stewart N, Gunnell KE, Goldfield GS. The effects of reducing social media use on body esteem among transitional-aged youth. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology. 2021 Dec;40(6):481–507.

Smith OE, Mills JS, Samson L. Out of the loop: Taking a one-week break from social media leads to better self-esteem and body image among young women. Body image. 2024 Jun 1;49:101715.



Testimony of

Sergio De La Pava

Legal Director

New York County Defender Services

Before the

Committee on Children and Youth

Int 0660-2026 (Williams)

April 21, 2026

Thank you to the Committee on Children and Youth for holding this hearing jointly with the Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use and the Committee on Oversight & Investigations. My name is Sergio De La Pava and I am the Legal Director of New York County Defender Services (NYCDS).

NYCDS is a public defense office that every year represents indigent New Yorkers in thousands of cases in Manhattan's Criminal Court, Supreme Court, and Family Courts. Since opening our doors in 1997, we have represented more than a half million clients in their criminal matters and witnessed firsthand the myriad ways the criminal legal system abuses and harms our clients. Our Youth Advocacy Unit represents some of the most vulnerable people in our city, children and young people charged with crimes. We aim to bring a perspective shaped by our work representing young people directly impacted by surveillance and criminalization.

We, therefore, thank you, Chair Stevens, for holding today's hearing and all of the Council Members who seek to oversee the effects of social media on our youth.

I. Background:



New York County Defender Services (NYCDS) **strongly opposes** Intro. No. 660-2026. The proposed legislation raises serious concerns about the expansion of surveillance of young people and the concomitant erosion of trust between youth and the very systems meant to support them.

Although framed as a study, the proposed legislation directs agencies to identify, track, and analyze young people's activity on online platforms that relates to in-person altercations. It also calls for the development of strategies to monitor and identify such activity to prevent future incidents. This is not a neutral exercise. It creates a framework for monitoring speech, mapping relationships, and generating records about young people that can follow them far beyond the context in which they were created.

The proposed legislation directs the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to conduct a study in collaboration with the Mayor's Office for Neighborhood Safety and the Prevention of Gun Violence (ONS). This raises significant concerns about how prevention efforts may be reshaped and harmed under this framework. ONS was created to support community-based approaches to safety, including violence interruption programs, credible messenger initiatives, and other strategies that deeply rely on trust, relationship building, and voluntary engagement by young people. These programs are effective precisely because they are not seen as extensions of law enforcement or state surveillance. Young people need to feel safe enough to be vulnerable and truthful while in these programs. Introducing a mandate that identifies or monitors youth online activity risks altering that dynamic in a fundamental and deleterious way.

It is also imperative to situate this proposed legislation within the broader landscape of existing surveillance that already exists over young people. Law enforcement agencies, including the New York City Police Department (NYPD), monitor social media activity, track associations between young people, and analyze their online interactions. These surveillance systems are actively perpetuating harm in our communities. We have raised serious concerns about how and why information is collected, interpreted, and used by the NYPD. Similarly, here, any fragments of data collected under the proposed legislation would be out of context and incomplete, making them easily misconstrued.

The proposed legislation's study can then contribute to the NYPD's notorious gang database¹, or worse, make a parallel database that works alongside the gang database. The gang database is a system that labels and tracks individuals based on perceived gang affiliation, frequently using

¹ *The NYPD Gang Database, Explained*, Legal Defense Fund (last accessed April 23, 2026) at <https://naacpldf.org/case-issue/nypd-gang-database-policing-tactics/>.



associations and online activity as indicators. We, alongside other organizations, have frequently criticized its lack of transparency and the inability to meaningfully challenge an individual's placement on it. People are placed on it arbitrarily, and a mere communication with someone believed to be in a gang can land you in the gang database. It also has a significant discriminatory impact, as it disproportionately includes Black and Latino youth, often reflecting patterns of overpolicing instead of actual criminal involvement. The gang database serves as a warning. The proposed legislation will reproduce the same bias and create another discriminatory database.

As public defenders, we see how these systems operate in practice. Online speech is easily taken out of context: sarcasm, conflict, and everyday communication can be wrongly interpreted as indicators of risk or violence. Associations are mapped and treated as evidence of wrongdoing. What may begin as an effort to understand behavior can quickly become a mechanism for labeling and tracking young people, especially Black and Latino youth.

Equally troubling is how the proposed legislation would transform the role of trusted adults in young people's lives. Staff in youth programs, after-school settings, and community-based organizations are not meant to be investigators. They are mentors, counselors, and sources of support. Their effectiveness depends on trust and confidentiality. They have to be able to engage with young people without judgment and without even the perception of ulterior motives. By requiring agencies to monitor and analyze online activity, the proposed legislation risks turning trusted community members into watchers of youth behavior.

This shift fundamentally changes the relationship between young people and the very adults meant to support them. Young people are not ignorant of how adults watch them. News will spread quickly that they are being reported on. If young people believe that what they say, share, or post may be tracked or reported, they will disengage. The proposed legislation would erode their trust in rehabilitative and pro-social programming and the adults in their community who provide it.

The likely result is that young people will attend these critical programs at lower rates. They may even avoid these programs altogether, which will go directly against the goals of violence prevention. Even if they participate in programming, they may specifically avoid discussing conflicts, relationships, or challenges out of concern that their words could be documented or misunderstood. So that even while attending programming, the substance and goals of these programs would be gutted. This would particularly undermine early-intervention programming, which depends on openness and trust.



The sheer breadth and vagueness of the proposed legislation amplifies these concerns. The definition of youth includes individuals under 24 who attend programs funded by DYCD. This could encompass a wide range of settings, including after-school programs, workforce development programs, and services connected to housing. This means the bill could extend into spaces that serve some of the most vulnerable young people in the City. Additionally, the involvement of ONS creates a toxic pathway for sensitive information to move beyond its original context and purpose.

The proposed legislation captures everyday interactions and invites agencies to scrutinize online activity in connection with those interactions. Without clear limits, it leaves open how far this monitoring could extend and how the information collected could ultimately be used. It is even unclear if this information could be obtained or used by prosecutors. As Council Member Cabán shared during the hearing, prosecutors frequently will informally use information gathered online to pressure other youth to testify against one another. The proposed legislation does not have any meaningful privacy guardrails put in place. Even when it references privacy protections, it does not meaningfully constrain downstream use or prevent the sharing of this information across agencies.

We know that information collected by City agencies does not remain siloed. It is often shared, combined with other datasets, and in some cases accessed by federal authorities, including federal immigration enforcement. Without explicit and enforceable safeguards, the proposed legislation would create a database on young people that could be used for purposes far beyond prevention. And even with safeguards, history shows that once data is collected, it is difficult to control how it is ultimately used.

The proposed legislation does not protect youth. It instead turns providers into extensions of law enforcement and breaks the trust of young people.

II. Conclusion

NYCDS strongly opposes **Intro. No. 660-2026 (Williams)**.

If you have any questions about my testimony, please email policy@nycds.org.



Brooklyn Defender Services
177 Livingston St, 7th Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel (718) 254-0700
Fax (347) 457-5194
info@bds.org

TESTIMONY OF:

Talia Kamran, Staff Attorney

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before New York City Council Committees on Children and Youth, Mental Health and Substance Use, and Oversight and Investigations

Oversight Hearing on The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health

April 21, 2026

My name is Talia Kamran and I am a Staff Attorney in the Seizure and Surveillance Defense Project at Brooklyn Defender Services. Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation, and other serious legal harms by the government. We thank the Committee Chairs for holding today's hearing on the pressing issue of youth mental health and wellbeing. For 30 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. After 29 years of serving Brooklyn, we expanded our criminal defense services to Queens. We represent close to 40,000 people each year who are accused of a crime, facing the removal of their children, or deportation. Our staff consists of attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS also provides a wide range of additional services for our clients, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

As public defenders who represent youth in criminal and family court, as well as in immigration, education and other civil legal matters, we understand the importance of protecting youth and investing in programs and resources that support their mental health and wellbeing. Many of the young people we represent first become involved in the criminal legal system due to poverty, lack of access to employment and education. The city has invested in expanding access to afterschool programs, job training and mental health support. These programs, many which are operated by community-based organizations funded through the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), help alleviate these conditions and act as alternatives to incarceration, as they prevent young people at risk of system involvement from encountering the system in the first place. Many people we serve are only able to gain access to community-based programs after their contact with the criminal legal system and are often eager to take advantage of any resources that we can connect them with. Legislation currently before the City Council,

DEFEND • ADVOCATE • CHANGE

Int. 660, threatens to harm the critical relationship these programs play in the lives of the youth participants.

Through our representation of adults and youth in criminal and family courts, and parents involved with the family policing system, we see firsthand how surveillance-based approaches to community safety harm the people they claim to protect. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) does meaningful work to address youth mental health and to provide young people with access to opportunity, and that work deserves the Council's continued support and investment. It is precisely because we value those programs that we strongly oppose Introduction 660 (2026). Placing a surveillance mandate in front of programs designed to improve youth wellbeing does not make young people safer, it makes those programs less effective and creates yet another pipeline from city services into the criminal legal system.

Introduction 660 Would Create a Shadow Gang Database Inside DYCD

The NYPD already operates a vast and expensive social media surveillance apparatus. Its dedicated Social Media Research and Analytics Team (SMART) monitors at least 11 social networking platforms including Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and even Xbox and PlayStation chat rooms, tracking hashtags, mapping social networks, and using that information to add people to the Criminal Group Database, commonly known as the gang database.¹ Officers are permitted to create fake profiles impersonating teenagers in order to gain access to private posts and connections, and social media monitoring software gives the NYPD tools for real-time geographic tracking, influence mapping, and archiving of posts, generating detailed digital dossiers on young people who have committed no crime.² The NYPD has spent over \$3 billion on surveillance technology in just over a decade, and that investment has produced no demonstrable reduction in violence.³

What it has produced is thousands of gang database entries — nearly all of them Black and Latino New Yorkers, some as young as 11 — based on criteria so broad and vague that they sweep in ordinary youth behavior.⁴ Inclusion in the database does not require a criminal conviction, an arrest, or even reasonable suspicion of criminal activity. Instead, people are

¹ Ananya Roy et al., *All Eyes on Us* (Ctr. for Court Innovation Youth Justice Bd. 2020), <https://www.courtinnovation.org/yjb> [hereinafter *All Eyes on Us*]. see also N.Y.C. Police Dep't, Social Network Analysis Tools: Impact and Use Policy (Feb. 4, 2026)

² Ángel Díaz, *We're Suing the NYPD to Uncover Its Online Surveillance Practices*, Brennan Ctr. for Just. (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/were-suing-nypd-uncover-its-online-surveillance-practices> (describing documents obtained through public records litigation revealing that NYPD officers are permitted to create fake online profiles to surveil individuals so long as a supervisor approves).

³ David Meyer, *NYPD Spent \$3 Billion on Surveillance, but Critics Say Details Are Vague Despite New Disclosure Law*, N.Y. Daily News (Nov. 13, 2022)

⁴ Thurgood Marshall Inst., NAACP Legal Def. Fund, *What Happens When You Erase a Gang Database?* (Dec. 13, 2024), <https://www.naacpldf.org/what-happens-when-you-erase-a-gang-database/>.

labeled as gang members based on arbitrary and unverified criteria such as wearing certain colors, being seen in certain areas, or associating with certain people, and using certain emojis or making certain posts on social media.⁵ Young Black and Latino New Yorkers, by virtue of living in overpoliced neighborhoods, already have their social media activity, phone contacts, physical movements, and family associations disproportionately represented in the NYPD's Domain Awareness System and gang database. That accumulated data is then used to justify the very stops, frisks, and interrogations that generate yet more database entries, creating a feedback loop that increases the likelihood of arrest, prosecution, and ultimately incarceration for young people.

What Introduction 660 proposes is to reproduce this logic inside DYCD. The bill would require DYCD providers to study and document altercations among program participants and identify their associated online activity — creating an institutional incentive to view young people not as participants deserving of support, but as sources of intelligence. There is no firewall between the information this bill would generate and law enforcement: the Commissioner is required to collaborate with the Director of the Mayor's Office for Neighborhood Safety and the Prevention of Gun Violence, and the data produced could flow directly into NYPD systems, adding yet another stream of information on young people who are already disproportionately surveilled.

Once a person is designated as a gang member by the NYPD, they have no means to challenge that label in court or elsewhere. Prosecutors raise gang affiliation on the record, solely based on a person's inclusion in the database, to justify harsher bail applications, stringent plea negotiations, and longer sentences. Even after sentencing, gang designations follow people into jails and prisons, barring them from rehabilitative programs that could aid in reentry and reducing recidivism. Incarcerated people labeled as gang members are often denied educational or vocational opportunities and can face harsher parole determinations. Introduction 660 would expand this system's reach into DYCD. Rather than reproducing a failed surveillance model, the Council should be investing in community violence interruption programs like Cure Violence, credible messenger initiatives, mental health resources, and school-based supports that actually address the root causes of youth conflict.

