

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor -
Hearing Room 1

B E F O R E: Hon. Dr. Nantasha Williams, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Rita C. Joseph

Christopher Marte,

Rafael Salamanca, Jr.

Kevin C. Riley

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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Housing and Health Community Organizer at Center
for the Independence of the Disabled, New York
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Amy Blumsack,
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Yolanda Allison,
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SERGEANT LEVY: Testing, testing, this is a microphone check for the New York City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights—recorded on October 3, 2025. We are on the 8th Floor, Hearing Room 1. This is being recorded by Sergeant Ben Levy.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon, good afternoon, welcome to the New York City Council Hearing for the Committee on Civil and Human Rights.

At this time, please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode and do not approach the dais—I repeat, please do not approach the dais.

If you wish to testify at today's hearing, please make sure to fill out a witness slip with the Sergeant at Arms.

We have translation services in the hallway, so if you need a translator, you can grab one in the hallway. Thank you very much.

Chair, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: [GAVEL]

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you so much for your patience. This morning was a struggle. My name is Nantasha Williams, and I serve as Chair of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. Thank you to

everyone for joining us today for the hearing on:
Housing Discrimination and Inequity.

Currently, we are living through what is likely New York City's worst housing crisis to date. Skyrocketing rent costs and slow to follow income increases, combined with a mismatch between the demand for affordable housing and its supply, are two of the largest contributing factors. And while this situation is unsurprisingly impacting the wallets of New Yorkers, it is also serving as a driving force behind gentrification, displacement, and continued segregation. As we look at these trends, it's clear that certain communities are disproportionately affected, underscoring why we must pay attention to who is being left out of stable housing opportunities. Neighborhoods that were redlined during the 1930s continue to have higher rates of poverty. Additionally, the devaluing of redline neighborhoods impacts access to services and resources, and the usage of redline maps to determine a neighborhood's value is seen as largely responsible for the conflation of proximity to people of color with declining home values.

And now, nearly a century later, data shows that these effects are ongoing. According to the 2020 US Census, New York City holds a status of quote, unquote, "high segregation" and ranks as the seventh most segregated city in the United States.

Equitable access to housing isn't limited only to racial or ethnic discrimination; our City's Human Rights Law is expansive and covers a multitude of protected classes, including lawful source of income. The outlawing of the source of income discrimination is aimed at aiding those facing unfair stigmas and stereotypes associated with receiving some form of rental assistance. Yet, despite active enforcement, it remains the most prevalent form of illegal housing bias in New York City.

These ongoing violations show that protections on paper are not always experienced by residents and that enforcement must be responsive to how landlords actually operate. Some landlords continue to use tactics to sidestep the laws, such as steering voucher holders away from coveted neighborhoods and requesting exclusionary credit scores or exorbitant fees, while other landlords cease all communication with prospective tenants upon

learning that they will use a voucher to pay their rent. And that's true. I actually did like a secret shopper, and that happened to me—as I pretended that I was looking for an apartment and had a voucher, and had that experience as well personally myself.

Furthermore, locations of Housing Choice vouchers, or HCVs, households show patterns that continue to inhibit equitable access to various types of neighborhoods, with approximately only one in five HCV households living in low poverty areas and over 40% still living in high poverty areas, based on a study between 2010 and 2020-- This is a very long opening statement, but I'll keep going-- while we are fortunate enough to live in a city that is always working to do right by its residents, despite a difficult political climate and less than ideal economic circumstances, we are not immune to the eventual effects of decisions being made at the federal level. The federal government has historically worked to ensure equal access to housing through the Fair Housing Act—And I just saw on the news that guy they fired from HUD—wild—which prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex or family

status and tasks the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which we know is not doing this, also known as HUD, with enforcing such violations.

According to recent reports, the Trump administration has refused to enforce the Fair Housing Act. Internal documents have quoted members of the administration as stating that decades of housing discrimination cases are artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary. It is clear that enforcement of anti-discrimination policies and the increase of equitable access to housing are nowhere near close to being priorities for this current presidential administration.

Though we don't have much power over what is happening federally, I do look forward to having a productive discussion with our own local enforcement agency—I would argue that it is probably the only real enforcement agency right now when it comes to human rights—During today's hearing, I'm hoping to learn more about the solo work and interagency coordination of CCHR when it comes to how they not only enforce protections against housing discrimination, but also how they educate and train to prevent it. That work must be visible and

accessible so that every New Yorker understands their rights and trusts that we are standing with them.

Thank you to committee staff for your work on this hearing, and thank you to my colleague, my favorite committee member, who's always here early and on time, Council Member Chris Marte, who has also joined today.

And with that, I will turn it over to committee staff to swear you all in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, before we begin testimony, I will administer the oath to all members of the Administration who will be offering testimony, or will be available for questions, please raise your right hand.

Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

PANEL: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Go ahead.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Good afternoon, Chair Williams and Committee members. I am JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and External Affairs at the New York City Commission on

Human Rights. Joining me today for questions is Kevin Farley, our Associate Commissioner of Investigations and Operations of the Commission's Law Enforcement Bureau. Thank you for calling today's hearing. We are excited to speak about the agency's work combating discrimination in housing, which is one piece of the puzzle mentioned in the Chair's opening remarks.

The NYC Commission on Human Rights is dedicated to ensuring all New Yorkers are able to live, work, and thrive in our city, free from discrimination. I will speak about the NYC Human Rights Law's protections against housing discrimination and the ways that the Commission on Human Rights educates New Yorkers about their rights and obligations under the Law.

In recent years, the Commission has strengthened this work and developed new initiatives to address housing discrimination. This afternoon, I'm going to give highlights of our written testimony. There are more details in the formal written testimony submitted by CCHR.

So I'll just start by underscoring that New York City Human Rights Law is one of the most robust civil rights laws in the country, prohibiting

discrimination not only in housing, but employment and public places. More than 27 protected categories are explicitly recognized in the law, including disability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and in the area of housing, source of income, which was already mentioned, criminal history, presence of children, marital status, and others. Retaliation against individuals for asserting their rights is also prohibited.

As we've discussed before, the Commission has a dual mandate: first, enforcing the city's Human Rights law, and second, fostering intergroup relations, and the agency structure reflects this. The Community Relations Bureau, or CRB, sits at the center of the Commission's education efforts and is responsible for outreach and training. And this work to ensure New Yorkers know the law is done in partnership with housing providers, nonprofits, houses of worship, businesses, and sibling agencies. Commission staff lead public events, host roundtables, organize days of visibility, and participate in resource fairs, among other activities, to reach New Yorkers where they are.

The Law Enforcement Bureau combats discrimination through a wide range of tools, including investigations, testing, conducting Pre-Complaint Interventions, responding to public inquiries, and filing complaints to address individual and structural discrimination.

In housing, the New York City Human Rights Law aims to protect against invidious discrimination that impacts applicants and tenants. Housing providers with obligations include brokers, building owners, property managers, and their agents and employees. The law prohibits these covered housing providers from refusing to sell a rent housing, from misrepresenting the availability of housing based on a protected category, or from setting different terms and conditions because of an individual's protected identity.

Today, we're going to highlight work that demonstrates how the Commission has been tackling housing discrimination, focusing on three main areas of the law: Expansive protections for persons with disabilities, source of income protections, which make it illegal to disqualify applicants and prohibits landlords, brokers and other

covered housing providers from treating people less well because they pay in part or whole with a voucher or other public assistance, and it will also touch upon the newest housing provision known as Fair Chance in Housing, which bans discrimination based on criminal history and went into effect on January 1st, making it illegal for most housing providers to discriminate against renters and buyers because of their criminal history, and requiring any housing providers that choose to do background checks to follow a series of process and notice requirements to ensure they are focused on tenant qualifications rather than the existence of criminal history or arrest.

The Commission effectuates these and other housing protections in a number of ways. I'm going to start with education and outreach. In FY25, the Commission achieved a new milestone, engaging with more than 150,000 New Yorkers, which is the highest since I've been at the Commission, but we think it might be the highest ever.

One consistent and growing pathway of engagement is our free facilitated trainings. We have a range of trainings covering Human Rights Law

housing provisions, including a General 101, an overview of housing discrimination, a training focused on disability protections, as well as a new training focused just on Fair Chance in housing.

This year, one partnership with other City agencies was offering our Disability in Housing and Public Accommodations training to City Agency Disability Service facilitators in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Persons with Disabilities. Of course, in addition to educating the City workforce, the Commission works diligently to meet New Yorkers where they are across the five boroughs. This is increasingly important in the current time when there's a lot of government mistrust.

Our collaborations range across our protected categories and across boroughs. We offer our housing training, for example, in Older Adult Centers across New York City. More recently, over the summer, we hosted a Disability Unite Festival along with advocates, training about 5,000 people in the Human Rights Law and engaging in other activities as well. The Agency also partnered with the Bronx Borough President's Disability Advisory Council and the Centers for Independent Living.

CCHR has additionally worked with a range of collaborators to spread the word on Fair Chance and SOI protections. This includes CAMBA, Asian Americans for Equality, the Harlem Development Corporation, and the Fortune Society, among others.

Fiscal Year 2025 also saw the second year of CCHR's partnership with the Fordham Real Estate Institute, which features a free course for brokers and realtors who earn professional credit while they learn about the City Human Rights Law.

We are also excited about a new partnership to promote awareness of the Fair Chance Housing Law. This year, CCHR is collaborating with a public artist in residence who is producing a theater performance that includes scenarios of discrimination and educates about the Human Rights Law, while having audience participation, that will be shown in locations across New York City and has been developed in partnership with re-entry organizations and individuals impacted by discrimination based on criminal history.

Additionally, for a Fair Chance, we launched A citywide multilingual campaign, "Breakdown Barriers to Housing", to ensure housing providers and

residents are aware of their rights under the Fair Chance Housing Law. This campaign appeared in print, LinkNYC kiosk, and digital platforms, as well as in convenience stores, really building on other past housing campaigns like "Vouchers Pay. Discrimination Doesn't." in 2023.