The Bill Is Unconstitutionally Vague and Creates Serious Privacy Risks

The operative trigger in Introduction 660 — “verbal or physical altercation” — is not defined, leaving a vague, overbroad standard for DYCD providers to interpret. Just as the gang database's overbroad criteria referencing clothing, colors, hand signs, and associations has been applied in a racially discriminatory manner that sweeps in ordinary cultural expression by young people of color, an undefined “verbal altercation” standard will inevitably be applied inconsistently and discriminatorily. The determination of what rises to the level of a reportable altercation, and whose online activity is deemed “relevant,” will be left entirely to individual program staff

⁵ *All Eyes on Us*, *supra* note 1, at 10–13; K. Babe Howell, *Gang Policing: The Post Stop-and-Frisk Justification for Profile-Based Policing*, 5 Univ. Denver Crim. L. Rev. 1, 16 (2015).

exercising unconstrained discretion. While young people with access to well-resourced schools and private programs can have conflicts de-escalated through trusted adults and mental health professionals, young people from low-income backgrounds, who disproportionately rely on city-funded programming, will find that the same ordinary adolescent behavior is instead criminalized, referred to law enforcement, and used as a gateway into the criminal legal system.

To the extent DYCD programs operate in or alongside schools, documentation of student conduct and associated online activity implicates the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act's protections for education records.⁶ Where programs connect young people to mental health services — as many do, because DYCD explicitly funds programs that provide mental health support, crisis intervention, and counseling — collection and reporting of behavioral information may conflict with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.⁷ Beyond the specific protections afforded by those statutes, there is a more fundamental problem: forcing young people to surrender their right to privacy as a condition of accessing city-funded resources and opportunities is itself a harm. Young people who need mental health support, job training, or after-school programming should not have to accept surveillance as the price of admission. Directing program managers to surveil, document, and report on participant behavior under such vague statutory guidance, with only a general admonition to comply with applicable law, is an invitation to privacy violations, unauthorized disclosure of sensitive personal data, and the erosion of the trust that makes these programs work in the first place.

Conclusion

DYCD-funded programs work because they are built on trusted relationships with adults who are not law enforcement, not reporting to law enforcement, and not cataloging participant behavior. That trust is the mechanism through which intervention, counseling, and support actually reach young people. The moment a young person understands that their program is tracking their online activity and documenting altercations for government review, that trust is gone. They will not confide in counselors, seek help when they are in danger, or join programs at all. DYCD's own mission is to alleviate the effects of poverty and provide opportunities for young New Yorkers to reach their full potential.⁸ Subjecting program participants to social media surveillance betrays that purpose.

Young people have recognized the outsized role social media plays in their lives and relationships, the effect it can have on conflict, and — critically — the ways in which social media monitoring can lead to consequences they could never have anticipated, including police surveillance, gang database entry, and criminal legal system contact. They have asked for help

⁶ Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R.

⁷ Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-191, 110 Stat. 1936 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 42 U.S.C.).

⁸ N.Y.C. Dep't of Youth & Cmty. Dev., *About DYCD*, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/about/about-dycd/about-dycd.page>.



navigating the digital world, not for more surveillance of it. Here in New York City, the Youth Justice Board of the Center for Court Innovation dedicated an entire report, *All Eyes on Us*⁹, to exactly these questions, and shared their recommendations: a Youth Bill of Rights that protects their digital privacy, education about their rights and responsibilities online, and investment in mental health support and economic opportunity. Critically, within these recommendations young people also called for the abolition of the Criminal Group Database and any successor database. BDS echoes this recommendation and calls on the Council to pass Introduction 460, a bill that would abolish the NYPD gang database. We must make progress to move away from surveillance, which drives incarceration and cycles of community instability, and toward genuine investment in the health, safety, and opportunities available to young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jackie Gosdigan, Senior Supervising Policy Counsel, at jgosdigan@bds.org.

⁹ *Id. supra* n. 5.



TESTIMONY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE

before the

**Committees on Oversight and Investigations, Children and Youth, and
Mental Health and Substance Use**

IN OPPOSITION TO

Int. 660-26

by

Elizabeth Bender

Senior Policy Counsel, Criminal Defense Practice

April 21, 2026

Dear Committee Chairs Caban, Krishnan, and Stevens,

The Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem urges the Council to oppose Int. 660. NDS is a community-based public defender office that provides high-quality, holistic legal services to residents of Northern Manhattan. Each year, our attorneys represent nearly 8,000 clients in New York County's criminal, housing, and family court systems, and in federal immigration courts. Our social workers and advocates support clients by referring them to appropriate services, connecting them with benefits, and working to minimize the collateral consequences of legal system involvement.

NDS's Youth Law Unit represents around 100 young people charged in Family Court and Supreme Court each year. Many of our young clients are involved in community-based programs that receive DYCD funding. That programming is often mandated by the court, but some of our clients attend it voluntarily. We are deeply concerned about the impact that this bill would have on our clients' experiences in those programs. We believe this bill's reporting requirements will erode the trust that program providers work diligently to build with our young clients; will make young people less likely to seek guidance from program staff when they are dealing with conflict; and will force program staff to spend their time meeting the bill's investigation and reporting requirements rather than engaging with youth and addressing conflict productively. Moreover, this bill's negative effects will mostly impact youth who are already vulnerable: young people seeking emergency shelter and crisis intervention services, LGBTQIA+ young people who rely on City-funded services and safe spaces, and young people with criminal legal system involvement—a group that comprises [disproportionately high rates](#) of Black and Latino youth. For these reasons we strongly urge the Council to oppose the bill.

To be sure, we support youth safety and take conflict among young people seriously. Many of our young clients become our clients because of conflict. And our experience representing young people in the criminal legal system tells us that youth-serving spaces are most effective when they are built on trust, relationship-building, de-escalation, and support. Young people need places where conflict can be

addressed safely and constructively—not policies that undermine that trust or move community-based programs toward surveillance.

Int. 660 would significantly expand surveillance of young people by requiring all programs funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under 24, detail the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report whether an agency responded. This would impact over 120,000 young people, as DYCD funds afterschool programs (COMPASS), Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the Crisis Management System, runaway and homeless youth services, employment supports and more. Intro 660 also specifically calls for identifying strategies agencies can use to “monitor and identify” young people’s activity on online platforms to prevent altercations, as well as strategies to “counsel” youth regarding that activity. In addition, the bill would require a report listing specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response in machine-readable format.

Those requirements raise several serious concerns. First, the bill requires online surveillance of young people in DYCD-funded programs which will shift youth-serving spaces away from their core role as trusted places for mediation, support, and conflict resolution, and toward a monitoring role that can damage relationships between youth and staff. Second, the broad scope of the bill, including both “verbal or physical altercations” and “relevant” online activity would result in overreach and subjective interpretation. This would result in ordinary youth conflict and reactive behaviors receiving scrutiny instead of support. In many ways, this bill would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the NYPD’s gang database, which [disproportionately targets](#) Black and brown New Yorkers.

There are also serious data and privacy concerns with this legislation. It does not call for a general review of trends alone; it requires incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response, all in machine-readable form. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, it does not take any proactive steps to protect young people from having personally

identifiable information released. Indeed, it is difficult to see how DYCD would report on the “details of the altercation” and “details of any relevant activity on online platforms by youth that led to the altercation” without providing identifiable information. This bill applies only to youth under 24 who attend DYCD-funded programs, meaning this scrutiny will fall on young people already connected to city-funded support systems. Providers have reason to worry that this burden will not be felt evenly and will fall hardest on young people who are already subject to heavier surveillance and criminal legal system contact. Although this bill is framed as a study and report, it lays the groundwork for future monitoring practices by asking the City to develop strategies for identifying and tracking online activity in the name of prevention.

Moreover, this bill will make it harder for youth program staff to provide our clients with much-needed services. Program staff already do so much with so little, going above and beyond to build real relationships with our young clients so they can support them through crises and celebrate their successes. The detailed reporting requirement means that DYCD-funded programs will have to divert their already scarce time and resources away from serving youth and instead spend them on investigating, tracking, and reporting on “altercations”—altercations that, in many instances, could provide valuable, restorative learning experiences under the guidance of experienced staff. Further, it is unworkable to require program staff to investigate and determine the “reasons for each altercation”. There are always at least two sides to every story; whose “reason” will be reported to DYCD? Again, this requirement will divert staff away from effectively navigating conflict with young people and force them to become detectives tasked with surveilling the youth they serve rather than supporting them.

Finally, this bill would jeopardize the relationships between young people and program staff and disincentivize young people from going to programs for help in addressing conflicts. If young people know that their mentors must report every altercation, they will simply avoid bringing conflict to their mentors’ attention. They may even avoid seeking out necessary services, like emergency shelter or crisis support. Differences that could have been resolved within the safe space of a program will carry over into

spaces where young people don't have supervision or support. City-funded programs should be empowered to teach young people healthy conflict-resolution skills, but that cannot happen if young people don't trust those programs.

For all of these reasons, we urge the Council to reject Int. 660 and instead support approaches to youth safety that strengthen youth programs as places for prevention, conflict resolution, healing, and care—without expanding online monitoring or building new systems for reporting on and tracking young people in the very spaces meant to support them.

To the extent the Council is working to understand how online activities can drive conflict in young people's lives, the City should fund qualitative research that engages young people in both the study design and as experts to provide information on how this plays out in their own lives. Rather than surveilling youth, we would learn much more by talking with them directly about their own lived experience. By providing young people a space to share, and a role in the study design, the City would get in-depth and actionable information about how to improve youth safety and well-being. Additionally, this would connect young people to the world of research and improve their economic health by providing stipends for participation.

We urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you for considering our testimony.

Contact:
Elizabeth Bender
Senior Policy Counsel
Criminal Defense Practice
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
ebender@ndsny.org



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committees on
Children & Youth, Mental Health and Substance Use, and Oversight & Investigations
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair
Council Member Tiffany Cabán, Chair
Deputy Speaker Nantasha Williams, Chair**

Oversight: The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst
April 20, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Stevens, Chair Cabán, Deputy Speaker Williams and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kate Connolly, and I am Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH).

UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 840,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses have been community hubs for youth programming and community development for over a century, and ensure that community members have what they need to thrive. Settlement houses operate DYCD-funded programs in most neighborhoods of New York City. Collectively, they operate over 170 DYCD-funded after-school programs (COMPASS Elementary, SONYC, and COMPASS High), serving over 25,000 youth or 23% of all COMPASS/SONYC participants citywide. Settlement houses also operate half of all Cornerstone contracts, a third of all Beacon contracts, and 32 adult literacy programs. Additionally, they serve over 27,000 participants annually through DYCD-funded youth workforce programs, a total of 7% of all SYEP participants. Settlement houses are also providers under DYCD's Office of Neighborhood Safety Programming, Immigrant Support programs, and Runaway and Homeless Youth services. Under the purview of ACS, settlement houses operate 7 Family Enrichment Centers.

Today's youth live in a world heavily influenced by social media and the digital world. While some of these platforms can be used as educational or supportive tools, a young person's world is overly saturated with platforms designed to maximize the amount of time spent engaged,

regardless of the detrimental effects on the user. In February 2026, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement titled “Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents”¹ where they discussed the impact of digital ecosystems on young people and provided recommendations for different levels (families, pediatricians, government, etc.) on how to minimize the negative impacts. The top recommendation for policymakers was to “fund prosocial third spaces” such as “community centers that provide enrichment, social activities, and physical activity, can “crowd out” digital experiences.” Beyond the well-documented academic, economic, and mental health benefits of afterschool programming, the AAP’s policy statement makes another case for further investments in afterschool programming by highlighting the pro-social benefits these programs have.

While an expansion of afterschool programming was announced under Mayor Eric Adams, the total number of new slots totaled just 20,000. In a 2025 report, [Mapping the Gap: Expanding Afterschool Access in New York City](#), UNH mapped the current landscape of afterschool programming in New York City, and was able to assess the level of access by neighborhood. Based on the number of young people and conservative utilization rates, the City would actually need over 200,000 additional slots to achieve universality. While all expansion is beneficial to the youth and families accessing these new slots, New York City is far from achieving universal access.

Simultaneously, the recently released awards for COMPASS Center-Based and Non-Public School Site Programs will end access to long-time afterschool program sites. While the full scope of center-based programs across the City is unclear due to a lack of transparency, UNH is aware of several long-standing center-based afterschool programs who were not awarded contracts despite scoring high enough on the RFP rubric to be awarded. Two of these programs, Henry Street Settlement’s Boys and Girls Republic serving the Lower East Side, and Hudson Guild’s Elliot Center serving NYCHA’s Chelsea development, have been trusted local providers for over 100 years. This is a very different situation from a program site being turned over to a new provider to conduct services. If these contracts are not restored, there will likely be no programming at these sites, leaving communities who have long been served by DYCD afterschool with no viable alternative.

In the FY27 Executive Budget, the City must fund all center-based afterschool programs who were previously contracted, but not awarded under the COMPASS Center-Based and Non-Public School Site Programs RFP.

Beyond the need to protect and invest in all afterschool program models across New York City, we would like to comment on one of the bills being heard during today’s oversight hearing:

Intro 660 (Williams) - Requiring a study and report on in-person altercations among youth and their associated activity on online platforms

UNH urges the Council to reconsider advancing Intro 660, and meet with youth justice advocates and DYCD-funded program providers to shape any future iteration of this legislation. We support youth safety and take conflict among young people seriously. Youth-serving spaces are most effective when they are built on trust, relationship-building, de-escalation, and support.

¹ “Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents.” The American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/157/2/e2025075320/206129/Digital-Ecosystems-Children-and-Adolescents-Policy>. February 2026.

Young people need places where conflict can be addressed safely and constructively—not policies that undermine that trust or move community-based programs toward surveillance.

Intro 660 would significantly expand surveillance of young people by requiring all programs funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under 24, detail the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report whether an agency responded. This would impact over 120,000 young people, as DYCD funds afterschool programs (COMPASS), Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the Crisis Management System, runaway and homeless youth services, employment supports and more. Intro 660 also specifically calls for identifying strategies agencies can use to “monitor and identify” young people’s activity on online platforms in order to prevent altercations, as well as strategies to “counsel” youth regarding that activity. In addition, the bill would require a report listing specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response in machine-readable format.

Those requirements raise several serious concerns. First, the bill requires online surveillance of young people in DYCD-funded programs which will shift youth-serving spaces away from their core role as trusted places for mediation, support, and conflict resolution, and toward a monitoring role that can damage relationships between youth and staff. Second, the broad scope of the bill, including both “verbal or physical altercations” and “relevant” online activity would result in overreach and subjective interpretation. This would result in ordinary youth conflict, or reactive behavior receiving scrutiny instead of support. In many ways, this bill would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the gang database.

There are also serious data and privacy concerns with this legislation. It does not call for a general review of trends alone; it requires incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response, all in machine-readable form. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, it does not take any proactive steps to protect young people from having personally identifiable information released. Indeed, it is difficult to see how DYCD would report on the “details of the altercation” and “details of any relevant activity on online platforms by youth that led to the altercation” without providing identifiable information. This bill applies only to youth under 24 who attend DYCD-funded programs, meaning this scrutiny will fall on young people already connected to city-funded support systems. Providers have reason to worry that this burden will not be felt evenly and will fall hardest on young people who are already subject to heavier surveillance and system contact. Finally, although this bill is framed as a study and report, it lays the groundwork for future monitoring practices by asking the City to develop strategies for identifying and tracking online activity in the name of prevention.

We urge the Council to support approaches to youth safety that strengthen youth programs as places for prevention, conflict resolution, healing, and care—without expanding online monitoring or building new systems for reporting on and tracking young people in the very spaces meant to support them.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at kconnolly@unhny.org.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE FORTUNE SOCIETY**

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

City Hall,
New York, NY

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

SUBJECT: Joint Hearing of the Committees on Children and Youth, Mental Health and Substance Use, and Oversight and Investigation

PURPOSE: To Express Opposition to Intro 660

Presented by

Reggie Chatman
Director of Policy, The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy

The Fortune Society
29-76 Northern Blvd.
LIC, NY 11101
212-691-7554

<http://www.fortunesociety.com>

Thank you, Deputy Speaker Williams and Chairs Stevens, Caban, and Krishnan, for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Reggie Chatman, and I am the Director of Policy at The Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. In my role, I help lead Fortune's policy and advocacy efforts. I am also a formerly incarcerated youth who spent 25 years in prison starting at age 17, and who now also works as a credible messenger, coach, and mentor for justice impacted youth. Therefore, I have lived experience with respect to how important trust is between youth and the staff of the programs that serve them. It is our belief that Intro 660 may threaten that trust and thus, we have grave concerns about this proposed legislation.

The Fortune Society is a 58-year-old organization committed to providing alternatives to incarceration and supporting successful reentry. Our mission aims to strengthen the fabric of communities by instilling a belief in the power of individuals to change. Through programs shaped by the experiences of our participants, we help rebuild lives. We also seek to change minds through education and advocacy to foster a fair, humane, and rehabilitative justice system. In Fiscal Year 2025, Fortune served more than 18,000 New Yorkers – including over 2,000 people under the age of 25 – through our broad array of programs, including employment services, mental health and substance use treatment, and housing. Every day we see how comprehensive, community-based programming and interventions can change lives, break cycles of involvement in the justice system, and create safer communities for all of us. We have no wrong front door, meaning that whether someone is mandated to participate in our services or comes to us voluntarily, and regardless of which program is their initial form of engagement, they can avail themselves of everything we have to offer. Because of the care with which our staff build trust, it is common for our younger participants to reach back out to their case managers well after they have completed a specific program, to keep them updated on their progress or to inquire about re-enrolling in another Fortune program.

In 2026, we were proud to be selected as a partner organization for the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) Community Resources for Employment and Development (CRED) program. This program offers career development training through mock interviews, resume writing support, digital literacy lessons, and green building operations and maintenance training with our partner Solar One. With the gracious support of DYCD,

participants receive up to 24 weeks or 600 hours of paid training and internship experience, earning \$20 per hour. Upon completion of the program, participants are placed in transitional work opportunities for 21 hours per week. After their internships, participants remain in Fortune's continuum of support and are assigned to an Employment Specialist who will continue to help them find permanent work opportunities. This program operates out of our Supervised Release Program location in the Bronx and is designed for and available to residents in communities most impacted by gun violence. The services have been well received, and we have not experienced any issues between our participants. In fact, during our many years of serving thousands of participants annually, including young people whom we have served in various ways since our founding, we have rarely experienced altercations between participants in our sites.

In CRED, we serve young people between the ages of 18-24. We are therefore concerned that Intro. 660 will impact the young people we serve in a way that erodes their trust in our frontline staff, and Fortune as a whole. Intro 660 would require all programs funded by DYCD, including the CRED program, to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under the age of 24, provide details on the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report on whether an agency responded. The bill also suggests that community-based providers "monitor and identify" young people's online activities to prevent potential altercations. We know that youth-serving spaces are most effective when they are built on trust, relationship building, de-escalation, and support; thus, these requirements raise serious concerns for Fortune as a provider of youth programming. Young people need places where natural conflict can be addressed safely and constructively. Requiring reporting on any altercation and monitoring online activity will instead create an atmosphere that disrupts trust, making relationships between youth and staff feel less authentic and less conducive to the program's intended outcomes.

One of our former young participants shared that after a few weeks, "I started to open up because Fortune was my safe haven in a sense," which enabled him to fully embrace the program. The requirements outlined in Intro. 660 would complicate that sense of safety and vulnerability, thereby undermining the true power of the programs we offer. Mandating reporting on participating youth is simply antithetical to our program's purpose. Our goal is to support

their growth and prevent future criminal legal system involvement – not inadvertently increase their exposure to it because they no longer want to attend a program out of distrust.

The requirements laid out in this legislation would impact over 120,000 young people throughout our city. We are deeply concerned that Intro 660, if implemented, would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the gang database. To protect the integrity of programs at Fortune and at our partner organizations across the city, we urge the Council to refocus its concerns about protecting young people towards investment, rather than surveillance, and to safeguard the critically important relationships built between our staff and the youth we serve.

LETTER OF OPPOSITION

April 21, 2026

To: The Honorable Members of the New York City Council

Subject: Opposition to Introduction No. 450-2026

On behalf of NetChoice, a trade association of leading internet businesses committed to promoting free enterprise and free expression online, we respectfully oppose Int. No. 450-2026, which would impose a one-hour daily limit on minors' access to social media and prohibit platforms from targeting, advertising, or recommending content to youth.

We share the Council's goal of ensuring young people have safe and healthy online experiences. But the Constitution places clear limits on how the government may pursue that objective. Int. No. 450 crosses those limits by restricting access to lawful speech and regulating how that speech is delivered. The First Amendment does not permit the government to ration how much protected expression individuals may access—whether in books, films, or online—and it does not allow the government to dictate how private entities organize and present that expression.

The Bill Raises Serious First Amendment Concerns

Int. No. 450 implicates the First Amendment in two principal ways: (1) by restricting minors' access to lawful speech through a one-hour daily limit, and (2) by prohibiting platforms from engaging in core editorial functions such as recommending or prioritizing content.

First, the restriction on targeting, advertising, and recommendations functions as a content-based regulation of speech. Modern platforms necessarily organize and present content through ranking, curation, and recommendation. Prohibiting these practices for an entire class of users is not a narrow regulation—it is a sweeping restriction on how speech is displayed and received. Such a law must satisfy strict scrutiny, requiring a compelling governmental interest and narrow tailoring. This bill fails that test. It would prohibit not only commercial advertising, but also the recommendation of educational materials, public health resources, civic information, and peer-support communities.

Second, the Supreme Court's decision in *Moody v. NetChoice, LLC* confirms that platforms' decisions about whether and how to present content constitute protected expressive activity. While the Court

remanded for further analysis, it made clear that laws restricting these editorial judgments raise serious First Amendment concerns. A prohibition on recommending or suggesting content to minors directly burdens that protected activity.

The one-hour daily limit raises parallel concerns. By restricting minors' ability to access lawful speech after an arbitrary threshold, the bill burdens both the right to speak and the right to receive information. Courts have consistently recognized that the First Amendment protects not only speakers, but also audiences' access to lawful content.

Recent litigation underscores these constitutional defects. A federal district court recently enjoined a Virginia law imposing similar restrictions on minors' social media use, finding that the law likely constituted a content-based restriction that failed strict scrutiny.¹ The reasoning in that case applies here: broad limits on access to lawful speech, coupled with sweeping restrictions on content curation, are unlikely to survive constitutional review—particularly where less restrictive alternatives are readily available.

Int. No. 450 Creates Significant Privacy and Compliance Risks

Beyond its constitutional flaws, Int. No. 450 would impose substantial practical burdens. Enforcing a one-hour daily limit would require platforms to track user activity with precision, including login times, duration of use, and behavioral patterns. This effectively mandates the creation of a comprehensive tracking system for minors—undermining, rather than enhancing, user privacy.

The bill's prohibition on "targeting, advertising, or suggestion" is also impermissibly vague. It provides no clear standard for what constitutes a prohibited "suggestion" or "targeting." Routine platform functions—such as displaying a feed, surfacing trending topics, or recommending crisis resources—could all fall within its scope. This ambiguity exposes platforms to substantial liability while providing no clear path to compliance.

The inclusion of damages for "emotional harm" compounds this problem. By creating a private right of action untethered to clear standards of causation or conduct, the bill invites expansive litigation based on subjective experiences. Faced with indeterminate liability, platforms would likely overcorrect by limiting access to content or withdrawing services for minors altogether.

The Bill Rests on Uncertain Policy Assumptions

Finally, the bill is premised on a contested and evolving body of research. While some studies identify correlations between social media use and certain mental health outcomes, correlation does not establish causation.² Youth mental health is influenced by a wide range of factors, including family

¹ *NetChoice, LLC v. Jones*, No. 3:25-cv-____ (E.D. Va. Feb. 27, 2026)

² See, e.g., American Psychological Association, *Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence* (2023)

environment, preexisting conditions, and offline social dynamics. There is no clear evidence that government-imposed time limits will improve outcomes.

Moreover, restricting targeted recommendations may have unintended consequences. Public health campaigns, educational institutions, and crisis intervention services rely on targeted outreach to reach vulnerable populations. Eliminating these tools may reduce access to beneficial resources rather than enhance it.

* * * * *

In conclusion, Int. No. 450-2026 likely violates the First Amendment, presents serious implementation challenges, and rests on flawed policy assumptions. Federal courts have repeatedly enjoined materially similar laws regulating minors' access to social media and platform features. At the same time, less restrictive and more effective alternatives already exist, including parental controls, digital wellness tools, and platform-level safety features that allow families to manage minors' online experiences without government mandates. We welcome continued dialogue with the Council and stand ready to work collaboratively on solutions that support young people's well-being while respecting constitutional limits and preserving access to lawful speech.

Sincerely,

Amy Bos
Vice President Government Affairs, NetChoice³

³ The views of NetChoice expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of all NetChoice members.