I will now turn to fostering accountability through enforcement tools. The Commission's Law Enforcement Bureau uses a wide range of tools to address discrimination, from testing to Pre-Complaint Interventions to case settlements. Pre-Complaint interventions are utilized in particular to address housing discrimination through an expedited resolution.

In FY25, the Law Enforcement Bureau fielded over 15,500 inquiries from members of the public, which included 1,222 jurisdictional inquiries related to housing. This is consistent with the upward trend of inquiries over the past four fiscal years—additionally, the vast majority of the over 300 Pre-Complaint Interventions were also in the area of housing. Pre-Compliant Interventions were used to secure housing opportunities, such as an apartment viewing for an individual paying with a voucher who

may have been ghosted. The Commission's PCIs can also allow for reasonable accommodations for tenants with disabilities to be implemented without a complaint being filed, where the parties are willing and it's otherwise appropriate.

Of the more than 600 claims filed in FY25, 171 were in the area of housing. These filed claims are often resolved through settlements, allowing the Commission to pursue monetary awards, civil penalties, and other creative forms of affirmative relief, such as policy and practice changes. The Commission is proud to have effectively utilized settlements and source of income cases to increase housing availability for voucher holders through set-asides and broker incentive programs. In one key example from last year, in partnership with the Fair Housing Justice Center, the Commission settled its largest ever housing case, resulting in 850 units being set aside for voucher holders and \$1 million in civil penalties for New York City. This example represents one of the ways that the Commission uses enforcement tools, and we've spoken as well about education and outreach.

I'll just close by saying the Commission and our staff work with dedication to address discriminatory policies and practices that stand in the way of housing access through our dual mandate of enforcement, education, and outreach.

We appreciate the Council's time and attention and welcome your questions.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I know we discussed this in previous hearings, but could you just talk to us a little bit more about the testing that you do in relation to housing discrimination?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Thank you for the question, Chair. Most of our testing at CCHR is going to arise from allegations of discrimination that are being made by members of the public. A lot of times, it is necessary to test in these instances to substantiate the discrimination to aid in our Pre-Complaint Interventions to get rapid housing for folks. Another part of the testing is going to come from referrals or tips from sister agencies or community-based organizations that are interfacing with the public and have knowledge of bad actors that they're referring our way.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What do you actually do? Like, how do you conduct the test?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY:

Typically, it's going to be paired testing. It will vary depending on the protected class we're attempting to test. The one you referenced, one that is the most prevalent now, is source of income discrimination. Typically, we have a peer testing model where, essentially, you will have an inquiry from someone posing as a voucher holder about the availability of renting an apartment. Then you have someone posing as someone with earned income trying to rent the apartment, and we're looking for differential treatment there to determine if discrimination is happening—via e-mail, telephone, things of that nature.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Do you find that the testing has been effective not only in identifying bad actors, but in preventing future infractions?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY:

Absolutely. I think that the fact that we kind of have this in a real-time tool to use, typically our testing related to Pre-Complaint Interventions will

1 happen within the 1st 24 to 40 hours, 48 hours that
2 the member of the public is contacting us. And the
3 fact that brokers and landlords know that these
4 things won't linger, you know, without that, maybe
5 the delay people would be less likely to follow up
6 with these formal complaints and things of this
7 nature. But we're contacting brokers in real time.
8 We're sending different types of enforcement letters.
9 I think that the real-time element of it is very
10 effective in terms of (INAUDIBLE) brokers.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So it is time
13 sensitive (UNINTELLIGIBLE) time-- but you-- So, two
14 things: you just made it seem like it was time
15 sensitive, though, you do it within 24 to 48 hours
16 upon a complaint. Is it also time-intensive?

17 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: It can
18 vary. Every Pre-Complaint Intervention is not
19 successful. Where a Pre-Complaint Intervention will
20 fail, then some-- Let me rephrase. Are you asking
21 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Two things, the
23 question I have is... (CROSS-TALK)

24 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY:
25 (INAUDIBLE) PCI...

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Is it intensive?

But when you just said what you said, I'm like, oh, it's also time sensitive. So it is fair to assume that it's time sensitive, as in when a complaint comes in, you conduct a test within 24 to 48 hours?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Only related to a Pre-Complaint Intervention.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Okay.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: And then we typically are reaching and getting it processed within 24 to 48 hours.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Let me clarify: testing might happen a little later...

(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: But these things are relatively a short periods of time, generally... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, and does it take a lot to conduct these tests?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: A test typically will not take a lot of time. A test can be inconclusive, but there's a wide range, but I

wouldn't say that they typically take a lot of time when we're, you know, doing it on behalf of an individual. We can talk about other types of cases or larger cases where you might be trying to build something, but that's kind of different.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What role does data play in determining where to conduct tests and where to investigate potential areas of unlawful discrimination in housing, or is testing completely randomized? It sounds like it might-- Is it particularly administered after some type of complaint?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: It's definitely not randomized. Essentially, these are tips or allegations of evidence of discrimination that we're getting and we know to test. So that kind of guides and directs where we're testing.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I think I'll just add, I mean, this is where community partnerships are also super helpful. There are some particular SOI collaborations that help CCHR identify where we think discrimination is happening or where

there are multiple reports against particular entities.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: When the Commission receives a complaint in relation to one specific type of discrimination, do you inquire further about other potential forms of discrimination—for example, voucher discrimination can often be a proxy for racial discrimination—if so, how?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY:

Absolutely. Our investigators are well-trained, they understand discrimination, they understand that a lot of times there's this intersectionality that is happening, and their goal is really to thoroughly investigate the complaint and make every allegation that they find. And this is, you know, evidenced by—many of our complaints will essentially identify multiple types of discrimination in them.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. It was mentioned in my testimony about the current federal climate. So with respect to the Fair Housing Act, has CCHR been impacted in any way? And do you feel that--if you haven't been impacted, do you feel there are any anticipated effects of the current federal climate on housing discrimination in particular?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I think it has become increasingly important for us to be talking about the City Human Rights Law almost constantly and identifying that the protections in the City Human Rights Law have not changed, and the commitment of our agency-- the Human Rights Law was drafted in the 50s to address the fact that there were racial and ethnic categories literally excluded from housing. So that is part of the agency's DNA, and it will continue to be really important work for us. Undoubtedly, the federal government's rollbacks, protections, and rhetoric are causing confusion; they are causing fear. So that means that CCHR is enhancing our efforts to be in communities, to do all aspects of our work. So, for example, our enforcement team is in Queens today doing intakes with a community partner, right? We know people do not necessarily have the appetite to come to a city office building, a government building, which can be very stressful at any time, but I think it is increasingly so. And we're really leaning into our partnerships with both state-level entities like the state Division on Human Rights. We are leaning into our collaborations with legal service providers. We

1 had a call this week to talk about some of this, and
2 we're really thinking about how we respond and ensure
3 that New Yorkers know. Even before our law was
4 stronger in some respects or many respects than the
5 Fair Housing Act at the federal level, right? We have
6 source of income protections. We have fair trans
7 protections. We have protections that haven't been in
8 existence at the federal level. The numbers, I think,
9 are too early to tell if we will see a huge increase.
10 But we are preparing for an increase and really
11 thinking about how to get the word out about what our
12 law continues to do and how we ensure that we're able
13 to serve New Yorkers.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, that's why we
16 wanted to have this important hearing, so people know
17 that we have amazing laws in New York City in an
18 agency that is very small but mighty.

19 Alright, so because of the federal
20 government abandoning equal housing initiatives, do
21 you feel it is necessary to take a more primary role
22 in ensuring equal access to housing? I feel like you
23 just answered that. And do you have the capacity? I
24 love to ask capacity questions and hear the nice
25 answers that I get on the record. But do you have the

capacity to increase its enforcement actions and punish bad actors in the absence of federal government accountability and federal intrusion on such enforcement activity? Honestly, because not only do we have a situation where the federal government is not acting on these things, they're also actively persecuting people who are.

So do you think you have the capacity to manage a potential increase and the chaos, I'll say, that is trickling down from the federal government?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I don't know if anyone has the capacity on their own to manage the chaos. I think CCHR, though, is in a really good position to be responding and to meet the needs of New Yorkers. I think if we look at the numbers for the past four years, the number of increases is going up, the number of claims filed is going up, and the people reached is going up. So those are all the indicators I think are really important for where we are in this moment. And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that we will be expanding our law enforcement and mediation efforts as a result of getting lines from the City of Yes. And that will allow us not only to continue to take

the public-initiated complaints that we take as a right to file with the agency, but to be able also to develop more affirmative work. And I think some of the partnerships that I mentioned are also going to be critical with other players and other jurisdictions, with whom we often... We are lucky in one respect, because we don't receive any HUD funding, and we are not directly impacted by rollbacks in rules or regulations from that agency. But we see a lot of work to do, and I think we feel very passionate about responding.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you talk about CCHR's role in the Tenant Protection Cabinet?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: The Tenant Protection Cabinet is citywide. We have our Community Relations Bureau, who are the folks that sit on the Tenant Protection Cabinet. I think it's a really important entity. We have already had a few outputs that we have collaborated with other agencies on as part of that. So one is in line with the questions we were just discussing. We have heard from service providers that there have been upticks in harassment by housing providers of tenants based on their perceived national origin or immigration

status, as well as a decline in willingness to do repairs where they feel they have the ability to get tenants in trouble. So that has come to us. That also came to HPD, and we, with the Tenant Protection Cabinet and PEU, held a community and ethnic media roundtable to underscore that harassment of tenants based on any protected category, including national origin, is a violation of the Human Rights Law and to get that out to communities in the languages that they speak. So that's one example. We have also worked on materials around service animals with the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare and continue other partnerships with MOPD. We also, through our outreach team, have trained a lot of staff from PEU and members of the Tenant Protection Cabinet, so they can also be ambassadors for the Human Rights Law.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Another question that I have is about capacity again, regarding the Fair Chance and Housing Act. So do you feel, and I guess another question I have, let me take a step back. So, because of City of Yes, you got increased lines particularly for source of income, even though I learned that it's not necessarily a separate unit per se. So, how will you utilize those lines? Will it

just be an overall increase in LEB, or is it just specific to source of income cases?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Great question.

The City of Yes lines are going to go to two pieces of law enforcement work pretty specifically, but not to any protected category. There will be three lines that are really focused on Commission-initiated work, working very closely with the Associate Commissioner, and there will also be two that go to our mediation work. So that's a way that we leverage staff when there are attorney-filed cases, and both parties are represented, to try and resolve cases without the formal complaint process.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you tell us more about the retention rate of attorneys dedicated solely to working on particular housing discrimination cases, whether it's source of income, fair housing, or disability? Or is it kind of what you said, like that division kind of works on a wide range of things, not specific to a particular housing discrimination infraction?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, Law Enforcement Bureau staff are increasingly working on

every issue. It's one of the moves that have been made so that we can pivot and be responsive to what is happening when people contact us. So there are specialists in certain areas of disability accessibility, in source of income interventions, but the staff who have expertise in those areas are also very informed of the Human Rights Law and can plug in on other cases. And attorneys similarly work across issue areas. I don't know, Kevin, if you have anything to add on that?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Are you able to provide us with a breakdown of the types of source of income discrimination inquiries you've received? Are there certain types that are more prevalent? For example, getting ghosted by a landlord, coerced away from units in coveted neighborhoods despite otherwise qualifying, or being asked for exorbitant fees?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Thank you for the question.

As previously stated, the source of income discrimination continues to be the most prevalent type of housing discrimination. I can't really say specifically, but anecdotally, I would say that ghosting leads the pack and has for the most

part over the course of the last few years. You know, misrepresentations about the availability of apartments are also common. You also might see certain things where you have individuals keeping a separate waiting list for voucher holders, and it's different from those with earned income, and we've had successful settlements related to brokers and landlords that have such practices.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

And just wanted to acknowledge that Council Member Joseph has joined us.

Do you have questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: (UN-MIC'D)

(INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, good. Let me know.

Does CCHR think of tenant advocacy and protection outreach as separate from its general anti-discrimination outreach or as one and the same?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Great question.

I think we see our outreach as integrated but also specialized. So I think the answer is both. You know, I've mentioned in the testimony a few

1 trainings that really cover all the protections in
2 our law, and that is also because individuals who
3 experience discrimination often experience multiple
4 kinds. And many of the nonprofits that we work with
5 also work across issue areas.
6

7 That said, we know that housing decision-
8 making and source of income in particular have a lot
9 of nuances, so we do have specialized training and
10 outreach focused on housing.

11 I think one thing that we've developed
12 this year to try and reach more New Yorkers is
13 meeting monthly with DSS shelter housing specialists,
14 so that they understand our law. We can provide
15 technical assistance to those who are really on the
16 front lines of trying to get people into housing.
17 Working with the Tenant Protection Cabinet is another
18 example where it's a specialized outreach. However,
19 most of the people at our agency are generalists and
20 are thinking across issue areas.

21 (PAUSE)

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How do you work
23 with community-based organizations in this field?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I'm going
25 to start off by talking about some of the education

and outreach and kind of more policy-sided work, and then I'll turn it over to my colleague, the Associate Commissioner, to talk about law enforcement partnerships.

I think that really important education and outreach requires trusted relationships. So, we work with a lot of organized organizations that are focused on housing. We mentioned CAMBA, we mentioned legal service providers as well, and we have resource fairs where we participate just with housing organizations. HPD is where we live. Citywide housing plan is one example of spending months doing listening sessions with community members, and part of that is CCHR training on the Human Rights Law, and entities that receive HPD funding are also trained on the Human Rights Law. And as I mentioned as well, for a Fair Chance Housing, we've been working very closely with the advocates who were part of the steering committee that pushed that law forward in order to ensure our materials are clear, that they are known and translatable. And I mentioned our public artists in residence already. It's been really super exciting as a lawyer to be in reentry spaces where people are acting out scenarios of

discrimination and then solving for them or telling us which parts we got wrong. And our artist in residence is amazing and also an ambassador for the Human Rights Law at the moment.

So those are some of the ways that we're thinking about how to get out of offices, really, and meet communities. And that's what our community relations Bureau is focused on. But Kevin, on the enforcement side... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You guys (INAUDIBLE) of these things. Even though I asked.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: We'll send you-- yes-- Yes, we will.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: I'll also add that referrals are a big part of our relationships with these organizations; they're consistently referring instances of discrimination to us to investigate. Another good example is we've utilized some of our settlements to direct those resources to some of these CBOs, whether it's, you know, we get a set aside for X number of apartments the landlords are looking to house people, we will inform them of it so that some of their clients and

things can comply for some of those from some of that anti-discrimination relief.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member

Joseph?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair, so much. I had a couple of questions around outreach. In terms of language access, how many languages do you use to make sure that you're reaching out to community members whose first language may not be English?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Great and very important question.

I mentioned earlier our "Breakdown Barriers to Housing" campaign and our "Vouchers Pay. Discrimination Doesn't." campaign, which were trilingual campaigns. So the primary languages were English, Spanish, and Chinese, which, for the most part, track our non-English language highest number of inquiries and claims.

But we also have almost all of our core trainings, or I will say all of our core trainings, available in English and Spanish. We have training that is available in Mandarin and Arabic. And in the past two years, we have also worked with translators

to do very short PSAs in several languages that were introduced and became more prevalent in New York City as a result of new arrivals and asylum seekers.

That is all in addition to the fact that our staff speak 25 languages. And the materials that we produce for our campaigns and our written resources are in the 10 Local Law 30 languages as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Earlier this week, I had a hearing, and it was interesting enough to see that, for those who don't read and write their native language, how are you reaching out to them? Because we also have that issue. Folks don't-- My mother doesn't speak-- doesn't read Haitian Creole, but she speaks Haitian Creole.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yes, also a great question.

Radio has been a way that we have been working to reach people in languages other than English. We also have a predominantly English radio show that I moderate with others. But we have done short PSAs in other languages. We use Taxi TV as well, and those are spoken and often can be translated.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you.

How do you keep track of neighborhoods from which these cases originate? Where do you see most of these discrimination cases coming from? What neighborhoods do you see them coming out of?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: We track our complaints by jurisdiction and type of discrimination. So, jurisdiction is going to refer to whether it's employment, public accommodation, or housing, and then the type. So the protected class is (INAUDIBLE) gender, race. So that's how we track our complaints. We do, however, have very strong relationships with various community-based organizations that take a geographical approach to monitoring what's happening with discrimination (INAUDIBLE) on the backend and then referring it back to our agency for investigation and prosecutions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Do you keep data on that? Do you keep data at least per borough, per type of discrimination? There are so many issues, from ageism to racism to all kinds of stuff—for example, landlords who refuse to take these vouchers. How do you do that type of enforcement? And where are

you seeing most of these numbers coming from? Where have you seen them?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: So, geographically, you're asking?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: We have that data. We don't release it publicly.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: So we're in the process of-- I could also switch to JoAnn, who I think they've used some of that data within the outreach aspect of it. So you, you know, we're educating citywide, essentially informing people of these laws and encouraging them to apply to us. But, specifically, we don't keep it in that manner.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: But that data also, that's what drives your work, right? Based on the information and the numbers you're coming, that's coming into you, right? All agencies, I think, all policymakers, data drives our work, right?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Right. The data we use is typically based on the number of complaints based on the jurisdiction and type, not geography.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Mm-hmm, okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: And I think, I mean, we've talked about in the SOI space, we can have individuals that come to us and they've experienced 10 different types of voucher discrimination at different buildings. So I think there's also, on our end, a hesitancy to release data that's not actionable or doesn't tell the whole picture. But as Kevin said, there are a number of nonprofits that are tracking, specifically source of income discrimination, by borough and neighborhood. We have done, as we were developing our plan for a Fair Chance outreach, we also used a lot of city-- no, census data, track information, CDTA, I think, is the acronym, to try and identify where the housing providers are that are covered by the law. Because a lot of New York City housing is two-family, and that's not covered by the law. But we're looking at high levels of poverty, high levels of reentry, and also where there are larger buildings, so that we could think about, on the outreach and prevention side, how we are getting into some of those neighborhoods. And I would say anecdotally that the Bronx and Brooklyn neighborhoods show up a lot.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah, Brooklyn shows up a lot because there's a lot of development, and a lot of folks can't access it. This is where when we talk about gentrification and equitable access to housing, this is where it comes down to it. Because I know some practices still happen around the (INAUDIBLE) entry, right? If you get an affordable unit, there's an entry for you, and a if you get a market-rate apartment, there's another entry for you, too.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yes, we have had cases challenging that practice and the different terms and conditions, not to mention a different entrance, but all kinds of differences depending on how people are paying. And that is something that we have looked at. And I think before you arrived, Councilwoman Joseph, we were speaking just about how we will be using some of the lines from the City of Yes to expand our Commission-initiated work, which will have the bandwidth to be able to more strategically look at the places where this is happening often, as Kevin was saying earlier.

Right now, we're responding to public-initiated complaints, which is 90% of what we do. And

so the ability to partner with others who have a lot of this data, it's not a question of the data not being there, but how we integrate our own system so that our outreach is feeding into our case management system, where we're able to look at those things, and those are conversations that are happening now at the agency.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I recall in 2022 when I first came into the office, I got a report for my district, District 40 in Brooklyn, which was one of the districts that faced a lot of discrimination from housing-- from landlords who did not accept vouchers. So if you look at that data, and of course, my neighboring council members, as well, had the same issue. So, I definitely would love to see more, you know, work done around that.

And one last question, what do you think is contributing to this inequitable access to housing? A lot of issues, I know.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: All of the things, Councilwoman Williams said in her opening testimony. I mean... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: (INAUDIBLE)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: There are so many factors. It's a super complicated and historically driven problem with current consequences, right? I mean, redlining mortgage clauses that prohibit sales, all of those things have created, I think, challenges for New Yorkers.

And as I mentioned, part of the citywide effort where we live, which is really led by HPD and other agencies that are direct service providers and housing creators, aims to get at a lot of the structural issues. But I think the reality is that there are still blatant discriminators out there, and I think people do feel emboldened in the current political climate to act on some of their feelings that they may not have done in the past.