**The New York City Council
Committees On Mental Health, Children and Youth, and
Oversight and Investigations
Chairs: Caban, Stevens, Krishnan**

Oversight
The Effects of Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health

Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society

April 22, 2026

Submitted by:

Cassandra Kelly
Staff Attorney, Policy Unit, Criminal Law Reform
Ckelly@legal-aid.org
The Legal Aid Society
Criminal Defense Practice
49 Thomas Street
New York, NY 10013

The Legal Aid Society, founded in 1876, is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit legal services agency, providing comprehensive legal services to low-income individuals and families in all five boroughs of New York City. Legal Aid's mission is to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by ensuring that no New Yorker is denied access to justice because of poverty. For 150 years, our growth has mirrored that of the city we serve. We have expanded our work to

passionately advocate for individuals, families, and our youth by fighting for the most vulnerable populations not only in court, but also beside them in their communities, before the City Council, and in Albany in hopes that they will eventually receive true equity and be treated with humanity. We look forward to the day when Black and Brown impoverished communities will receive the investments and support they need to flourish. With this mission in mind, we submit this testimony in strong opposition to Int. 660 which calls for the surveillance, investigation, and destruction of the programmatic spaces where our young people feel the safest.

While we appreciate the stated goal of this oversight hearing to protect our youth from the negative impact of social media, Int. 660 is very far from the solution. There are no amendments to the surveillance called for in Int. 660 that could make it safe for our children. If this Council wants to protect our youth from online exchanges turning into negative in-person encounters, it must continue to support the cure violence model of the Crisis Management System (CMS) - a network that has worked to reimagine what public safety and deescalation means. The power and impact of social media is felt across all ages, races, and social classes, not just among impoverished Black and Brown youth. Social media squabbles turning into in-person altercations is a universal problem that is not isolated to Black and Brown youth or families. Deescalation does not require surveillance and reporting, but rather the careful and attentive work of credible messengers. Credible messengers work directly in their communities and treat violence as a public health problem, using their reputations to build trust in communities which, in turn, allows them to recognize and interrupt potentially violent events. This is the “cure violence” approach that this Council embraced almost 15 years ago when it created the NYC Crisis Management System-- a system based on the use of “credibility, *trust*, and access to reach those at the highest risk, identifying conflicts before they escalate, mediating disputes, and following up to prevent

relapses.¹Emphasis added).^[50] A report by the NYC Comptroller's Office credited the system – predicated on trust - with potentially preventing 1,567 shootings between 2012 and 2024, pointing to an average reduction of 7.4 gun violence incidents a year in precincts with an active, registered organization.³

Int. 660 will upend the ability of credible messengers to create this essential trust by requiring city-funded organizations across our five boroughs to surveil and report on our children. This approach will inevitably be racially disparate in its application as mostly Black and Brown youth benefit and participate in programs funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Office of Neighborhood Safety. The bill creates surveillance and unnecessary intrusion in safe spaces created for our young people; destroying their safe havens by inviting in surveillance and reporting. Int. 660 mirrors the ills of the rogue NYPD gang database which targets, labels, and surveils our youth instead of investing in the actual support – and safe spaces – they need.

Surveillance and Privacy Concerns

¹ See Ransford C, Williams M, Slutkin G., *A Systematic Review on the Effectiveness of the Cure Violence Approach*. Inquiry. 2025 Jan-Dec;62:469580251366142. doi: 10.1177/00469580251366142. Epub 2025 Sep 9. PMID: 40922561; PMCID: PMC12420962. Available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12420962/>

³ See SHANNON CHAFFERS Amsterdam News Staff, Report for America Corps Member and Tandy Lau January 29, 2026 “Will Mamdani hit his target on gun violence prevention?” <https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2026/01/29/will-mamdani-hit-his-target-on-gun-violence-prevention/> quoting The Cure for Crisis: The Power and Potential of Community Violence Intervention BUREAU OF POLICY AND ORGANIZING March 2025 by the Office of NYC Comptroller Brad Lander available at <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/The-Cure-for-Crisis.pdf>

The broad collection of data required by Int. 660 is inconsistent with its stated purpose of creating tools meant to prevent online exchanges between young people from becoming in-person altercations. Although the bill outlines an intent to collect incidents of online disputes, it requires the collection and investigation of *all* in-person altercations regardless of whether there is a connecting link to social media. This would authorize yet another dangerous surveillance database that disproportionately tracks young Black and Brown New Yorkers.

Over the past few years, advocates, alongside numerous City Council members, have fought for the passage of Int. 460, which abolishes NYPD's rogue GANGS database. A 2023 audit completed by the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD estimated that the database holds records on 17,500 to 42,000 New Yorkers, some as young as 11 years old. Ninety-nine percent of those in the database are Black and Latinx.⁴ Int. 660 would create an even larger, broader database – that would very likely skew with the same racially disparate cataloguing of young Black and Brown children and, unlike the rogue NYPD gang database, would have the official approval of this Council. This massive database would go into effect with a multitude of privacy concerns left unanswered. We urge you to consider what prevents ICE from accessing this data? What prevents NYPD? Who will have control over the data, and what are the penalties for accessing, using, or copying the data without authorization?

Releasing the "details of the altercation" and "details of any relevant activity on online platforms by youth that led to the altercation" is a significant invasion of privacy, which is not sufficiently covered by the inadequate limitations set forth in section (c)(4) of the proposal. Details of a far-ranging and specific nature will serve to publicly reveal private, identifying information about young people online without their consent. This both breaks the trust that programs work to

⁴ See report released April of 2023 available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doi/reports/pdf/2023/16CGDRpt.Release04.18.2023.pdf>

build with their participants while also potentially fanning the flames of potential conflict -- by cataloguing observed “altercations” which could potentially lead to retaliation and further altercations.

Int. 660 is Impractical to Implement

According to a [2024 report](#) by this Council, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) funds over 1,339 community-based organizations serving roughly 423,000 youth, including over 900 COMPASS NYC and SONYC afterschool programs. These programs also provide summer jobs (Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)), literacy, immigrant services, and support for runaway and homeless youth. Nor is this bill limited to this expansive set of DYCD programs – it will also put this reporting and surveilling requirement on the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). ONS combines the efforts of the Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) and the Office to Prevent Gun Violence (OPGV) -- programs that also span our city. The investigation and surveillance requirements within the bill would apply to thousands of children and youth programs and providers. The bill states it is the duty of the Commissioner to gather data, but based on the multitude of organizations that receive DYCD and ONS funding, this not only creates a seemingly impossible burden for the Commissioner, but ensures there is no way to obtain this information without the involvement of providers, which demands the breaking of confidentiality and trust with the families and community members these providers serve.

Protect Youth Safe Havens from Becoming Extensions of Law Enforcement

At The Legal Aid Society, we know all too well how important it is for young people to trust their program providers. Our Community Justice Unit works within a network of 32 crisis

management programs citywide, made up of credible messengers, outreach workers, and violence interrupters. Across all five boroughs, CMS programs are built on one core foundation: trust. Credible messengers, outreach workers, and violence interrupters are effective because they are embedded, live and work in the same communities they serve. They are people who have lived experience, who understand the realities on the ground, and who can step into conflicts before they escalate into violence. Young people engage with CMS not because they feel monitored, but because they feel heard, supported, and respected. That trust is what allows outreach workers and violence interrupters to mediate disputes, prevent retaliation, and connect young people to real resources at critical moments.

Introducing social media monitoring and altercation tracking into this work risks undermining the very foundation of the work. Historically, violence prevention through CMS has never relied on monitoring and reporting about youth social media usage. Rather, that space has largely been associated with law enforcement. Bringing CMS and other providers into a monitoring role blurs the lines between support and surveillance. It will likely shift how young people perceive credible messengers, outreach workers, and violence interrupters from trusted community-based support to perceived extensions of enforcement. Once that trust is destroyed, it becomes significantly harder to reach young people in moments when intervention matters most.

Youth across all five boroughs are already experiencing multiple layers of surveillance in schools, housing, and public spaces. Adding another layer within community-based prevention spaces risks reducing engagement rather than increasing safety.

We all share the same goal: reducing violence and protecting young lives. But the most effective CMS and program-based work is relationship-based, not surveillance-based. If we want to strengthen outcomes across the City, we should invest in credible messengers, outreach workers,

and violence interrupters, not introduce systems that are likely to weaken the trust that makes this work successful.

Int. 660 is Not the Answer

We urge this Council to protect our youth and unequivocally oppose Int. 660. When surveillance increases, young people don't feel safer — they disengage. They pull back from programs, from services, and from the very adults who are trying to support them. Trust and surveillance cannot coexist.

Int. 660 turns providers into extensions of law enforcement while destroying the safe spaces where our children should be free. There is no way to amend Int. 660 in a way that will adequately protect our youth. The creation of any database that investigates, surveils, labels, and targets our children will be harmful. If creating tools for prevention and deescalation are the goal, we recommend that this Council convene the many DYCD and ONS providers across our City to hold listening sessions to understand the resources they need and the ways they can continue to offer safe spaces for our young people to confront conflict in a reasoned and non-physical way. Our City does not need large-scale surveillance structures to protect our children; we need to invest in the resources and tools that flow from the community-based providers doing the work of violence interruption. Instead of spending 5 million dollars on a large scale database⁵ that breaks trust and frustrates the work of violence interruption, we urge this Council to dedicate that 5 million dollars to strengthening the programs already working to ensure we are creating the conditions that allow our youth to flourish.

⁵ The \$5 million figure is taken from the City Council hearing on April 21st, 2026 provided by representative from DYCD in response to Council questioning.

**Testimony at the Joint Hearing of Committee on Children and Youth and
Committee on Mental Health and Substance Use and the Committee on Oversight
and Investigation**

April 21, 2026

OPPOSE: INTRO 660.

On behalf of Youth Represent, which provides legal services, advocacy skills training, and youth development programming to youth aged 26 and under throughout New York City, **I urge you to oppose Int. 660.** We support youth safety and take conflict among young people seriously. Youth-serving spaces are most effective when they are built on trust, relationship-building, de-escalation, and support. Young people need places where conflict can be addressed safely and constructively—not policies that undermine that trust or move community-based programs toward surveillance.

Intro 660 would significantly expand surveillance of young people by requiring all programs funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development to report on in-person verbal or physical altercations involving youth under 24, detail the reasons for those altercations, examine related online activity, and report whether an agency responded. This would impact over 120,000 young people, as DYCD funds afterschool programs (COMPASS), Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the Crisis Management System, runaway and homeless youth services, employment supports and more. Intro 660 also specifically calls for identifying strategies agencies can use to “monitor and identify” young people’s activity on online platforms in order to prevent altercations, as well as strategies to “counsel” youth regarding that activity. In addition, the bill would require a report listing specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response in machine-readable format.

Those requirements raise several serious concerns. First, the bill requires online surveillance of young people in DYCD-funded programs which will shift youth-serving spaces away from their core role as trusted places for mediation, support, and conflict resolution, and toward a monitoring role that can damage relationships between youth and staff. Second, the broad scope of the bill, including both “verbal or physical altercations” and “relevant” online activity would result in overreach and subjective interpretation. This would result in ordinary youth conflict, or reactive behavior receiving scrutiny instead of support. In many ways, this bill would create a new surveillance database of our youth that in effect could become a new iteration of the gang database.

There are also serious data and privacy concerns with this legislation. It does not call for a general review of trends alone; it requires incident-level reporting on specific altercations, related online activity, and agency response, all in machine-readable form. Although the bill states the report should not violate existing privacy laws, it does not take any proactive steps to protect young people from having personally identifiable information released. Indeed, it is difficult to see how DYCD would report on the “details of the altercation” and “details of any relevant activity on online platforms by youth that led to the altercation” without providing identifiable information. This bill applies only to youth under 24 who attend DYCD-funded programs, meaning this scrutiny will fall on young people already connected to city-funded support systems. Providers have reason to worry that this burden will not be felt evenly and



will fall hardest on young people who are already subject to heavier surveillance and system contact. Finally, although this bill is framed as a study and report, it lays the groundwork for future monitoring practices by asking the City to develop strategies for identifying and tracking online activity in the name of prevention.

For both our legal services and youth programming, Youth Represent brings together youth from different neighborhoods of New York City with a wide range of legal system involvement. Many come with significant histories of adverse childhood experiences. Conflicts within groups of young people are normal, and our organization has adopted safety and de-escalation protocols rooted in restorative justice practices to address them when they arise. Safety is always the priority, but maintaining trust is also essential, both for the effectiveness of our programs and for maintaining safety for all. Our participants need to be able to share information with us freely without fear of us reporting it. In some cases, reporting a conflict could further escalate an issue that is otherwise resolved.

Youth Represent supports the goal of better understanding the root of conflicts between young people. We welcome support from DYCD in continually improving our practices for avoiding and de-escalating conflict when it happens, and sharing best practices among organizations to keep all youth participants and staff safe. For all of these reasons, we urge the Council to reject Int. 660 and instead support approaches to youth safety that strengthen youth programs as places for prevention, conflict resolution, healing, and care—without expanding online monitoring or building new systems for reporting on and tracking young people in the very spaces meant to support them.