So we see, of course, subtle discrimination. But we also continue to see explicit discrimination across protected categories.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Absolutely.

So, is there any policy enforcement that's successful in preventing? I know it's a wish, but I'm just asking, is there anything in your toolbox that can really protect more of our vulnerable communities? Our communities are being

1 displaced at an alarming rate. And where I'm seeing
2 this, especially in our Black and brown communities,
3 is that older adults are being pushed out at the
4 fastest rate than ever, and entering the shelter
5 system at a fast rate. And our older adult immigrant
6 communities are also facing this at a faster rate.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah, I
9 do want to point out, I think two of the tools that
10 we think are highly effective, especially in the
11 source of income space, uh, they are part of the
12 affirmative relief that we can order in cases. You
13 know, I think as a non-direct service providing
14 agency, we often are involved on the backend after
15 something has happened. And these are some tools in
16 addition to monetary fines that we have used. So I
17 don't know Kevin, if you want to talk a little bit
18 about broker incentives and set-asides?

19 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER FARLEY: Yeah,
20 where (INAUDIBLE) to be very creative in terms of
21 affirmative relief, reference (INAUDIBLE) to 800
22 rent-regulated apartments. We had other settlements,
23 ten are rent-regulated apartments, 20, these are very
24 valuable assets to the City, and also a lot of them
25 are going to, well, the majority of them are going to

1 voucher holders who are coming out of shelter. You're
2 also saving the City money and that effort. We're
3 also sorry-- speak into the MIC (INAUDIBLE) now.
4 We've also, for example, created things with
5 brokerages, for example, one I can think of where--
6 and these are established, well-known brokerages.
7 We're not just going after the low-hanging fruit,
8 where they incorporated incentives for their brokers
9 for placement, for example, voucher holders. So in
10 addition to education, we've definitely-- And civil
11 penalties, of course, we've really developed the
12 toolbox which we think is being very effective. And
13 in part, we also think the increase in sources of
14 discrimination complaints is somewhat related to our
15 effectiveness. And, you know, we have these CBOs that
16 are, you know, referring us. I was a former workforce
17 CBO before; you don't want to refer folks just
18 anywhere, but you refer them to places where you know
19 they can get assistance.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: In the list of
22 folks who are repeat offenders on this list, what is
23 the process, and how do you handle that?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I think
25 we have a few tools in our toolbox. One, again, there

are bad actors, and then there are uninformed actors. So we definitely try to get at the uninformed actors by creating partnerships for housing providers specifically. We work with PEU and the Tenant Protection Cabinet and HPD on that, who have landlord groups that they meet with regularly and sometimes fund. So that is on one side. I think we cannot underestimate having people informed and knowing how to report, but also seeing our faces, right? Like you need to trust someone if you're going to report discrimination to them. So that's the expansion of our outreach education and intake in community spaces. And then in our affirmative relief, when cases are settled, the deterrence tools are civil penalties, where how egregious someone has acted can be reflected in how much money they have to pay. That can be helpful. It's also an area where we would like to increase civil penalties so that there can be a greater deterrence effort. We can also monitor entities. So, if you've been before us before, it's likely that on a future case, we are going to be monitoring something, because you have not agreed to what was part of the settlement earlier. And then I think also the broker incentives and set-asides also

come along with trainings. So when Douglas Elliman brings their brokers to a training, that's a lot of folks who are learning about protections that they may not have been informed of or may have forgotten.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you, Chair Williams.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

The question that Council Member Joseph had about language access, I know this has come up in previous hearings. Just wondering if there has been any thought put into how we properly compensate staff who work for CCHR who are bilingual? Because I feel like so many people are drawn and are recruited to that agency who come from so many different types of walks of life, and they just naturally speak another language. And then that language is utilized for their jobs in many ways. So, have you all thought about how to properly compensate people who speak multiple languages?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I don't have an answer on how to compensate staff properly, but we do have staff do other work than English language work by choice. So no one is forced to do that work. We also, when we have campaign materials

1 and trainings, things that are intensive, we pay
2 translators to do that work. So we are compensating
3 folks who are doing translation to the extent that we
4 can and reaching out as well to vendors, as I
5 mentioned, to do work that is not in a language that
6 is spoken in-house. And then we also use a Language
7 Line, which is a paid service.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I have gotten some
10 letters, by the way, I feel like I've maybe spoken to
11 you about it in the past, maybe not. But I have
12 gotten letters from, I guess, whistleblowers within
13 the agency that say that they're-- how you describe
14 it is that it's kind of like voluntary, like they can
15 use their language, it's not required, but I have
16 gotten some complaints in the past from people who
17 are part-time testers, or people who work in the
18 agency that speak multiple languages, that it does
19 more so feel like a requirement for them and not
20 something that they kind of can casually do if they
21 want to because they understand a particular
22 language. So just flagging. It made me think about
23 that. And I don't know what happens. I know you have
24 lots of people who work there, but it was something

that was flagged to me, maybe like two or three times, since I've been Chair of the Committee.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So I'll take that back to our leadership team and we'll discuss. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. And then I know there was a question and conversation around geography. So when people file complaints, they typically give addresses of the complaints. So, are you able to share that information with the Council? If you can map areas, even through by way of neighborhood zip codes? Are you able to share with the Council some type of aggregate number? I know you had a very large number. I'm, like, 15,000?! I guess, I'm saying if 15,000 people actually know about CCHR and filed A complaint, how many people actually are also struggling and don't know CCHR exists?

Because it's my personal opinion that most people don't know where to go for help, most people don't even know I'm their Council Member, so why would they even think to come to like some random agency that's like tucked away on like XX-floor downtown? It's, like, crazy. I mean, I know you guys

1 in other locations in the boroughs, but I mean, even
2 like the Queen's location is also kind of tucked
3 away. That's the local one that I know of. It would
4 be helpful if you could send it to us, like, where
5 you see-- based on these like 15,000 complaints? What
6 did you say? You said 15,000?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah,
9 it's 15,000 (INAUDIBLE) people call us... (CROSS-
10 TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Fifteen thousand
12 inquiries...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah, so
14 that does not mean... (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, or... (CROSS-
16 TALK)

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: That
18 people are calling... (CROSS-TALK)

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Or... Or... At
20 least for the 1,200...

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: People. Are you
23 able to map it for us and send (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-
24 TALK)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, I think we can share some aggregate data. I think our concern always, when we get requests about specific claims and cases, is to ensure that we are protecting people's identities who come to us. And so we can-- but we can share information that is at a higher level that doesn't compromise... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, like zip codes...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: personal identifying information. And I think the other piece is that we do publish our settlement highlights on our website every six months, as well as Commission-initiated complaints. So all of that is publicly available, but it's not broken down in the way that you're talking... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's not mapped... (CROSS-TALK)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And, yeah, I wouldn't want people's personal information, but even if you could, the same way that you were able to quantify, like, you know, we've had 15,000 complaints

1 and 1,222 jurisdictional inquiries related to
2 housing. It's like, well, out of the 1,222
3 jurisdictional inquiries related to housing, if you
4 could map like, okay, we had like 10 in Southeast
5 Queens. We had five in Central Brooklyn. Like, it
6 doesn't-- I'm not asking for any real levels of
7 specificity, just a broad understanding of what parts
8 of the city are these complaints coming from? I think
9 it would be useful information.
10

11 And then my last question is, are there
12 any ways that the Council can be helpful? Because I
13 mean, on one end, I'm pretty critical of capacity. I
14 think that's been my ongoing criticism of the agency,
15 because I just don't think you all have the capacity
16 to do your work in ways that obtain maximum impact. I
17 know you all are making an impact, which is very
18 clear from your numbers, but I think everybody could
19 always be doing more, of course. And so I'm always
20 thinking of ways, and I know I've met with you all
21 about this, like how can the Council be helpful in
22 promoting the services that you have, uh, promoting
23 just even being educated on the different outreach
24 components, so people actually know where they can
25 go. As I say all the time, I'm always concerned about

1 the people who don't know you exist. So, I'm very
2 happy for the 15,000 complaints, but there are 8
3 million+ people in New York City. I feel like this is
4 probably such a small fragment of people who are
5 actually dealing with various forms of
6 discrimination, not just housing, but we're talking
7 about housing today. So, I just wanted to ask if
8 there are other ways that the Council can be helpful?
9 Because there are 51 of us, and we represent over
10 (INAUDIBLE) 170,000+ people. I always think it might
11 be useful or beneficial to really work with members
12 in their districts, as many agencies do around a wide
13 range of different types of things, to further get
14 your messaging out about what you can offer New
15 Yorkers.
16

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah,
18 100%. I think, as part of our effort to do intakes
19 and outreach outside of our office spaces, City
20 Council people are critical. We can come to your
21 offices. We go to community groups in your
22 neighborhood together. We find that being in space
23 with people is the best way to build trust. So, I
24 think partnering on events is key, and, especially,
25 with expanded-- (BACKGROUND NOISE) pause for siren--

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It's very New York.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD:

Especially with an expanded kind of borough-based approach to our law enforcement. I think that will be something that we are really looking forward to. And I will just shout out the fact that Kevin is here as the Associate Commissioner, which is a testament to the restructuring of our law enforcement bureau, and thinking about how we have enough leadership to be able to think proactively and respond to the constant incoming.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, I will follow up, because I know I had mentioned that I wanted to send an email to my colleagues... (CROSS-TALK)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I brought you materials, too.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (INAUDIBLE) back out to you all. I feel like I don't think we ever did that. I don't we ever-- I don't think I ever sent out the email to my colleagues about, like, you should reach out for this, that. I think, especially everything that continues to happen on the federal side, it would just be a refresher. So, yes, we can work together to send something out, so that, yes,

you can all be proactive with us, but at least I can plant a seed for my colleagues to be proactive with CCHR in connecting and thinking about ways to integrate you into the work that they're doing. Like, I know some of my colleagues just feel like this big action around immigration, like that's like a perfect space for a CCHR to be a real partner. So I will keep people (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah, people know how to find us when they have constituents to refer. But I would love to have a proactive conversation about collaboration and to think about some of the neighborhoods where we are working and have strong partnerships, or where we need to strengthen partnerships. Because I think that's a critical space for Council as well.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You know, I feel like I've tried to pivot within the last year+ around prevention, because while having money for LED is important, on the reactionary side, for me, I feel like it's equally important to talk about how we prevent these discriminatory acts from taking place in the first place, which does require us-- which government is just by nature very reactionary, all of

our roles. But I do think it's so important for us to like, walk and chew gum at the same time and also figure out ways to dedicate time, energy, and resources to proactivity that, you know, minimize discrimination.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Well, thank you so much for testifying.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Nice to meet you, Kevin, Associate Commissioner. Is that your title? Yeah, Associate Commissioner.

UNIDENTIFIED: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

UNIDENTIFIED: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Right, so important. Oh, for me? Thanks. Goodies. Yes, I will email you all.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I will now open the hearing for public testimony. I want to remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be

observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have three minutes to speak on today's hearing topic: *Housing Discrimination and Inequity*.

If you have a written statement or additional testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms.

You may also email written testimony to Testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

Okay, I will call Airenakhue. Did I say that right? That was right?

AIRENAKHUE B. OMORAGBON: (UN-MIC'D)

Airenakhue.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, Airenakhue and Mr. Muhammad.

AIRENAKHUE B. OMORAGBON: All right, is this on? Yes.

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and Members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. Thank you for holding today's important hearing on housing discrimination and inequity.

My name is Airenakhue Omoragbon, and I serve as the New York Policy Manager at African Communities Together. I am here today to shed light on the unfair treatment African immigrants face in New York City's shelter system and general housing market. In doing so, I urge the City Council to request that the Commission on Human Rights do more to educate African communities on Human Rights Law, and encourage them to report their experiences with housing discrimination and inequity.

As a national membership organization that is by and for African immigrants, we are dedicated to fighting for civil rights, opportunity, and a better life for our communities in the United

States. I won't go through all of the statistics, but I just want you to understand that 172,712 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa are living in New York State.

When you look at our demographics, for our membership, we see that 60-65% of our members are women; two-thirds of the members of our NY Chapter are Muslim, and so on and so forth. Due to these social constructs like race, religion, national origin, immigration status, gender, and so much more, African immigrants are among New York's most language-isolated communities, and we are also extremely susceptible to housing discrimination and inequity.

I would love to share a series of cases with you, but I will start with one. We have a member whom I am calling Aisha for the purposes of this hearing. She was born and raised in Mali and moved to the United States in 1987. She had been living in her apartment for 25 years and was one of the first three tenants to move into her building. To make a long story short, her apartment has turned into a source of stress, danger, and humiliation.

She currently lives with a family of rats, and every time she takes a shower, it floods to

her neighbor down below. Her stove stopped working, and the management basically refused to fix it. She ended up buying her own stove for \$1000 because, to this day, they have yet to fix that stove.

With our mission and vision in mind, ACT is definitely committed to speaking truth to power in this fight against inequity and discrimination. We're inspired by our members, and we launched our own Right to Shelter campaign and established a Housing Justice Committee to respond to Mayor Adams' 30-60 day rule. We even hosted a sleep-in in front of Gracie Mansion. So, you know, we're built like that. And you know, we continue to do this work, in 2025 and beyond, because there are so many African immigrants who have issues that are similar to Aisha's, but they're afraid of reporting their landlords and building managements to the Commission on Human Rights. We're giving voice to our community by dedicating our efforts to educating African immigrants on their rights here and the housing resources that are available to them. We are fighting against the challenges that anti-Black, anti-Muslim, and anti-Immigrant sentiments created for immigrants in need of housing, and we are also ensuring that

permanent immigration status does not serve as a barrier for accessing vouchers, lottery, and any other housing opportunities available in New York State.

We encourage you to see us as a resource in better serving this community, and encourage them not to be silenced in the face of inequity. Thank you.

HAWA TABOURE: (UN-MIC'D) Taboure.

Thank you, Chairman William, and a Member of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. My name is Hawa. I'm a long-time African community member. So I'm originally from West Africa, Mali, and I lived in New York City for 25 years.

So from 2016, I volunteered in the African community, ACT, from our campaign (INAUDIBLE), our campaign (INAUDIBLE) hair braiding, and the Campaign of Human Rights for Shelter. And now I'm working as a community guardian at African Communities Together to protect African people living in New York City.

I'm here today to tell you my story of housing discrimination and to shed light on the experiences of many African immigrants living in

Harlem. In doing this, I hope the other immigrants feel inspired to speak out about what they are going through.

In 2018, I moved to an apartment in West Harlem, 136th Street. And at that time, I felt safe and proud to have a nice apartment with three bedrooms. And the living room was good, everything-- next to the hospital, and my kid was in a District 3 for the school. So, it was a good neighborhood. But over time, especially when the management changed the building, they were taking care of everything, but then the management changed. After that, the building management doesn't want to do anything. They stopped answering our calls, they stopped reviewing maintenance requests, and they stopped caring about us.

My lease expired in 2019, and even now we don't have a lease, but they force us to pay the rent through the virtual apps-- I mean, paying the rent through the online system. So in the wintertime, we had no hot water, no heat for a long period. My bathroom is moldy even right now. Even today, I have to spray bleach to clean up those bathrooms. This became a health issue for me and my children. I am a

1 mother of children. So our window cannot go up;
2 truly, it has become a health problem for us. So a
3 city inspector comes to see me so many times, and the
4 building people ignored it, and they didn't do
5 anything. Nothing has changed.

6 So on the biggest question I'm asking
7 myself, I pay my rent on a time. We don't cause any
8 problems. Why are we neglected? (TIMER) (INAUDIBLE)
9 Oh, okay, I'm sorry.

10 In speaking to my neighborhood, I learned
11 I'm not alone with the building. The majority of our
12 building people are African and African American. We
13 are hard-working people. And many of them are elderly
14 and blue-collar families. So we see a bunch of white
15 people working in our building, and thinking they are
16 trying to sell the building. So we are in that
17 problem. We believe that management may try to push
18 us out of the building and make room for other people
19 who don't look like us.

20 So today they want to replace us with
21 people with a high incomes. But I haven't left the
22 building, because I didn't try-- I applied through
23 Housing Connect. But nothing. I didn't get anything
24 from Housing Connect. Importantly, I have stayed
25

1 because my children are in a good school district,
2 and this is our home. We shouldn't have to choose
3 between decent living conditions and my children's
4 future. That was the question. So I have to stay
5 because the kids go to school. I don't want to change
6 my children's school.
7

8 This is housing discrimination. This is a
9 human rights issue. I am here today not just for
10 myself, but for every tenant in a Harlem, across the
11 city, who's been silenced, neglected and out because
12 of who they are. Three of the women in this room live
13 in a building. Our community members, they are seated
14 behind me, they are living in a building with five
15 kids in a one-bedroom; one of them has three kids in
16 one bedroom. The woman with the five kids has lived
17 in the same building for 20 years. The other woman
18 with three kids has lived in the same building for 10
19 years. They are in a one-bedroom. They are in a
20 Housing Connect building. They are looking for a
21 transfer, but they have been discriminated against
22 because of their race. Because the management is of a
23 different race, they don't want to help them. This is
24 discrimination. So we have to talk louder about those
25 problems today. Some of them stay with no bathroom

1 fixed, no stove fixed. With the 25 years, with the
2 rat, with the bedbugs, with everything. One of them
3 is sitting there. She just texts me, but I can't
4 reach out to my phone to tell you about her story,
5 but she's right here, sitting here behind me. Twenty-
6 five years later, one stove, the same refrigerator.
7 She said she got bed bugs. She said she got rats. She
8 says she got everything in her house. Now she's in
9 court with this building management; they didn't do
10 anything. We need a strong tenant protection. We need
11 enforcement, and we need our leader to hear us and
12 act. Thank you.

14 MUHAMMAD MUSAH: Good afternoon, Chair
15 Williams and Members of the Committee on Civil and
16 Human Rights. Thank you for holding today's important
17 hearing. My name is Muhammad Musah. I am a Ghanaian
18 American and the Lead Community Organizer at African
19 Communities Together. At our New York Chapter, I am
20 responsible for growing and engaging our membership
21 base.

22 I am here today to support our members as
23 they speak truth to power and recount their
24 experiences with housing discrimination and inequity,
25 here in New York City. I felt compelled to testify

1 today because, outside of my role as a professional
2 advocate, I have also experienced the failures of our
3 housing system right here in Harlem. In sharing my
4 story, my hope is that our members will also see that
5 housing is not just about shelter, it's about safety,
6 dignity, and human rights, and they don't need to be
7 silent in the face of injustice.
8

9 Here is my story: I lived in my apartment
10 on 118th Street in Harlem for three years. It was my
11 home, a place where I built my life and community. I
12 go to the masjid every day, and I have a lot of
13 friends that I have made there. Then, one day,
14 without warning, I discovered my name was no longer
15 on the building's virtual doorman list. Soon after,
16 my key fob stopped working altogether. Suddenly,
17 despite paying my rent religiously, I could no longer
18 access my own home. When I reached out to my
19 landlord, I was ignored. Weeks went by before the
20 management company finally told me the reason: the
21 landlord had been illegally leasing the unit to me.
22 And I really think this happened because my roommate
23 and I lived in that space, and I would walk around
24 sometimes with my Muslim thobe, my prayer thobe. And
25 my roommate is also just a happy-go-lucky person; we

1 don't look like we make a lot of money. And I am from
2 a different background. I'm a Muslim, and there are
3 not many Muslims in that building. So, we felt like
4 we were being ignored by management, by the landlord.
5 As a six-foot-three, Black man in New York City,
6 being locked out of my building was not just an
7 inconvenience; it was dangerous. I often had to wait
8 hours outside, hoping someone would let me in, while
9 worrying about how I might be perceived or treated
10 just for trying to enter my own home. I felt unsafe.
11 I felt invisible. And I felt powerless.