To truly understand how online activities can drive conflict in young people's lives, the City should instead fund qualitative research that engages young people in both the study design and as experts to provide information on how this plays out in their own lives. Rather than surveilling youth, we would learn much more by talking with them directly about their own lived experience. By providing young people a space to share, and a role in the study design, the City would get in-depth and actionable information about how to improve youth safety and well-being. Additionally, this would connect young people to the world of research and improve their economic health by providing stipends for participation.

If you have any questions about our testimony or would like additional information, please reach out to Kate Rubin, Director of Policy (krubin@youthrepresent.org; (646) 759-8079. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Cuddles Child Care Center

329 Broadway Brooklyn, NY 11211

April 24, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Health
Jointly with the Committee on Oversight & Investigations
and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education

Re: Follow-Up Submission – Child Care Program Background Checks Hearing (April 22, 2026)

Dear Chair Schulman, Chair Gutierrez, Deputy Speaker Williams, and Members of the Committee:

Please accept this submission as a follow-up to the oral testimony delivered at the April 22, 2026 hearing regarding Child Care Program Background Checks.

Included in this submission are:

- The original oral testimony presented at the hearing
- A follow-up written testimony expanding on the issues discussed
- Supporting exhibits (Exhibits A–F) documenting specific examples encountered in the course of daily operations

These materials are intended to provide additional clarity and real-world documentation of the challenges child care providers face in navigating the current Comprehensive Background Check (CBC) and State Central Register (SCR) clearance processes.

The examples included are not isolated incidents, but rather representative of recurring issues that directly impact staffing, program capacity, and access to care for families.

Certain personal identifying information has been redacted from the exhibits to protect privacy.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to this matter and the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Beily Appel
Human Resources Coordinator

**Testimony of Cuddles Day Care Center
New York City Council Hearing**

Committee on Health

***Jointly with the Committee on Oversight & Investigations and the Subcommittee on
Early Childhood Education***

Child Care Program Background Checks Oversight

April 22, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Schulman, Chair Gutierrez, Deputy Speaker and Chair Williams, and members of the Committee.

My name is Beily Appel, and I am the Human Resources Coordinator at Cuddles Child Care Center in Williamsburg. Cuddles currently serves nearly 150 children, with capacity to serve nearly 300 children across our programs.

Thank you, Chair Gutierrez, for visiting Cuddles last week. We appreciated the opportunity to share our program and discuss the realities facing providers and families. Our staff was grateful for your care and compassion.

I am here today to speak about the staff clearance and credentialing process, which remains one of the biggest barriers to hiring and maintaining qualified staff. Streamlining this process is essential if centers are going to recruit workers efficiently, respond to staffing needs, and continue providing safe, stable, high-quality care for children and families.

One of the most difficult issues involves staff transitioning from one childcare program to another. Currently, a worker must obtain a termination letter before the CBC/SCR process can even begin with the new employer. Once that termination letter is issued, the worker may lose pay from their prior employer yet cannot begin working for the new employer until clearance is completed. This creates serious financial hardship for staff and leaves programs struggling to fill positions.



Cuddles operates two separate licensed programs, an Infant/Toddler program and a Preschool program. When staff move between these co-located programs within the same organization and building, they are often required to repeat the full clearance process from the beginning, even though there has been no change in employer, location, or background status. That is unnecessary and inefficient. It also makes it very difficult to use already-cleared staff to temporarily cover absences or serve as floaters across both programs, which creates added logistical and financial strain.

For that reason, we are encouraged by Councilman Abreau's Intro 0015-2026, which would prevent unnecessary repeat background checks for providers, employees, and volunteers who have already been cleared within the previous five years. We are hopeful that this will also help allow staff to be linked to more than one program without requiring a separate clearance for each one.

We further would like to raise other issues during the clearance process, including:

Applicants are asked for exact address histories for prior residences – very often they don't recall the exact month and year of older moves.

We also continue to encounter vague deficiency and rejection notices that do not clearly explain what is missing or how to correct it, along with long processing delays and little or no information about application status while materials are pending.

In addition, applicants with foreign-language diplomas often face unnecessary obstacles because of restricted translation options, which can delay their ability to complete the process.

Finally, legally authorized workers who do not yet have a Social Security number can face serious barriers in moving forward with the clearance process, even when they are otherwise fully eligible to work.

Thank you for your attention and for supporting efforts to reduce unnecessary barriers while helping centers keep qualified staff in classrooms.

FOLLOW-UP WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMISSION

Cuddles Child Care Center

Committee on Health

Jointly with the Committee on Oversight & Investigations and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education

Oversight Hearing: Child Care Program Background Checks

April 22, 2026

Follow-Up to Oral Testimony

This submission is provided as a follow-up to oral testimony delivered at the April 22, 2026 hearing regarding child care program background checks.

Executive Summary

Cuddles Child Care Center supports the intent of the Comprehensive Background Check (CBC) and State Central Register (SCR) systems in ensuring child safety. However, the current process creates significant operational barriers that delay hiring, duplicate effort, and place unnecessary strain on both workers and providers.

These barriers result in delayed placement of qualified staff, understaffed classrooms, and reduced access to childcare despite available capacity. The issues below are recurring challenges encountered in the daily operation of a licensed New York City child care center.

Operational Impact

Cuddles currently serves nearly 150 children and has the capacity to serve nearly 300. We frequently have available seats and qualified staff ready to work, yet are unable to move forward due to delays and restrictions in the clearance process.

Key Issues

Address History Requirements Cause Delays (See Exhibit A)

Applicants are required to provide precise address histories with exact dates. In practice, many cannot recall exact information from years prior. Even minor inconsistencies can result in applications being placed on hold, delaying hiring for issues that are not related to safety.

Rejections Without Clear Guidance (See Exhibit B)

Applications are often rejected without clear explanation or instructions for resolution. This leads to repeated submissions, extended delays, and unnecessary administrative burden for both employers and applicants.

Lack of Timely Processing and Transparency

Applications frequently remain pending for extended periods with little or no communication. This makes staffing planning extremely difficult and prevents timely placement of qualified workers.

Barriers Related to Foreign Diplomas (See Exhibits C-1 and C-2)

Requirements to use limited approved translation or evaluation services create delays, increase costs, and restrict access for otherwise qualified candidates.

Termination Requirement Creates Financial Hardship (See Exhibits D-1 through D-4)

Applicants are often required to leave their current employment before the clearance process can proceed. This creates a period where they are not working and not earning income, while still unable to begin employment elsewhere.

Unclear Communication and Strict Deadlines (See Exhibit E)

Applicants and employers are given deadlines to resolve issues without clear or complete instructions. This increases the likelihood of rejection and further delays.

Barriers for Workers Without Social Security Numbers

There is no consistent or clearly communicated process for legally authorized workers who do not yet have Social Security numbers, creating unnecessary obstacles to employment.

Duplicate Clearance Requirements Across Programs (See Exhibit F)

Even within the same organization and location, staff are often required to repeat the clearance process when moving between programs. This prevents efficient staffing and limits flexibility within centers.

Recommendations

- Allow portable clearances across programs and employers.
- Eliminate duplicate CBC and SCR processing.
- Allow reasonable flexibility in address history reporting.
- Require clear, actionable deficiency and rejection notices.
- Establish predictable processing timelines and status updates.
- Allow clearance processing to begin prior to termination from a prior employer.
- Expand flexibility for foreign credential evaluation.
- Provide clear guidance for workers without Social Security numbers.

Conclusion

The attached exhibits are not theoretical concerns - they are real, repeated examples, a few of many, many more, from daily operations at a licensed New York City child care center. These barriers directly delay hiring, reduce available childcare slots, and place unnecessary strain on working families and providers.

We appreciate the Council's attention to this issue and the opportunity to provide both testimony and supporting documentation.

Exhibits Attached

- Exhibit A - Address History Verification Delay
- Exhibit B - Rejection Without Clear Guidance
- Exhibit C-1 - Foreign Diploma / Evaluation Requirement
- Exhibit C-2 - Foreign Diploma / Evaluation Supporting Document
- Exhibit D-1 - Prior Program / Termination Confirmation Issue
- Exhibit D-2 - Prior Program / Termination Confirmation Issue
- Exhibit D-3 - Prior Program / Termination Confirmation Issue
- Exhibit D-4 - Prior Program / Termination Confirmation Issue
- Exhibit E - Application Hold and Deadline Issue
- Exhibit F - Duplicate Clearance Restriction Across Programs
- Exhibit F-2 - Supporting Documentation for Program Clearance Issue

Note: Certain personal identifying information has been redacted for privacy.

Respectfully submitted,

Beily Appel

Human Resources Coordinator
Cuddles Child Care Center

PAGE 2

Exhibit A
Page 1

From: Shawn Shafat <sshafat@health.nyc.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 8, 2026 10:05 AM
To: Cuddles HR
Cc: Employees; [REDACTED]
Subject: Background Check Application on Hold - DC44026 [REDACTED] | BLA-0000113556
Attachments: OCFS-LDSS-3370-DCCS.pdf

Good morning,

CCU is reviewing BLA-0000113556 for [REDACTED]. The application process is currently on hold due to the following reason(s):

- SCR was not processed for the applicant under the permitted child care program listed on the BLA.
- Address history verification required.

We require that the applicant reply via email directly using their own email and confirm the correct information for their address dates. In previous applications to our unit, applicant stated the start date for their current address [REDACTED] Street) to be 12/2008, 10/2010 and 08/2009 (from last BLA), also meaning their previous address's end date being the same three dates. Applicant must verify which is the correct dates if any of the mentioned or a different date that is the accurate residency end date for [REDACTED] Street and start date for [REDACTED] Street.

Once verified, applicant must complete a new LDSS-3370 Form with information provided accurately on the Form. No SCR request was submitted for the applicant, an SCR online database check request must be submitted by the child care program with matching accurate information entered in the SCR database.

In order for processing to continue, complete the below:

- Have the applicant reply to this email and state their complete address history accurately. Verification must come directly from the applicant. Their provided email is Cc'd on this email.
- Have the applicant complete a new/blank LDSS-3370 Form with all information entered accurately on the form.
- Provide a copy of the newly completed form.
- Submit an SCR online database check request via OCFS for the applicant with all information entered accurately.
- Provide a copy of the SCR request report.

Respond by replying to this email. Provide documents as PDF attachments. **DO NOT** submit a new CBC application (BLA#) to provide documents. I will update current BLA with provided items.

Failure to respond and return necessary information and documents satisfactorily within 5 business days from the time/date of this email will result in rejection of this application.

Thank you,

Shawn Shafat [he/him/his]
Clearance Administrator
Bureau of Child Care - Central Clearance Unit
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – City of New York
125 Worth Street, New York, NY 10013
Telephone: 646.632.6692
Email: sshafat@health.nyc.gov | nyc.gov/health



Exhibit A
page 2

Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Exhibit B

From: NYC DOHMH <childcarecbc@comms.health.nyc.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2026 10:17 AM
To: Cuddles HR
Cc: Employees
Subject: Background Clearance Application Rejected - DC44026 [REDACTED] BLA-0000113556



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP
Commissioner

Dear Child Care Provider,

The Comprehensive Background Check application number BLA-0000113556 for [REDACTED] has been rejected for the following reason(s):

- **SCR - SCR was not processed for the Applicant under the Permitted child care program listed on the Background Check Request Form.**

If you want to clear this applicant, you must submit a complete application using the online tool:[\[LINK\]](#)

Please note: This message was automatically generated. Please do not respond to this email.

Thank you,
Bureau of Child Care
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene



Exhibit C-1

 Outlook

Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: DC44026 - DC44028

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Thu 4/3/2025 3:22 PM
To: Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED] - Cuddles <[REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>; Zeeva Altman <zaltman@health.nyc.gov>

Got it, thanks!



300 Rodney Street
929.329.1010

From: Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>
Sent: Thursday, April 3, 2025 12:48 PM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>
Cc: [REDACTED] - Cuddles <[REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>; Zeeva Altman <zaltman@health.nyc.gov>
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Re: DC44026 - DC44028

Hey [REDACTED]

Ana's qualifications needs to be transcribed and evaluated. Attached are the DCAS directives

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 3, 2025 12:41 PM
To: Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>; Zeeva Altman <zaltman@health.nyc.gov>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: DC44026 - DC44028

Hi Jean,

I originally planned to hire [REDACTED] as a group teacher. However, her diploma and certifications are from another country. I was unsure if that is acceptable, and did not want to delay the process. I have [REDACTED] to replace her.

I attached [REDACTED] certificates to this message, please advise.



BLA-0000086697 Mamel Ausch

From Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>

Date Mon 7/7/2025 10:02 AM

To Employees [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>; [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com>

Dear Applicant,

I am working on processing your clearance application for Group Teacher. In our system, shows that you are currently an Assistant Teacher for United Academy DC33478 and 35310 and 24816. In order to proceed with your application, please respond that you no longer associated with those programs with an end date.