12 This experience is why I do the work that
13 I do today. At African Communities Together, we
14 started our Housing Justice Committee so that people
15 from African communities can have voices fighting for
16 housing injustice that look and sound just like them.
17 We want to ensure that tenants have a voice,
18 immigrants know their rights, so that every person
19 has someone fighting for them, just as people once
20 fought for me and my family when we sought asylum in
21 this country.

22 At this time, I urge the City Council to
23 strengthen tenant protections and hold landlords
24
25

accountable so that stories like mine become the exception, not the norm. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, and thank you for your personal testimonies. Does your organization currently work with CCHR at all?

AIRENAKHUE B. OMORAGBON: Good morning, or afternoon, I'm not sure what time it is at this point. So we do attend the Commission on Human Rights meetings. We go to that religiously, and there are some spaces where African leaders have the opportunity to speak and shed light on these issues.

I actually went to a meeting earlier this month, and you know, we had the opportunity to be with other advocates and other executive directors, et cetera, who were working with our community. And I was hearing a lot of the stories, like what you heard today on the panel that I'm sitting on, which is that a lot of African people may have fear in terms of saying this is what I'm experiencing. Really, what people are being asked to choose between is telling the Commission on Human Rights that there is an issue that is happening in my space or leaving the space. And maybe you may end up homeless, right? So I think

that was the biggest concern that everybody in that room spoke about.

One woman was talking about how she's, you know, an older woman, and she also has, like, roommates. She was telling the story about how someone living with her was essentially just mistreating her. And I don't want to say it, but like better words, putting things in her food. You can take it how you want to describe that, right? But she, you know, felt so afraid of saying something about this that she would lose her place to live. She can only live with a roommate. So if you lose the roommate, where do you go? Right?

So these are issues that are common in our community. And I also think it's getting worse despite all of the, you know, changes in immigration policy, etc.

So this is a big problem, and we're hoping that, you know, the Commission on Human Rights can do more education, especially in the languages that members of our community speak. I think they talked a lot about the 10 languages that we, you know, value here in the United States or in New York. Our members speak hundreds of languages. I think one

of the statistics that I have is that 86,694 people are speaking, you know, various African languages. And then you also have to add French and Arabic, right? So, unless they start to crank out more documents and more ways of communicating with people who speak African languages, uh, I believe these issues will continue without, you know, our members saying this is what is happening to me. So I hope that answers the question a little bit.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's helpful.

I think overall, within immigration, because CCHR also deals with immigration discrimination as well, I think in our city, whether it's CCHR or other agencies, I do feel like there is a deficit in support for Black immigrants, particularly African immigrants. So I have heard that before. I think even from my vantage point, when I have had African immigrants in my community, I struggled to find resources for them or find an entity that could support me in supporting them. So yeah, we should talk offline to figure out ways to advocate for not only CCHR, but also many different city agencies that could be doing a better job at serving the very large African population we have in New York City. So, yes,

we can chat. You can speak (INAUDIBLE) right there and exchange information so we can follow up.

AIRENAKHUE B. OMORAGBON: Well, thank you, Chair Williams.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah.

AIRENAKHUE B. OMORAGBON: We appreciated the opportunity today.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

MUHAMMAD MUSAH: Thank you, Chair Williams.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

Next up are Robert, Jeremiah, and Arthur. Do you want to start, Robert?

ROBERT DESIR: Sure, thank you. I have written testimony that I will submit online. But it's not ready yet. It still has to go up the flagpole at Legal Aid.

So I'm Robert Desir; I'm a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society. Thank you for holding this important hearing. I think the backdrop here is what's going on in the federal government with H.R.1 becoming law. We are seeing a progression of protections being gutted, uh, HUD being decimated, a lot of the resources that go towards Fair Housing

1 Work is not reaching the providers, namely the
2 testing work that's done, the enforcement that's so
3 necessary. So you know, a lot of the burden now is
4 going to fall on New York City. And the reality on
5 the ground here is that the source of income
6 discrimination remains alive and well. You still have
7 the landlords that flatly say no, they're not going
8 to accept Section 8. But since the law has been
9 passed, their tactics have grown far more
10 sophisticated. You know, they have an arsenal that
11 includes a number of tactics like imposing income
12 requirements that ignore subsidies, demanding
13 cosigners, and inflating deposits, ghosting, dragging
14 out the application process until a voucher expires,
15 pricing schemes, and refusal to repair. And we're
16 seeing a number of defenses that are being lodged in
17 courts that are becoming increasingly novel and far-
18 fetched.
19

20 So you know, the law is clear, but the
21 enforcement hasn't kept pace. I know I don't have a
22 lot of time, so I'm just gonna make a couple of
23 recommendations on what I would like to see from the
24 Commission on Human Rights:
25

First, more pursuit of the systemic cases to cut off the practices at the path, and that would involve, you know, bringing cases in court, joining the myriad of court actions that are happening, and also issuing guidance because, as I said, we're seeing an increase in different tactics there. So it would be great to hear from the agency on where they stand on these matters. Expanding real-time testing to catch ghosting and delays, I think, is important. And publicizing outcomes to deter violators. And also, I would urge the Council to take action. I think there are a number of bills that are under consideration, and they would create real-time financial consequences for discrimination and the unlawful credit and minimum (TIMER) income requirements for voucher holders.

I'll just close by saying that the tools exist. I think we have to increase the urgency, the resources, and the follow-through, because we're reaching a point where housing is becoming increasingly out of reach for many New Yorkers, and the vouchers are becoming more vital than they were before. So, it is really important that the

protections are in place to ensure that people are able to identify and secure housing. Thank you.

JEREMIAH SCHLOTMAN: Hello, I got it. Great.

Thank you to the Committee and to Chair Williams for the hearing today on such a critical issue. I'm Jeremiah Schlotman. I'm the Director of Housing Litigation for Legal Services NYC, we're the nation's largest civil legal services provider and we represent tens of thousands of low income New Yorkers every year on a variety of matters, but primarily in housing.

Our clients experience housing discrimination in a variety of ways. You heard some of it first hand from some of the tenants and my colleague Robert mentioned that as well about repairs and there's other ways as well. But all of these ways dramatically impact our clients' ability and their family's ability to break down the barriers that keep them trapped in poverty.

For example, our clients also routinely face source of income discrimination, with landlords and brokers often refusing to even discuss renting apartments once they learn that the perspective

1 renter has a housing subsidy. Or as mentioned various
2 times by folks, sometimes you have vigorous
3 conversations back and forth and suddenly you're
4 ghosted when the information comes up about your
5 housing subsidy. These are things-- And by the way,
6 those are little things when we talk about
7 enforcement and you know, Mr. Desir's recommendations
8 on that front about proactive enforcement, those are
9 things that can be difficult to catch. In an isolated
10 experience of ghosting, for example, there can be
11 myriad facially neutral reasons why the broker or the
12 owner has stopped communications. But if we track
13 patterns for exists example, we may see, you know,
14 these sort of routine patterns in a very real
15 consistency amongst how the owners and brokers are
16 treating prospective renters.

18 Our clients also experience quote-un
19 quote "steering" on the basis of receiving housing
20 subsidies, where brokers or owners try to steer them
21 into quote-unquote, "Section 8 buildings" or into
22 "voucher buildings" in an attempt to warehouse low
23 income families together and keep them away from the
24 higher income renters and the amenities for those
25 individuals.

This predictably reinforces the city's long standing residential housing segregation and the uneven availability of resources between communities that frequently accompany this type of segregation. Moreover, source of income discrimination means that those most in need, and for whom there has already been city, state and federal funding allocated, and appropriated, they're unable to realize that assistance and are often facing or experiencing homelessness in a needless fashion, which is not only an inhumane trauma on the families, but also a needless, significant burden on the public fisc.

At Legal services NYC We regularly file lawsuits against landlords who engage in housing discrimination. We have amazing decisions and precedent. Legal Aid is also joined as amicus on some of these significant cases, uh, victories, that are great for tenants. But those can only (INAUDIBLE) to the benefit generally to our individual clients. And understandably, many of our clients would rather settle and take something sure-shot than necessarily putting themselves on the line and litigating down the road. And that's understandable, right? They have enough challenges on their plates. But here the city,

1
2 against the backdrop we're talking about, has the
3 resources to combat this and be proactive. The local
4 and state can be a bulwark against a lot of what's
5 happening, the dismantling of the federal protections
6 down to nothing more than mere rubble. But we have
7 the tools. But it's about enforcing those laws and
8 enforcing those values that we have in our city. And
9 that will bring the positive impact if we're
10 proactive about it, in line with a lot of the
11 recommendations from my colleagues here.

12 So we appreciate your work. And more than
13 ever, this is a type of session that we need. And as
14 we move quickly towards implementation in order to
15 truly be that bulwark. Thank you.

16 ARTHUR Z. SCHWARTZ: Good afternoon, my
17 name is Arthur Schwartz, and I am the general
18 counsel of the Center for the Independence of the
19 Disabled New York, which is an organization, if
20 you're not familiar with it, which serves-- Last
21 year we serviced 62,500 disabled New Yorkers in
22 their efforts to live independently, meaning
23 getting them out of nursing homes into housing,
24 into housing that that serves their needs, getting
25

benefits, et cetera. We've gone from about 25,000 four years ago to 62,500 in the last year.

For me, housing-- I spent 45 years as a labor and employment lawyer and rarely dealt with the housing issue. But I came to learn-- I've come to learn a lot in my year and a half at Sydney that I think is important to pass on to you.

First of all, my written testimony has a lot of statistics, but one of the most important is that, right now in New York City, public housing, 43% of the households in public housing have a person with a disability; in subsidized rental 35%; in regulated housing 24%. So there's a lot of people with disabilities living in that type of housing and that's a big segment of the population. And that's why we see a lot of people with problems.