Kindly confirm receipt of this email.

Jean Berquin [*he, him, his*]

Operations Associate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – City of New York

195 Montague St. 4th Floor

Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

T 718.222.6447

Email: jberquin@health.nyc.gov | nyc.gov/health



Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Fw: Background Clearance Application Rejected - DC44026 | [REDACTED] | BLA-0000089252

From Cuddles HR <HR@cuddlescenter.com>

Date Tue 8/26/2025 3:25 PM

To jberquin@health.nyc.gov <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>

Cc [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com; [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com

Hi Jean,

We're having some complications with the clearance for the above applicant and hope you can assist us with this one. [REDACTED] has previously worked at Simcha Tots but is no longer employed there since May 2025. Please advise how we should proceed with her clearance submission.

Thank you!

From: noreply@salesforce.com <noreply@salesforce.com> on behalf of NYC DOHMH

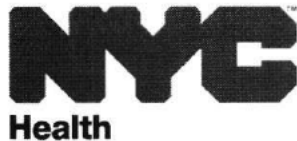
<childcarecbc@comms.health.nyc.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, August 26, 2025 3:09 PM

To: Cuddles HR <hr@cuddlescenter.com>

Cc: [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com

Subject: Background Clearance Application Rejected - DC44026 | [REDACTED] BLA-0000089252



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Michelle Morse, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Dear Child Care Provider,

The Comprehensive Background Check application number BLA-0000089252 for [REDACTED] has been rejected for the following reason(s):

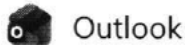
- **Multiple CBC Request Forms/ DCID numbers were submitted for this Applicant. The Applicant's role is Group Teacher and can only be CBC cleared for one (1) Permitted child care program.**

If you want to clear this applicant, you must submit a complete application using the online tool: [\[LINK\]](#)

Please note: This message was automatically generated. Please do not respond to this email.

Thank you,
Bureau of Child Care

Exhibit D-3



BLA-0000086104 [REDACTED]

From Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>

Date Thu 7/3/2025 12:18 PM

To [REDACTED]@gmail.com [REDACTED]@gmail.com; [REDACTED]>

Hey [REDACTED]

I noticed in the system that [REDACTED] is currently a group teacher for Sunny Tots Brooklyn DC43997. I would need an end date for that program.

Jean Berquin [*he, him, his*]

Operations Associate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – City of New York

195 Montague St. 4th Floor

Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

T 718.222.6447

Email: jberquin@health.nyc.gov | nyc.gov/health



Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Exhibit D-4



BLA-0000081973 [REDACTED]

From Jean Berquin <jberquin@health.nyc.gov>

Date Wed 5/21/2025 9:24 AM

To [REDACTED]@cuddlescenter.com> [REDACTED]@gmail.com [REDACTED]@gmail.com>

Hey [REDACTED]

I noticed in the system that [REDACTED] is currently a Group Teacher for BNOS Yakov DC21229 and Assistant Teacher for United Academy DC150. Please respond that she's not in the previous program with an end date.

Jean Berquin [*he, him, his*]

Operations Associate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – City of New York

195 Montague St. 4th Floor

Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

T 718.222.6447

Email: jberquin@health.nyc.gov | nyc.gov/health



Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Exhibit E

From: Mindy M. Centeno <mcenteno1@health.nyc.gov>
Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 2:23 PM
To: Cuddles HR
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: SCR Request for [REDACTED] BLA-114489 (DC44026)

Dear Child Care Provider,

Thank you for submitting a Comprehensive Background Check application. Unfortunately, the application for [REDACTED] is currently on hold due to the following reason:

- **The SCR was not processed for the Applicant.**

To proceed, please process the SCR under the correct Permitted childcare program. Once complete, reply to this email with the SCR receipt. If you have any questions or need further clarification, I am happy to assist.

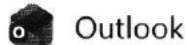
Failure to return the necessary documents by **April 28th, 2026, by 3pm** will result in the rejection of this application.

Best,
Mindy Centeno
Clearance Administrator
Bureau of Child Care - Central Clearance Unit (CCU)
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – City of New York
125 Worth Street, New York, New York 10013
Telephone 646-632-6771
Email: mcenteno1@health.nyc.gov | nyc.gov/health



Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Exhibit F
Page 2



RE: [EXTERNAL] [REDACTED] BLA-0000092569

From CCUQuestions <CCUQuestions@health.nyc.gov>

Date Thu 9/4/2025 2:33 PM

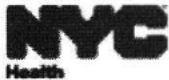
To Cuddles HR <HR@cuddlescenter.com>; CCUQuestions <CCUQuestions@health.nyc.gov>

Cc [REDACTED]

Good day,
Thank you for your inquiry.

An application was submitted for the Applicant for a Group Teacher role on 07/28/2025, BLA 89653 for DCID 44026 and approved on 09/04/2025. The applicant will not be eligible to work as a Group Teacher for BLA 92569 under DCID 44028. Group Teachers can only work under one program/DCID.

CCU Questions Team_LM
NYC DOHMH - Bureau of Child Care
125 Worth Street 9th Floor., New York, NY 10013
Email: CCUQuestions@health.nyc.gov



From: Cuddles HR <HR@cuddlescenter.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 4, 2025 1:08 PM
To: CCUQuestions <CCUQuestions@health.nyc.gov>
Cc: Latisha Jones <ljones9@health.nyc.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] [REDACTED] BLA-0000092569

Some people who received this message don't often get email from hr@cuddlescenter.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Good day,

We have recently received the CBC approval letter for the above referenced applicant.

The program, DC44026, listed on the letter is for the original BLA number submitted on 7/28.

We have submitted a new BLA number for this applicant on 8/25 for a different program.

Please advise.

Thank you,

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. Forward suspect email to phish@oti.nyc.gov as an attachment (Click the More button, then forward as attachment).

Sent from the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. This email and any files transmitted with it may contain confidential information and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. This footnote also confirms that this email message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.



“I Have a Dream” Foundation Testimony to the Committees on Children and Youth, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and Oversight and Investigations

April 21, 2026 Hearing on The Effects Social Media and Screen Time on Youth Mental Health

Thank you to Chairs Althea Stevens, Tiffany Caban, and Shekar Krishnan for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melissa Hunte, and I am a Social Work Manager at “I Have A Dream” Foundation.

“I Have a Dream” builds cohorts of “Dream Scholars” from under-resourced communities and provides a holistic continuum of afterschool and summer programming and services for young people from kindergarten all the way through college, along with guaranteed post-secondary scholarship support.

We currently operate two program sites in New York City public schools, serving 220 Dream Scholars ages 5-23 years old. Each of our young person’s journey stretches over more than a decade of wrap-around programming from kindergarten to their first job.

At “I Have a Dream”, we run a Digital Citizenship class that specifically helps our young Scholars navigate online spaces safely, keep information private online, and understand the role of social media in friendships. This programming is reinforced by a weekly anti-bullying group sessions within our social-emotional support framework, part of our Overcoming Obstacles curriculum rooted in the evidence based approach utilized by CASEL (collaborative for academic, social and emotional learning) which we adapt as our Scholars progress through grade levels to ensure age-appropriate guidance. They learn the importance of being a good friend, empathy, how to report bullying and standing up for what's right; all which are rooted in the CASEL 5 competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making and self-management.

Building on this foundation, we recently integrated monthly parent workshops on social media safety to bridge the gap between home and digital life. Due to our long term approach here at “I Have A Dream” Foundation, these skills are reinforced consistently through high school and beyond.

I want to thank the Council for convening today’s hearing and exploring policy solutions to ensure that our young people use social media responsibly, so that digital literacy can serve as a tool for success for our young people, not for setbacks, and urge the Council to continue to invest in community-based programming that reinforces these lessons to our young people and their parents.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

TO: NYC Council Committee on General Welfare
DATE: April 15, 2026
RE: TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE
FROM: MY EMAIL: eneddderman@schools.nyc.gov

A CALL FOR THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TO ALLOCATE AT LEAST \$250.000
TO SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE TO FUND A NETWORK OF SCHOOL-RUN FARM
STANDS AND HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS TO ADDRESS CHRONIC FRESH FOOD
INEQUITY AND INSECURITY

Dear NYC Council General Welfare Committee Chair Crystal Hudson and Committee Members:

My name is Evelyn Nedderman and I am an educator at Meyer Levin Middle School. I am also a resident of New York City, and I am submitting testimony to support Seeds in the Middle's request for \$250,000 for a new, more impactful approach to addressing chronic food insecurity and inequity. Many of our low-income neighborhoods continue to suffer from a systemic lack of access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, cooking classes and healthy choices.

We want our school to be part of this network and are appealing to you to support this powerful initiative. However, we also want to support their efforts in the other boroughs such as the Bronx and Manhattan because they are also experiencing fresh food insecurity. The lack of access to fresh foods in these neighborhoods continues to contribute to high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, maternal and infant mortality rates and premature death - all related to poor diet.

Kindly see Seeds in the Middle's proposal at the end of this letter. This is what we support.

Here is why:

*Writer/Supporter - **PLEASE write here GIVE a paragraph YOUR REASONS here***

THIS IS SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE REQUEST

FY27 FUNDING REQUEST: \$250,000 (for up to 10 school-run farm markets in highest-need neighborhoods)

Overview: This is a call for a new, locally-based strategy to overcome persistent food insecurity and directly address the inequitable systemic lack of fresh fruits and vegetables or healthy choices in NYC's lowest-income, food-insecure zones - all predominantly communities of color suffering from NYC's highest rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, maternal and infant mortality and premature death.

Seeds in the Middle was founded in 2010, named by 4th graders at PS 91 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, among NYC's lowest-income neighborhoods. Educators were inspired by First Lady

Michelle Obama's alarm about tragically high rates of diet-related diseases among Black/Brown Americans.

Educators, parents and students at PS 91 realized they lived at the center of the obesity epidemic. They had no nearby fresh produce, healthy cooking classes, affordable fitness or edible gardens - actually no way to avoid preventable diseases tied to poor diet. The closest farmers market was 2 miles away - a distance some parents walked and still do to get nourishing food for their families.

Then and 16 years later, farmers markets exist only in the wealthiest neighborhoods flush with shops and options to buy healthy at reasonable prices. In the dozens of neighborhoods that Seeds in the Middle serves and has served, farm stands are scant if they exist at all, and produce in supermarkets is often rotten or not fresh, and higher-priced than in affluent areas. The inequity is an invisible wall.

Despite millions of dollars invested by government & foundations, food insecurity, inequity and preventable disease rates have only gone up. Food pantries, free food distributions have not moved the needle on food insecurity and hunger. Nor do they regularly offer fresh healthy food. And people are forced for hours to stand in lines to get anything, always first come first serve. It is not only an insult to dignity, but such a method excludes the most vulnerable who cannot get there, keeps people dependent, fails to grow economic development through food, plentiful in other more fortunate areas. No sustainable access, just ineffective "drive-by" interventions.

This systemic failure is evidenced by NYC statistics year after year: obesity, hunger, diabetes heart disease rates among low-income New Yorkers is only going up, not down. We are calling for:

1. **EQUITABLE LOCALLY-RUN FRESH FOOD ACCESS:** Sustain and expand our network of student-run farm stands in the highest need neighborhoods. **See map**
bit.ly/seedsinthemiddlemap2026
2. **DIGNIFIED, EFFECTIVE HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS:** distributed to those in need to "buy fresh" (no bread line)
3. **FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO NEED HEALTHY FOOD:** Engage schools, community-based and government organizations focused on poverty to identify those who need these Hip2B Healthy Bucks (our young moms and seniors, i.e., who can't wait hours on bread lines)
4. **FRESH COOKING WORKSHOPS;** Hire culinary professionals to help people learn and feel empowered to prepare fresh, nourishing meals at home - guidance they often ask for but don't get.
5. **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Stipends for teens, parents in need, community members identified by schools or local residents to be trained and run markets as sustainable businesses and school fundraisers.
6. **HIP2B HEALTHY CAFES:** Run by students, offering fresh orange juice, smoothies, i.e, to fundraise, instead of candy, junk food, thus making schools healthy oases amid a swamp of unhealthy advertising.
7. **COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCILS:** Residents say what they need and act, empowering healthy change.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

For: New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Good morning Chair and members of the committee.

My name is **Sitan Sako**, entrepreneur and founder currently developing initiatives through **TBS Charity Incorporated and TBS Youth Rise HDFC**. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony advocating for stronger preventive services that help families remain together before crises occur.

In many cases, families enter the child welfare system not because they lack love for their children, but because they lack access to the support systems that help families remain stable. When families are struggling with childcare, employment, housing, or other basic needs, the absence of support can create situations that escalate into deeper system involvement.

Families experiencing poverty should not be pushed deeper into the child welfare system simply because they lack financial resources. Instead, families should be supported with services, opportunities, and community-based programs that help them stabilize their lives and care for their children safely.