And what I wanted was just to impart an interesting experience, which led me to want to come here today. We had a disabled person who lived in a NYCHA Development in Brooklyn. And her NYCHA development, along with another one, was taken over under the RAD program by an entity called Stanley Avenue Preservation. Stanley Avenue Preservation

1 was supposed to-- their job was to, in return for
2 collecting the rents, they had to repair the
3 buildings. What Stanley Avenue-- so this person
4 came to me, and her first complaint was that they
5 weren't including her Section 8 housing benefit in
6 her lease, and she didn't want to sign it, and they
7 didn't want to add it in. So they sued her for
8 holdover. Then they sued her for not allowing them
9 to have access. Then they sued her again for not
10 allowing her to-- so she had three cases. When she
11 called me up in Sydney, she had three cases pending
12 in the Housing Court. They were all on the same
13 day. So I looked them up, and I found out that
14 Stanley and Stanley Avenue Preservation, which has
15 1,900 tenants, had 190 active LNT cases going on.
16 And when I looked at the list of who the attorneys
17 were, there were nine, *nine* out of 190. So I went
18 to court with her, and the first complaint I made
19 to the judge was-- who said, "You've gone on too
20 long. We can't reopen your litigation. You're going
21 to have to go to trial," whatever she was saying.
22 And it was the first time she had a lawyer. And I
23 said, "Judge, she's never gotten a lawyer, and
24 she's been here 12 times." And the judge-- and I

1 said, "This is a failure of the Office of Court
2 Administration," and she said, "No, it's a failure
3 of the City. The City doesn't fund the lawyers. We
4 send people up to see the lawyers."

5 So I've started a project with disabled
6 tenants with this one landlord, and I am finding
7 they go up to the office to get a lawyer, and
8 they're told, "We're at capacity."

9 So in this particular development, nine
10 out of 190, that's an absurd percentage of people—
11 you can fight for all the affordable housing you
12 want, if the tenants are then getting evicted, and
13 if they don't have lawyers, they're very likely to
14 get evicted. I watch stuff in the courtroom. I
15 can't believe it. They're likely to get evicted.
16 You're bringing people in one door and moving them
17 out the other door.

18 So what I push in my testimony, in my
19 written testimony, is, number one, the City Council
20 has to expand the Right to Counsel Program. Borough
21 President Levine wrote a whole piece on it in the
22 last few months about how there should be a law
23 stopping all non-represented L&T cases from
24 proceeding.
25

Second, I say fivefold. I talked to some people in the audience. I think there needs to be a fivefold increase in the amount of money that's put into the Right to Counsel program.

I also want to urge, because half of the regulated apartments and NYCHA apartments have stairs requiring people with mobility issues to go up, which makes them inaccessible. And we should be talking not just about affordable housing, but affordable and accessible housing.

It's such a large percentage of those who need affordable housing are disabled, we need to include that number in there, that word, when we're talking about housing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, yes, I do think this is an important topic that I think gets glossed over by some of the more splashy headlines around housing. I don't know why we kind of talk about it as a council when it comes to the source of income discrimination and not fair housing and disability access. But it is not talked about from this lens. And it is a gap. I don't know-- this is like, I feel like a conversation in the weeds. Because we can say housing

1 discrimination, we can say there's a housing crisis
2 in New York City, but this particular conversation
3 is getting in the weeds. And I don't know if it's a
4 capacity issue with just the government, but I do
5 think that it is very important. And there are a
6 lot of people who work on it, but not enough people
7 are talking about how to really address housing
8 discrimination. Lots of studies are saying we have
9 a supply issue, but then we also have an issue with
10 the very small supply we have with people actually
11 landing an apartment or staying in their apartment.
12 And I feel like it just really exacerbates the
13 issue.
14

15 I thought I had a question, but I feel
16 like you guys were pretty comprehensive. I plan to
17 follow up with CCHR. It's very difficult sometimes
18 at these hearings because, you know, agencies kind
19 of present testimony that makes it seem like
20 everything's okay. And then you speak to other
21 people, and then you're like, Oh no, everything's
22 not okay.

23 I don't know, have you all worked with--
24 - I know the answer is probably yes-- but have you
25 all worked with CCHR in any official capacities? If

1 so, what was the capacity? I know you suggested
2 that they attach themselves to existing litigation
3 that's taking place. Have you had success in that
4 when you have reached out or spoken to CCHR? I just
5 want to understand what engagement you all have
6 with CCHR, and anything that you think could be
7 better with that engagement itself.
8

9 ROBERT DESIR: Yeah, go ahead.

10 JEREMIAH SCHLOTMAN: So the answer is
11 yes. First off, we have engaged with them, and I'm
12 glad you asked the question, Council Member,
13 because part of this testimony, too, is we talk
14 about the money availability, the increase in
15 funding, things like that, what kind of positive
16 impact that would bring? And all of that is
17 necessary. But you also have to be strategic about
18 it. And I know there's only so much that, you know,
19 you can do, you appropriate the money, agencies
20 have to be smart about what it does to broaden this
21 impact. But the idea is that, for example,
22 competitive salaries would attract people who would
23 be very dedicated and willingly do this work for
24 their whole life, and are brilliant, but also need
25 to raise their own families in this expensive area.

That's something, for example, that surely would keep top talent and have a flow down, positive impact on our clients and our communities, right, having that experience and allocating in a smart fashion.

That being said, I would love to see that, but with the folks that we've had, even more inexperienced folks, we do often get good, decent engagement. We get a willingness to investigate, and it's even helped, sometimes, in litigation that we filed, either separately or only through the Commission.

So they can be helpful. I think there's a will there, but I think there are certain structural things that probably can increase their impact positively and proactively—that, us, having to wait client by client and have all those variables, you know, we have to wait-- we had to wait years, for example, for a court to say, “Vicarious liability exists under New York City Human Rights Law,” “A broker's discrimination against you for sources of income”. Yep, yeah, the landlord's liable, right? But that had to go all the way and get litigated, and Legal Aid was in on

that. So that takes time. So it's about this proactivity. That's really what I would say would be the real impact.

ROBERT DESIR: All I would add to that is, you know, and I echo the sentiments, you know, we've collaborated with HCR in trying to find out how we could support them in, you know, their push for increased funding so they can do a lot of the work that we urge.

We've also worked with them on issues around outreach, particularly around the Fair Chance to Housing Act, which is, you know, new and people are still learning about. And I think they're, you know, just starting to think about how they're going to enforce that. And I'm part of a coalition that's done a lot of work around that, you know, getting the law passed, and still working towards educating the community, educating people who interface with folks that are in their housing search, you know, wherever they are.

So, you know, there have been opportunities, and also I think that CCHR is active in collaborating with our staff that focuses on employment-related issues. So, there are definitely

opportunities there, definitely instances of synergy. There's a lot that we would like to see from the agency.

ARTHUR Z. SCHWARTZ: My experience with CCHR has been for 45 years as an employment lawyer, and I would say that I rarely tell people to rely on the City Commission, unless there's absolutely no way that they can find someone to take them to court. Because the City Commission remains horribly horrible-- just like the Right to Counsel program, horribly underfunded. They really can't move things quickly, particularly in the housing area, where somebody is being denied an apartment or being kicked out of an apartment. They're not really equipped to-- unless there's some systemic issue that-- then they'd probably use Legal Aid to do the litigation. They're not really equipped to handle the system. It would be wonderful if they were equipped to do that kind of work, you know, active advocacy work in the courts as opposed to through the process that they have, but they're not, they're just totally underfunded, that's my position.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you for your testimony. I appreciate it.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, Anthony and Barbara? Is that right? Barabara?

Do you want to go first, Anthony?

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE)

BARBARA MANUEL (phonetic): Good afternoon to you. My name is Barbara Manuel, and I immigrated to the United States 33 years ago. I have two disabled, some two disabled mentally disabled sons. In 2018, I had been on Section 8 for over 20 years. After our apartment failed inspections, I decided to look for apartments. I couldn't find anyone, uh, apartment in the city. So I decided to move the voucher to Albany. In Albany, the same thing. So I decided to move out of the state. From New York State to California. So, before I moved, I requested the voucher to be bought out to California. So once you get there, in a short term, within the same months, I received a letter from NYCHA saying that our Section 8 is terminated for some reason-- that one of the household members moved out, and I never reported it to NYCHA, which wasn't true. I had my two disabled

sons and myself on the voucher. So I came back to the city and asked them why they terminated the voucher. I later found out that before we moved out in 2017, I found out that for Medicaid, my children's addresses had been changed for Medicaid and Social Security. So, as a result of that, that's why the Section 8 was terminated, meaning that my children are not living with me. So when they terminated the Section 8 and stated that one of your family members moved out, and you never reported it. It's the result of what Medicaid, the change of address, and the change of address from Social Security are the reasons why the Section 8 was terminated. And also at the same time, in October 2017, when I found out they had my children's address had been changed, I took Medicaid to court. That's why they switched my they changed my children's addresses. Not only did they change the addresses, they also made it as if my younger son, who at that time was 13 years old, was not living with me. Back and forth, Medicaid said they have changed the address.

To make it short, for six years now, we've been homeless. The City denied us over and over to accommodate even my, uh, disabled son, who lives

with me now-- accommodate him. Every time we moved, they moved us to a different shelter. His needs are not met.

So to make it short, we are still homeless and I want to know why the Section 8 was terminated and given another family. Because I never violated any rules of Section 8. So that's it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We can talk offline, because I don't know, I would probably need to have a conversation with a city or quasi-agency. Because Section 8 is tricky, because it's a federal program, and it's New York City, but then we have PHEPS Vouchers, with state, city, federal—it's confusing. So, we can chat offline to figure out exactly what you had before, and figure out a way to help you now.

Do you currently hold a CityFHEPS Voucher?

BARBARA MANUEL: Yes, I do, but it is going to expire this month. And I still haven't found a place to... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: An apartment.

BARBARA MANUEL: We haven't found a place yet. And our voucher was from HPD.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, you know, I try to be as honest as possible. I have no faith in the federal government; I have no faith in HUD. So, we can chat offline to figure out if there are any city or state programs that can be helpful to get you out of the shelter.

BARBARA MANUEL: And my children also.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, of course...

BARBARA MANUEL: Not just me.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We can't leave them there.

BARBARA MANUEL: Okay, thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

ANTHONY FELICIANO: Good afternoon, Dr. Chair Williams. My name is Anthony Feliciano, and I am the Vice President of Community Mobilization for Housing Works.