There are also many families who want to become independent from the welfare system, but they should not be forced to do so at the expense of their children's safety, stability, or well-being. Preventive services should empower families to move toward independence while ensuring that children remain safe, supported, and connected to their communities.

One of the most important preventive supports is accessible and flexible childcare. When parents have access to reliable childcare, it becomes easier to maintain employment, attend school or training programs, and create stability within the household.

I encourage the City to expand preventive programs such as:

- At-home nanny support vouchers for families experiencing crisis
- Emergency drop-in childcare centers for parents who need immediate childcare assistance
- After-school programs that include academic support and youth mentorship
- Parenting education and family counseling services
- Access to forensic evaluations and evidence-based testing in serious child welfare cases to ensure decisions are based on clear and accurate evidence

Providing flexible childcare options and supportive community programs can help families stabilize their lives and prevent situations that may otherwise lead to family separation.

Organizations like **TBS Charity Incorporated** are working to build programs that deliver these exact types of preventive services within our communities. With support from the City, our organization can help expand access to childcare support, mentorship, academic assistance, and family-centered services that strengthen families and protect children.

I respectfully ask the New York City Council to consider funding TBS Charity Incorporated so we can help deliver these services and support families in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and for your continued commitment to children and families across New York City.

Sincerely,

Sitan Sako

NYC City Council Written Testimony

Sitan Sako

Founder, TBS Charity Incorporated & TBS Youth Rise HDFC

Statement

I am submitting this testimony to share my personal experience and to advocate for urgent reforms within the child welfare system.

Children should never be placed in the care of someone who has abused them—especially when prior reports exist. Yet, this continues to happen.

Families are being forced to navigate a system without full transparency. Parents often do not have access to their discovery, leaving them unable to properly defend themselves while decisions about their children are being made.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Full Access to Discovery:** Families must receive all evidence and reports prior to hearings.
2. **Mandatory Forensic Testing:** Decisions must be based on verified, evidence-based evaluations.
3. **Polygraph Access:** Available in serious cases to support truth verification.
4. **Hospital Accountability:** Mandatory retesting for positive findings and accountability for false reports.
5. **Legal Support Funding:** Ensure low-income families have access to attorneys and expert resources.
6. **Child Safety Protections:** Prohibit placement with individuals who have prior abuse reports.
7. **Prevention Funding:** Support community-based programs like TBS Charity Incorporated and TBS Youth Rise HDFC.

Conclusion

Parents are suffering. Children are suffering. The system must be rooted in truth, transparency, and accountability.

What happened to me should not happen to another family.

Testimony

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Council,

My name is Cherokee, I am the Executive Director of We The People 4 The People By The People, myself along with our partners House of Skillz Barbershop, and Lucian Dojo have created a community-based initiative, called Spread Love, a youth-led, intergenerational anti-bullying program rooted in restorative justice, creative expression, and healing.

We are here today to talk about mental health and substance abuse and we cannot have that conversation without addressing one of the earliest and most overlooked root causes: bullying.

Bullying is not just “kids being kids.” It is often the first exposure many young people have to trauma, rejection, and violence.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 5 students report being bullied nationwide. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports similar numbers, with higher rates among Melanated youth in under-resourced communities.

Here in New York City, data from the New York City Department of Education and New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene show that:

- Nearly 1 in 3 middle school students report being bullied
- Youth who experience bullying are significantly more likely to report persistent sadness, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts
- Victims of bullying are at increased risk of substance use, including alcohol, marijuana, and other coping behaviors

This is not coincidence, it is a pipeline.

Bullying leads to emotional isolation.

Isolation leads to unaddressed mental health needs.

And too often, that leads to self-medication and substance abuse.

We see it every day.

Through our Spread Love Youth-Led Intergenerational Anti-Bullying Initiative, we work directly with elementary school youth across Brooklyn, young people who are already navigating identity, peer pressure, and trauma far too early.

What makes our model different is that we don't just intervene, we transform.

We bring together youth leaders, teaching artists, barbers, stylists, and martial arts instructors to create safe, culturally relevant spaces where young people can:

- Speak openly about bullying through restorative justice circles
- Build confidence through fashion, grooming, and creative expression
- Develop discipline and self-worth through movement and self-defense
- Learn how to resolve conflict without harm

We are not waiting until the crisis, we are working at the prevention level.

Because by the time a young person is in the mental health system or struggling with substance abuse, we are already behind.

What our young people need is:

- Early intervention
- Safe spaces
- Trusted mentors
- And programs that reflect their lived experiences

We have already begun this work in partnership with local schools and trusted community spaces, reaching hundreds of young people. And what we are seeing is clear:

When youth feel seen, supported, and valued, bullying decreases, confidence increases, and healing begins.

So today, we are asking the Council to:

- Invest in community-based, youth-led prevention programs
- Expand funding for arts-integrated mental health initiatives
- Support restorative justice practices in schools
- And recognize that addressing bullying is not separate from mental health and substance abuse, it is foundational to it.

If we truly want to reduce substance abuse and improve mental health outcomes, we must start earlier.

We must start where the harm begins.

We must start with our children.

Thank you.

LA "Cherokee" Dickens



Testimony

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Council,

My name is Cherokee. I am the Executive Director of We The People 4 The People By The People. Alongside our partners, House of Skillz Barbershop and Lucian Dojo, we created Spread Love, a youth-led, intergenerational anti-bullying initiative rooted in restorative justice, creative expression, and healing.

We are here today to talk about mental health and substance abuse. But we cannot have that conversation without addressing one of the earliest, and most overlooked, root causes: bullying.

Bullying is not just “kids being kids.”

For many young people, it is their first experience with trauma, rejection, and violence.

In New York City, nearly 1 in 3 middle school students report being bullied. Youth who experience bullying are significantly more likely to struggle with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, and more likely to turn to substance use as a coping mechanism.

This is not a coincidence. It is a pipeline.

Bullying leads to isolation.

Isolation leads to untreated mental health challenges.

And too often, that leads to self-medication and substance abuse.

We see this every day.

Through our Spread Love initiative, we work directly with elementary school youth across Brooklyn. What makes our model different is that we don't just intervene, we prevent and transform.

We create safe, culturally relevant spaces where young people can speak openly, build confidence, develop discipline, and learn how to resolve conflict without harm.

We are not waiting for a crisis, we are working at the prevention level.

And that brings me to Intro 0660-2026.

While we understand the intent to study the connection between online activity and in-person altercations, we do not support this bill as written.

This approach risks shifting the focus toward monitoring and surveillance of young people instead of addressing the root causes of their behavior.

Monitoring without support can damage trust and push young people further into isolation, the very condition that contributes to harm.

But we are not just here to oppose, we are here to offer a better path forward.

Alternative Recommendation

Instead of focusing primarily on monitoring, we urge the Council to invest in a Community-Based Digital Wellness and Conflict Prevention Initiative that would:

- Fund trusted community organizations to deliver digital literacy and conflict resolution programming
- Provide restorative justice training for youth, families, and community leaders
- Create safe spaces for youth to process online conflict offline before it escalates
- Support peer-led mentorship programs where young people are trained to de-escalate and lead
- Partner with schools and community groups to intervene early, not after incidents occur

This approach prioritizes prevention, trust, and healing, not just data collection.

Because we already know where the problem is. The question is: are we willing to invest in what actually works?

So today, we are asking the Council to:

- Reconsider Intro 0660-2026 in its current form
- Invest in community-based, youth-led prevention programs
- Expand funding for arts-integrated mental health initiatives
- Support restorative justice practices in schools and communities

If we wait until a conflict becomes a report, we are already too late.

If we want different outcomes, we must invest earlier.

We must start where the harm begins.

We must start with our children.

Thank you.

LA “Cherokee” Dickens

Executive Director, We The People 4 The People By The People



I am deeply grateful to Deputy Speaker Williams and Council Members Stevens, Riley, Banks, Hudson, Brooks-Powers, Louis, Farías and Schulman for proposing **Int 0450-2026** and **Int 0451-2026**, as well as Deputy Speaker Williams and Council Members Stevens, Riley, Louis, Brewer, Brooks-Powers, Ung, Salaam, and Hanks for **Int 0660-2026**. As the City Council's Committees on Children & Youth, Mental Health & Substance Use, and Oversight & Investigations was meeting to consider these bills, parents of children lost to online harms were holding a vigil on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to call on our nation's leaders to better protect U.S. children. In the absence of state and federal legislation to protect today's kids, I applaud the aforementioned Council Members for their leadership here in New York City and wholeheartedly support their bills. We need strong measures to keep NYC youth safe.

Int 0450-2026 is an important step forward to improving New York City youth mental and physical health, cognitive function, and social well being. Internal documents uncovered in the recent social media trials in Los Angeles and New Mexico reveal that tech companies have long been aware of their products' harms toward children. The trials also uncovered company intentions to addict children to their platforms. This social media industry-wide profits before people policy has long sought to place the burden of protecting children on parents, many of who do not have the time or bandwidth to police their children's online activities. Moreover, placing this onus on parents creates adversarial relationships between children and their trusted adults that are unfair to both parties leading to a loss of trust and healthy caregiver-child bonding. This damage is not limited to the home. Teachers and counselors must continually redirect youth to more positive modes of engagement only to see their hard work undermined the moment kids are back on their devices, including school-issued laptops. It is well past time that caregivers and children stop taking the blame for corporations that prey upon children with no shame whatsoever.

I strongly urge the City Council to follow the example of the Los Angeles trials and consider YouTube a social media company. YouTube is extremely harmful for children not only because of its addictive autoplay feature, myriad advertisers, and proliferation of inappropriate and factually baseless content. YouTube's engagement based design (as well as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat) prioritizes outrageous content for clicks. It is widely documented that many youth develop parasocial attachments to influencers who model inappropriate, unsafe, and bullying behaviors that are particularly appealing to teenagers, who are developmentally wired to push boundaries and challenge norms. Additionally, the YouTuber world is rife with influencers who start out seeming as though they are presenting content that is a productive way for children to spend time only to quickly introduce coded discriminatory and hate-based content that further divides our society and inspires harms. Some of this content poses direct harms to children themselves.

One parent I know watched her 9th grade son get involved with weightlifting owing to a YouTube influencer. This seemed great on its surface. Their son wanted to be a professional athlete. Working out at home seemed a positive use of time. Soon her son was asking his parents about his appearance. Why did he not have a square jawline? Why was his nose shaped its particular way? Their son continued to ask them questions that were coded toward a preference for Aryan physiognomy. The family, which has Jewish heritage, was horrified. Their son, whose great grandfather's family perished in Nazi camps, refused to acknowledge the coded anti-Semitism. He trusted the YouTuber over his parents. For him, the YouTuber was an expert, not his parents. Next, the teen was questioning the food his family served. The influencer began touting a raw meat diet. The son became convinced that the consumption of anything except raw meat would stunt his growth. Vegetables were poisonous. The family attempted to pursue counseling for their child, but were referred out to a cult deprogrammer. Their son has made progress in this inordinately expensive program, but he remains convinced that his parents have stunted his growth and that the YouTuber is his friend.

This is just one, lesser-reported type of harm that YouTube creates for children and their families. Though YouTube no longer meets the privacy standards of New York State Education Law 2-D it is still widely used in NYC classrooms. Moreover, when students bring school-issued laptops home, parents cannot shut down access to apps, sites, and specific content that they do not children to see. Another family reported that their son recently flunked out of college. When pressed about why they think this happened, they claim their son got “addicted” to watching movies on YouTube while in D.O.E. classrooms. Though many teachers champion YouTube, it is rife with issues. I hope that **Int 0450-2026** will apply to schools. Limiting YouTube access to teacher-only devices inside and outside of school on school-issued laptops would help bolster this bill, which is would be significant step for NYC youth and their circles of care.

Online gaming platforms that have chat functions should also be considered to meet social media criteria. It is widely known that Minecraft and Roblox are unsafe for children due to the proliferation of child predators lurking in their chat spaces. Extremists are also using these chat features to recruit members. As *The New York Times* reported on February 11, 2026, “Taking a page from the child molesters’ playbook, hate groups and terrorist organizations are exploiting games like Minecraft and Roblox and other popular online platforms to recruit a new generation of extremists, researchers say.” Sadly, many parents believe their children are safer at home, online, playing a video game when for many youth this is not the case at all.

I also urge the City Council to ban student-facing social media communications from city public and private schools. I hope that a similar policies may be applied to other institutions (libraries, health centers, youth-facing organizations and service sectors, etc) that drive children toward social media platforms as part of their public engagement messaging strategies.

Please also consider the bootleg social media networks otherwise known as grade-wide texting groups. Nearly every school community has experienced the downside of a well intending parent setting up a grade-wide texting group. At first, it seems like a great way to help kids learn digital skills and to connect outside of school hours. It often devolves into an arena of harm.