I was just going to call attention again to the persistent and harmful practice of source of income discrimination, especially against those who rely on rental assistance like HASA, CityFHEPS, and Section 8 vouchers. We know it's illegal, but

landlords and brokers continue to deny housing through tactics like ghosting, false claims of unavailability, and increasingly, minimum income and credit score requirements that are basically irrelevant for voucher holders whose rent is already subsidized. We already know (INAUDIBLE) disproportionately harms Black and Latinos, but the stigma of discriminatory screening continues to push people into homelessness, undermining public health and equity.

Our legal team has fought these practices, including landmark cases like *Short v. Manhattan Apts* and *Olivierre v. Parkchester*, which forced landlords to accept vouchers and stop using discriminatory income thresholds. But enforcement is weak, and many cases go unreported. And even when we have Council Bill 1214, it is not enough.

We urge the Council to take the following actions:

Introduce and pass legislation or expand on existing regulations to ban minimum-income requirements; strengthen the source of income protections by increasing penalties for violators; ban the use of credit scores to screen voucher

holders across all housing types; ensure Fair Housing to Housing for people relying on government assistance—And just to add, for all housing types, what I mean is, it may go to subsidized housing and Section 8, but it doesn't go into the private landlordship that's going on as well; hold landlords accountable for discriminatory screening practices; require transparency in rental application processes; increase enforcement capacity and CCHR, but that's a need for funding; centralized system to track the source of income discrimination and hold repeat offenders accountable.

Obviously, we heard a little bit from the Agency about funding Know Your Rights, but we need to continue funding more Know Your Rights Campaigns to combat not only the HIV stigma that I have in terms of our clients and our work, but also the racial bias. And I think we need to, it's drop in the dime (sic), but provide \$4 million annually to fund legal service organizations with a proven record of fighting SOI discrimination. It is a drop in the dime, but it's added to already what the funding is going out for.

And I just want to add one thing that maybe the Council is not aware of: We urge the Council to expand eligibility for the CityFHEPS to include residents of all emergency and transitional housing programs, not just DHS shelters. Programs like the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice Transitional Housing Unit Initiative help people who are leaving justice-involved incarceration rebuild their lives. But without access to vouchers, they risk being pushed back into homelessness and jail.

We already know this is not just a housing issue; it's a human rights issue, and everyone deserves a stable place to live. But we know that for people living with HIV, it's necessary because it (TIMER) helps with adherence, and it helps them take care of themselves. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Does your organization work with the CCHR?

ANTHONY FELICIANO: We do, but my role has been mostly in the healthcare side.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm.

ANTHONY FELICIANO: I do not know from our housing side, but we do know that they're extremely underfunded. But I also think that we can be more

creative and utilize the CBOs, the faith-based, and the legal services to reach out and to do some of this kind of secret shopper and everything else that needs to be done, including affirmative cases, because I think that's a part that's not being funded as much as it should be.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What do you mean by "affirmative cases"?

ANTHONY FELICIANO: To be more proactive, to start aggregating, checking, helping them with the patterns, working maybe with the Council in a more centralized system that can be accessible not only to the not-for-profits, but also to the City Council.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony. I appreciate it.

And, last, but certainly not least, we have the wonderful individuals who have joined us virtually—Mbacke, please tell how to pronounce that, Amy, and Yolanda. And we can start with Mbacke, so you can correct me if I said your first name wrong.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MBACKE THIAM: Hello, everyone.

(INAUDIBLE) you all can see me.

My name is Mbacke, I'm the housing... Can you all see me?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes.

MBACKE THIAM: My name is Mbacke Thiam. I am the Housing and Health Community Organizer at Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY). We advocate for people with disabilities in the five boroughs of New York City. Thank you, Chair, Dr. Williams, or Ms. Williams, and hello to everyone who is in the hearing today.

I think this is a very important topic for people with disabilities in New York City, and I just want to acknowledge our General Counsel, who was there earlier, Arthur Schwartz, and was also able to point out some points (INAUDIBLE) available and accessible housing.

A lot of the time, our housing is-- We talk about affordable housing (INAUDIBLE), pointing out the need for accessibility. Also, sometimes when people with disabilities are requesting apartments, they may be disqualified when they disclose their Disabilities. It's something also to point out, because I think it's illegal, but also, it's harmful to people with disabilities who will stay longer in

shelters and may not be able to see themselves living independently in the community.

I also wanted to talk about SCRIE and DRIE Programs, which are programs for senior citizens and people with disabilities. So SCRIE is like the senior citizens rent increase exemption, and also the disability grant increase exemption. These programs are very important for people with disabilities in New York City. Unfortunately, some people are not aware of these programs, and we need to urge the City to fund and expand these programs to people who deserve it and need it.

I also wanted to talk about the Right to Counsel, which is very important. If you're trying to keep the families together, we also want to advocate for them in court. I know others talked about it earlier regarding expanding and funding the Right to Counsel program, so people can have a lawyer, a housing lawyer, or an attorney who is qualified to represent them in court before seeing the judge, before their hearing. This will slow down the eviction machine of the housing court. This will also help people with disabilities to stay in their

families, and also help them navigate the housing process here. (TIMER) I'm drafting...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: (INAUDIBLE) Your time has expired.

MBACKE THIAM: Yeah, I'm drafting a written testimony, and I will be submitting it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

Amy?

AMY BLUMSACK: Hi, good afternoon, Chair Williams. My name is Amy Blumsack, and I'm the Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors Together. I want to thank you for holding this important hearing today on a very critical and timely topic. Thank you to the Committee Members and the committee staff.

I think that you described the context, unfortunately, of the housing crisis in New York City so well in your opening statements.

As you also know, source of income discrimination is a massive barrier to people accessing housing. Neighbors Together has been working with voucher holders very intensively in both helping them find housing as individuals and working

on policy solutions to end the source of income discrimination since 2019.

We have a couple of suggestions that I would like to share.

The first is that we have a bill package called the End Source of Income Discrimination Bill package. It's Intros 1210 through 1215, and they are a number of bills that are ideas that were sourced directly from our members who are voucher recipients who have experienced source of income discrimination, and the bills that would create... disincentivize landlords from engaging in source of income discrimination. Things like increasing fines based on portfolio size, removing credit checks and minimum income requirements, and a series of other policies that we think would have a really significant impact on reducing the amount of source of income discrimination that voucher holders face.

The other piece that I think is really important is that, yes, CCHR needs more capacity, especially in this current political context and landscape, to do the important work that they do. And they can only utilize increased funding if the barriers to hiring and timely onboarding are removed.

1 The Office of Budget... OMB has created a variety of
2 requirements that really stymie the Commission's
3 ability to bring on new staff. Right? So even if we
4 fight to give them more funding, if they're only
5 allowed to hire one person for every two people who
6 leave the Commission, then they're never going to be
7 able to fully onboard all of the staff lines that
8 they were given. So it's a little like the snake
9 eating its tail, and it seems to be a purposeful
10 tactic being used to prevent them from being able to
11 come to full capacity, so that they can do their job
12 well. So, until these issues are addressed, CCHR will
13 always be working at a deficit and will never be able
14 to meet the needs of the many millions of people who
15 live in New York City who desperately need their
16 help.

17 I will be submitting written testimony
18 that outlines some of the ways in which these
19 barriers could be removed, or what the problems are,
20 and what the barriers are specifically. And I think
21 it's really important that the City work on
22 addressing those, as well as passing the Source of
23 Income Discrimination Bill Package that I mentioned
24 previously.
25

So thank you, Chair Williams, for all of your work on this important issue, and I look forward to working with you as we move forward. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

Yolanda?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

YOLANDA ALLISON: Greetings, good afternoon, Chair Williams, and everyone on this Panel.

My name is Ms. Yolanda Allison. I currently reside at the Axel Building, an HPD Housing Connect Lottery Affordable Unit, and I am a Section 8 recipient.

Today, I want to share my experiences and advocate for the end of Source of Income (SOI) safe, quality, and affordable housing.

Two years ago, thanks to the assistance of "We Unlock NYC", CIDNY, CCHR agents, and social workers, and investigators, I finally secured a safe and affordable apartment through NYC HPD Housing Connect Lottery. However, I quickly learned that both the landlord and HPD failed to inform us about significant issues related to the property. My set-aside apartment is directly beneath a commercial gym—

1 a gym is above us, okay? Uhm, one second... Which has
2 caused constant noise disruptions from 5:00 AM to
3 12:00 midnight. Additionally, the building has had
4 ongoing pipe and HVAC construction issues, leading to
5 severe flooding, which has made living here
6 increasingly unattainable, and I unfortunately
7 discovered too late that my renters' insurance does
8 not cover flood damage, which compelled me to seek
9 another apartment, which I'm currently surveying for
10 again.
11

12 The HPD Housing Lottery can do a better
13 job with respect to the selection of the set-aside
14 affordable units. Many times, some of the set-aside
15 apartments are not of the very best quality. For
16 example, there are many imperfections, such as
17 structural issues, the quality of the stove,
18 refrigerators, or the apartment is cut up so small
19 that you could barely fit a bed, not to mention
20 furniture. They tried to steer us to apartments
21 located on super high floors, which I am a person
22 with a disability, so trying to go up-- move me up to
23 an apartment where there are heights, it makes me
24 sick to the point where my vertigo is extremely
25

aggravated. So, quite often I will not be selecting an apartment up on a high floor.

If you go for a two-bedroom apartment, some of the discriminations are that they'll give you the smallest apartment within the building. And these apartments, I kid you not, are the size of a jail cell. Oftentimes, what is advertised in the Housing Connect is not the same quality of apartment that a lottery or Section 8 will receive-- the recipient will receive. This experience has highlighted an unjust barrier...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has expired.

YOLANDA ALLISON: Okay, I have submitted-- I will be submitting additional arguments in a written testimony with the proper edits. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

Seeing that there is nobody left on Zoom and no one here in person, this hearing is officially closed. [GAVEL] Thank you so much, everyone, the Sergeants, for your help. Have a great day.

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 23, 2025