After the school bell in one NYC neighborhood this past fall, three boys 6th grade boys attacked another classmate, stripped him naked, and took pictures of their victim. The bullies posted these images to the grade-wide texting group with the message that the girls in the grade would be “raped next.” Though the bullies received a superintendent’s suspension and everyone in the entire neighborhood knew what happened, the incident was never discussed in the school community at large. Nor did the school encourage parents to shut down the texting group, which had now become the locus for a crime. The incident was entirely brushed under the rug, sending the message to kids, suspension aside, that this is perfectly acceptable behavior. I sincerely hope that **Int. 0450-2026**, **Int. 0450-2026**, and **Int. 660-2026** will include grade-wide texting groups in its criteria for social networking.

With the proliferation of A.I., limiting youth access to social media is increasingly urgent. On April 15, 2026, Wired Magazine reported, “Around the world, teenage boys are saving Instagram and Snapchat images of girls they know from school and using harmful “nudify” apps to create fake nude photos or videos of them. These deepfakes can quickly be shared across whole schools, leaving victims feeling humiliated, violated, hopeless, and scared the images will haunt them forever.” (I also hope that the members of this council committee with also support the AIM Coalition’s call for a 2-year Moratorium on generative A.I. in D.O.E. classrooms.)

In the same aforementioned NYC community, a local pediatrician who has been practicing in the neighborhood for over 20 years recently shared that when he first opened his practice, mental health visits in children were a rarity. Now, 1 in 5 of his office visits are now for mental health: anxiety, depression, and ADHD, in particular. One can only imagine these numbers increasing as A.I. takes over youth online spaces.

With social media, many parents understandably feel that once the genie is let out of the bottle there is no putting it back in. As California-based Dr. Richard Freed has stated, if you take a smartphone away from a girl she becomes suicidal. If you take video-games away from boys, they become aggressive. We all know these platforms are not going away and that to the best of our abilities we need to give children who already use them the opportunity to develop healthy boundaries around them. Many teens, in particular, do not want their social media taken away and already struggle with withdrawal. Until they are allowed to experience the benefits of time in offline social spaces, they will have no idea what they are missing. Hopefully limiting access to social media will help kids feel heard while also empowering them to seek more real world connections. With such products that are harmful and addictive by design, no parent should have to suffer the onus of pulling the plug.

I hope that the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will educate the public on the harms of these platforms and encourage families to delay the introduction of screens and internet connected devices such as iPads, which are essentially giant iPhones, as well as delay smart phones. So-called “dumb” phones and flip phones work perfectly well for youth to connect to friends, family, and move through the city safely without any of the distractions of social media systems.

For these laws to be effective, not only does clear enforcement need to be in place, our youth need more safe, real world spaces (what sociologist Jonathan Haidt refers to as 3rd spaces)

where they can be accepted for being the beautiful, energetic, messy, loud, confused, brilliant, dynamic, and seeking creatures we were all once allowed to be at their ages. So many quasi-public places to not allow youth under age 18 unless accompanied by adults which further isolates youth from society at large and forces them onto devices. Kids deserve the chance to participate in society as kids and not to be cordoned off in their bedrooms on devices which are not as safe as we have been made to believe they are. No community deserves gun violence in and around playgrounds and basketball courts and babies being shot by stray bullets. These three bills are likely poised to help address these devastating recent tragedies. In order for these bills to succeed, the city also needs additional real world measures to ensure the rights of NYC youth to safely grow and thrive in their home communities.

The Department of Youth and Community Development and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's studies must be fully independent and free from tech industry buy-in and bias that has infiltrated many of our educational institutions and youth-serving organizations such as the NYC D.O.E. whose many leaders are Google Fellows and recently attended the tech-pushing Global Silicon Valley; the American Association of Pediatrics; Common Sense Media; and other aligned outfits that receive tech industry funds and help bolster tech industry profits. As NYC parent Craig Garrett recently stated in *The New Yorker* with regard to GSV influence around the D.O.E. A.I. policy, "If you ask tobacco companies to help write your school's policy on cigarettes," Garrett quipped, "you're going to end up with guidance on how to smoke responsibly in school." It is my sincere hope that these bills will pass and will be implemented with input from the communities they will most impact rather than the industries that will be sure to find a way to monetize them.

I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Thank you again Deputy Speaker Williams and Council Members Stevens, Riley, Banks, Hudson, Brooks-Powers, Louis, Farías and Schulman for proposing **Int 0450-2026**, **Int 0451-2026**, and Deputy Speaker Williams and

Council Members Stevens, Riley, Louis, Brewer, Brooks-Powers, Ung, Salaam, and Hanks for
Int 0660-2026. I am confident I speak for other parents in offering my support to these bills.

Elyssa East, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] New York, NY 10033 | [REDACTED]

From: [Jack TM.](#)
To: [NYC Council Hearings](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposition to Int 0442-2024 / SAFE for Kids Act - Sergio Tejeda (Constituent, 10456) My testimony within the NYC Council regarding SAFE for kids act bill, and 0442-2024.
Date: Sunday, April 26, 2026 4:55:32 PM

[REDACTED]

Dear city council members of the New York City Council Hall. My name is Sergio Tejeda, and I am against the bill for the SAFE for Kids Act, and Int 0442-2024. This testimony was specifically meant as a voice for other minors. Who are concerned about their privacy rights on the Internet, who will have a voice in the New York City Council Hall. Regarding the concerns for the SAFE for kids act, and Int 0442-2024.

The Bill for SAFE for kids act will only segregate the Internet by age. And will make it harder for younger people like me to search for vital info of the world, in order to understand the things of this world. If we allow this stuff to be unaddressed.

Then we come into the risk of ending up in a world like George Orwell's 1984. Where social issues like lack of parenting, therefore outweigh our right to anonymity on the Internet. And block our ability to be safe online from dangerous people. To which, if they have access to our data, it would lead to identity theft by database breaches, and also invasive government monitoring. Where social issues justify more government tighter control, and less freedom for the people.

That would be similar to the British elected dictatorship in Europe. That uses the excuse of protecting children's safety over the right of anonymity. And the end to privacy in order to segregate the internet, in order to control information within the British dictatorship to stop criticism of its leaders, and the flow of information on the internet.

Once the excuse of children's online safety therefore gets normalized, the people who have the frog boiling mindset, will come to the realization that they sacrifice security over freedom. They care more about the present, than they care less about the long-term consequences of the loss of privacy, and the convenience of freedom of speech on the Internet. If this act is passed, it would break the American spirit of the first amendment. And our right to privacy on the Internet, where adults online would therefore be forced to give their IDs.

To these unsecure startup corporations that have crappy security, can therefore lead to data breaches that ends up being obtained by a hacker. And sold on the dark web that can end up in the hands of bad actors like child predators. Who would want to target the children who had their data leaked online. And the adults, the people of all age's alike, including the youth, will have to pay for the short-term convenience of parental safety, for the excuse of children's online safety.

Over our first amendment rights to long-term privacy and safety online. And the loss of our human rights of privacy on the Internet, which would be detrimental to the land of the free. The parents who choose to support the excuse of age verification online, therefore are only looking at the front door of safety. They think that they are protecting their kids from bad things online, but do not realize that they are opening a back door. Where these fragile databases with terrible security can easily be data breached, and hacked by bad actors.

Any American, who tries to justify this is against the values of the founders of America. The values of the American constitution are our freedom of speech, and our right to privacy. Shall not be a fringe upon by the states who want to segregate the Internet within the United States.

Similar to how the Southern States justified segregation by giving Black people the right to not be owned by slavery. But failed to ensure equality for the African-Americans who wanted equal services, equal jobs, and also equal respect across all of society. Where they are free only as long as they are not having a voice in society.

Online privacy isn't just an opinion to have, but is also a civil rights issue in this nation. A person who chooses long-term tyranny of losing their privacy, over the short term belief of under the excuse of protecting children by giving their ID, to a insecure hotspot database that's owned by a corporation, that can be breached at anytime. Are losing their spirit of American freedoms, and American values of their rights to liberties of freedom of expression.

Their freedom of privacy, and their right to bear arms. They are not realizing that once they give their government information to these corporations, under the excuse of children's online safety. They are there for jeopardizing their freedom of privacy digitally online.

There is many other less intrusive ways to protect kids online, and there's parenting tools that are out there, like features within iOS devices that specifically limit screen time. And restrict the kind of apps that the youth can access, even beyond the iOS platforms. Where android phones that are controlled by parents, can therefore restrict certain things for minors. Without the need for government intervention, there's also an app that is on the App Store that is named Blocksite. That explicitly blocks apps that includes sexual material, social media, and

any kind of distraction, including blocking URLs that block such content.

Furthermore, it is cleared that certain supporters of this act have blind nostalgia for foreign systems, which also includes people who are not really good at understanding the fundamentals of the Internet. Like the United Kingdom's authoritarian child safety excuse for invasive online surveillance.

There are people who "I have nothing to hide" people who judge the youth, adults, and the elderly by their personal lives. Falsely assuming that our desire for privacy, means that we are living a bad double life. Without realizing that this is basically a massive violation of our first amendment right to privacy. The frog boiling pot minded people only care about the benefits of age verification. Rather than realizing the consequences of exchanging your freedom, over the safety of anonymity on the Internet.

There are people who would rather prefer to deflect the danger of these laws. And care more about judging the lives of the youth, including other individuals that care about the actual security risk of these very insecure databases. This is not national security, it is a judgment on our personal lives used as an excuse to expose us to hackers. Those who defend these laws because, they admire the United Kingdom online safety act are acting on blind government excuses disguised as security, that are invasive surveillance.

Why are these people trying to force America, that was a nation born specifically against British authoritarian colonialism. Would want to stand for the values of the elected British dictatorship that prioritizes invasive surveillance disguised as child safety. Which the land of the free was built on individual freedom, and the first amendment that protects us from this kind of abuse of invasive government surveillance.

This "I have nothing to hide" mindset is dangerous for Americans. If these Americans start to have their government documents leaked in a age verification database. Then their confidence, over the false sense of security, will therefore make them regret their choice to sacrifice freedom over security. And we cannot let personal judgments, or foreign biases destroy our First Amendment rights.

I'd like to see our representatives, and our politicians talking about this civil rights issue of online privacy. And I trust that God, will therefore help our representatives and politicians. To be in the spirit of American values, and American freedoms to stop this invasive online safety act. That is gonna turn the Internet into a segregated place by age.

I believe that our politicians who represent American values, and respect the first amendment right to privacy. Will go against the SAFE Act to prevent New York State enforcing a law that goes against the American values of privacy. Over the excuse of children's online safety, to have a justification for invasive online surveillance, that everyone will have to pay and suffer from. That goes against the first amendment of the United States Constitution, of the human rights of privacy, no matter in real life or digitally.

As one of the founding fathers once said, Benjamin Franklin, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

I thank you for reading this digital letter about online civil rights, and my stance against the SAFE act bill.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Valeie Mulligan

Address: DYCD, Deputy Commissioner

I represent: 2 Calvary Hse

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Parryl Rattray

Address: 2 Lafayette St

I represent: DYCD

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marnie Davidoff

Address: _____

I represent: Health Department

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adria Gove

Address: _____

I represent: Children's Aid

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 660 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cassandra Kelly

Address: 49 Thomas St

I represent: Legal Aid Society

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 660 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Josiah Gilbert

Address: 40 Worth Street (LAS)

I represent: Legal Aid Society - Juvenile Rights Practice

Address: 40 Worth

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/76

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Jorge Petit

Address: _____

I represent: Health Department

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 660 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matthew Brodwith

Address: 419 Thomas Street

I represent: Legal Aid

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 660 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: 4/21/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LA "Cherokee" Dickens

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY 11212

I represent: We The People & The People By The People

Address: Same as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 660 Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Talia Kamran, Brooklyn Defenders

Address: 177 Livingston

I represent: BDS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MELISSA HUNTE

Address: _____

I represent: I HAVE A DREAM FOUNDATION

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. et al Res. No. et al
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Walter Adler

Address: 110 E. 61st St NY, NY 10065

I represent: EMSPAC

Address: same

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alera Aguilar

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Family Rep. YDP

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Davene Roseborough

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Family Rep. Family Defense

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paula Magnus

Address: _____

I represent: Northside Center for

Address: Child Development

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 801 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/21/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karen Rose

Address: ~~1000~~ 5030 Broadway, NY, NY

I represent: LINC/City's first Readers

Address: 5030 Broadway, NY, NY 10034

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 10066 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dana Rachlin

Address: [REDACTED] Greenpoint Ave BK NY 11222

I represent: We Build THE Block

Address: [REDACTED] Greenpoint Ave BK NY 11222

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Susanne DUQUE

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY-EMS - BHEARD-EMSPAC

Address: BRONX NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Troy Lee

Address: 116-23 166th St., Jamaica, NY, 11434

I represent: EMS PAC

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms