

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS  
CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

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Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Start: 10:25 A.M.

Recess: 1:47 P.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room,  
16th Floor

B E F O R E: Pierina Ana Sanchez, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu

Alexa Avilés

Eric Dinowitz

Oswald Feliz

Crystal Hudson

Lincoln Restler

## COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Ahmed Tigani,  
Acting Commissioner, New York City Housing  
Preservation & Development (HPD)

Emily Osgood,  
Associate Commissioner for Housing Services,  
New York City Housing Preservation & Development  
(HPD)

Meryl Block Weissman,  
Deputy Commissioner for Housing Access and  
Stability, New York City Housing Preservation &  
Development (HPD)

Jumelia Abrahamson,  
Director of Programs at University Neighborhood  
Housing Program (UNHP); AHORA — Affordable  
Housing Opportunities Right Away

Brendan Mitchell,  
Director of Real Estate at University  
Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP)

Arielle Hersh,  
Director of Policy and New Projects at UHAB  
(Urban Homesteading Assistance Board)

Eric Urquiza,  
Community Coordinator and Housing Specialist at  
West Bronx Housing & Neighborhood Resource Center

Joshua Stephenson,  
Executive Director of West Bronx Housing and  
Neighborhood Resource Center

Howard Slatkin,  
Executive Director of Citizens Housing and  
Planning Council

## COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

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

Brendan Cheney,  
Director of Policy and Operations at the New York  
Housing Conference

Milagros Salazar,  
Member of AHORA (Via Interpreter)

Brendan Benn,  
Business Representative for the International  
Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), Local 30

Shane Canada,  
Stationary Engineer Apprentice, IUOE Local 30

Richard Bess,  
Graduate of Stationary Engineer Apprenticeship  
Program from IUOE Local 30

Victoriano and Valentina Mejia (Via Interpreter)

Eric Lee,  
Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of  
America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY)

Karen Baez,  
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

Robert Desir,  
Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Society

Alex Martinez,  
Representative from Kingsbridge Heights Community  
Center

Sonia Simpson,  
Member of Affordable Housing Opportunity Right  
Away (AHORA)

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS  
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Mbacke Thiam,  
Health Community Organizer at Center for  
Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)

Kevin Wolfe,  
Senior Government Affairs Manager at Center for  
New York City Neighborhoods (CNYCN)

Christopher Leon Johnson

SERGEANT LEWIS: Microphone check, microphone check, this is a microphone check for today's Committee on Housing and Buildings. Today's date is April 29, 2025 — on the 16th Floor Committee Room, 250 Broadway, 16th Floor Committee Room — recorded by Walter Lewis.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, good morning, welcome to the New York City Council Hearing on the Committee on Housing and Buildings.

At this time, please silence all electronic devices and do not approach the dais. I repeat, please do not approach the dais.

If you are testifying today, make sure you fill out a testimony slip at the back of the room with the Sergeant at Arms, even if you have already signed up online.

We also have translation devices in the lobby, Spanish translation, so if you need Spanish translation, you can pick one up in the lobby.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Chair, you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ:[GAVEL] Good morning, everyone. I'm Council Member Pierina Sanchez, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings. Today, the

New York City Council is holding an oversight hearing on an issue that touches the lives of thousands of New Yorkers, the Affordable Housing Lottery, and the flawed platform that our city uses to administer the lottery, Housing Connect.

I've said it time and again as chair of this committee, and sadly, it is no less true today — New York City is in the throes of a housing crisis. We know the statistics, a 1.4% vacancy rate for rental units with more than half of renters rent-burdened and a third of low income renters severely rent burdened. If you want a low cost unit, you essentially cannot find one.

But today, I urge us to look beyond these statistics and remember the human cost of this crisis and the frustration that New Yorkers experience when even the few resources that we do have available are confusing and difficult to navigate.

Every day in my district office in the West Bronx, we serve dozens of our neighbors who are desperate to find an apartment, to find a safe, affordable place that they can call home. My staff works tirelessly to help these constituents gather their paperwork, navigate a platform that often

leaves them with more questions than answers, and for the lucky few, secure an apartment after months or sometimes years of trying.

But for as much support as we provide, the reality is that for many, the technology has made it harder, not easier, for New Yorkers to find an affordable apartment that meets their needs.

Today, our hope is to shine a light on fundamental issues that continue to plague Housing Connect and turn our collective attention toward solution.

Some context, between January 2014 and June of 2020, a six-year period, 29 million applications were received on Housing Connect compared to just 27,819 leases signed. That means that just one lease was issued for every 1,000 applications that were submitted. The root cause here is, of course, that we have just a fraction of the affordable apartments that we need to meet the demand.

But the application technology itself also causes unnecessary delay. For instance, according to the Fiscal Year 2025 Mayor's Management Report, it takes HPD an average of 191 days to approve an applicant after the applicant has won the lottery.

During this period, the lottery winner's housing unit sits vacant, denying someone the opportunity to live in an affordable home for over six months.

And some types of affordable apartments regularly take longer than a 191 days to fill. In cases where a previously occupied, affordable unit becomes available, which is commonly known as a re-rental, HPD's Marketing Handbook or requirements require that the building's marketing agent reach out one by one to applicants who expressed an interest in re-rental units in general when they created their Housing Connect account. This process leads to the marketing agent well, excuse me. This process leads to the marketing agent contacting applicants who may not be interested in a particular re-rental unit that has become available and creates delays in finding a new tenant for the affordable home.

There are also concerns that the lottery system is not accessible to some New Yorkers, especially those who may struggle to use Housing Connect's online interface. In particular, older adults, older New Yorkers, and New Yorkers without access to a computer face significant barriers when it comes to



learning about new housing lottery opportunities and responding to HPD's notifications in a timely manner.

And although HPD's Marketing Handbook requires that paper applications for housing lotteries be accepted, anecdotal information suggests that few applicants are aware of or utilize this option.

I'm sorry, there's somebody who has something on speaker phone or something and it's very distracting.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Someone has translation services. It's just a little loud.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Oh, okay. Okay, no problem. I'm just like, is it are they talking to me? Okay. No problem.

And although HPD's Marketing Handbook requires that paper application... okay, I already read that.

Okay. Proving that you are income eligible for an affordable housing is difficult enough and shouldn't be further complicated by barriers to computer literacy or access.

To address these issues with the housing lottery system, I've introduced a number of bills that we will hear today. They are:

Intro 1264, which would require HPD to allow users to apply directly to specific re-rental units on Housing Connect.

Intro 1265, which would allow applicants or a designee of their choice to receive notifications concerning lottery applications by email or text message – So figure grandma can assign her grandchild to receive those notifications.

And Introduction 1266, which would establish a program to provide in person Housing Connect application assistance in publicly accessible spaces such as older adult centers, community centers, and recreation centers.

These three bills aim to improve the efficiency of the housing lottery system and ensure that more New Yorkers have a fairer shot at securing an affordable apartment.

I want to thank our partners at the universe University Neighborhood Housing Program or UNHP, the members AHORA (Affordable Housing Opportunities Right Away, for their collaboration on this legislation, as well as my staff, Maria Villalobos, Ben Ratner, Kim Castellanos, Gerard Fernandez, Paola Olivo, (INAUDIBLE), Carla Castellanos, and Gerard Fernandez.

And, of course, our committee staff, Austin Maloney, Jose Conde, Andrew Bourne, Dirk Spencer, Jack Storey, and Reese Hirota.

I'm joined today by Council Member Eric Dinowitz and Crystal Hudson, and we will be joined by others shortly.

And before we hear from HPD, I'd like to read an opening statement from Council Member De La Rosa who could not join us today, but her bill 1207 is also being heard.

You ready? I'm gonna be Carmen. I'm gonna do my best impression. Okay. All right.

"Good morning, Chair, colleagues, and members of the public. Today, we'll be hearing my bill Intro 1207, a common sense and urgently needed amendment to the administrative code of the city of New York, one that supports our workforce, strengthen city services and responds directly to operational challenges we face today. This bill would allow time spent in a New York State approved apprenticeship program to count toward the supervised practical experience required to obtain a high pressure boiler operating engineer license. Currently applicants must first complete a two-year apprenticeship and add at least three or

more years of supervised experience operating high pressure boilers.

Intro 1207 eliminates this unnecessary duplication by recognizing the hands-on supervised experience gained during the apprenticeship as valid toward the three-year requirement.

This change is not only logical, is essential. The Department of Buildings, which recommended this bill, is facing a significant backlog on licensing engineers. By streamlining the pathway to licensure, without compromising safety or quality, we can efficiently grow a skilled qualified workforce.

At a time when we are working hard to refill vacancies across our municipal agencies, this legislation is aligned with our broader mission to ensure that we have the personnel in place to deliver high quality, reliable services to all New Yorkers.

Intro 1207 is about removing unnecessary barriers, expanding opportunities for working people, and making government work smarter. I urge my colleagues to support this bill and help move it forward.

Thank you to Council Member Shekar Krishnan for your partnership; Thank you to IUOE Local 30 and

Department of Buildings for advocacy and work on this bill.

Thank you, Chair Sanchez, and Committee Counsel for allowing us the opportunity to have this bill heard today."

Thank you, Council Member De La Rosa.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That impression was not good.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: It was not good? All right. Don't tell her, okay. (LAUGHTER)

Thank you so much, everyone. I will now turn it over to committee counsel to administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and to answer all council member questions honestly?

*PANEL AFFIRMS*

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Good morning, Chair Sanchez, members of the Committee, and all our partners that help make affordable housing possible in New York City. My name is Ahmed Tigani, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today

as the Acting Commissioner of the Department of  
Housing Preservation and Development.

Thank you for inviting me here and for allowing  
me to be joined by my team, the Deputy Commissioner  
of Housing Access and Stability, Meryl Block  
Weissman, and the Associate Commissioner Of Housing  
Opportunity and Placement Services, Emily Osgood.

We are grateful for the chance to discuss one of  
the most powerful tools in HPD's mission to expand  
access to affordable housing, the Housing Connect  
Lottery.

We talk to New Yorkers every day who are doing  
everything they can to stay in this city. Some have  
only ever known this place as home – people working  
one or two jobs to make ends meet, single parents,  
frontline workers, retired New Yorkers on fixed  
incomes who helped shape the neighborhoods we love.  
These residents are now seeking access to affordable  
housing opportunities that meet them where they are  
at a cost they can afford in a neighborhood that they  
love. We hear from children that grew up in this city  
and now adults returning home after college in search  
of new opportunity and families who want nothing more

than a stable, affordable home where they can raise their children in peace.

Today, we find ourselves in a moment of real urgency with a frightening low vacancy rate of just 1.4% for all apartments. And to break it down further, 0.94% for apartments priced at \$2,400 and less, and then less than 0.39% for homes at \$1,100; we're at virtually zero for extremely low income families.

The housing crisis is not looming, it's here. Rents continue to rise while demand for affordable housing far outpaces that supply. For too many New Yorkers, the process of securing housing feels like a full time job in itself. It's complicated, it can be slow, it's filled with uncertainty. This is a moment that calls for all of us, and calls on all of us, to move with urgency, clarity and purpose. That's why our work at HPD, especially within the Office of Housing Access and Stability, is focused on one clear goal, cutting through the red tape and getting people housed. We're not just managing this Housing Connect System, we're breaking it down, we're taking in and assessing feedback, and we are rebuilding it to be faster, more responsive, and easier to navigate.

This past fiscal year, we didn't just talk about removing barriers, we did it. We eliminated credit checks for voucher holders, because families with rental assistance should not be blocked by barriers that were never even necessary. We updated the Marketing Handbook, reducing paperwork, removing notarization requirements, easing documentation for federal benefit recipients, and making the process more accessible for people with disabilities.

We're even making marketing smarter. In addition to requiring most new lotteries to advertise in newspapers and conduct outreach to local community based organizations and elected officials, HPD and HDC, HDC is Housing Development Corporation and our sister agency in the housing work. We send email blasts to hundreds of thousands of active Housing Connect users whenever a new opportunity becomes available. We also email applicants directly when there's an update to their profile. Whether it's a reminder to submit documents, a status on an appeal, or a final determination, so they never miss a step in the process.

Our website also offers Housing Connect trainings with short informative videos on how to



1 apply to lotteries, set up an account, income  
2 eligibility, and more – along with a FAQ, frequently  
3 asked questions document, answering New Yorkers' most  
4 often sought after issues and questions. We're  
5 already seeing results from those changes.

6  
7 In 2024, HPD helped more New Yorkers move into  
8 affordable housing than ever before – 14,654  
9 households, that's over 14,000 second chances, new  
10 beginnings, and families finally able to exhale. Of  
11 those, more than 10,000 secured homes through Housing  
12 Connect lotteries, and another 4,600 families moved  
13 out of shelter and into HPD's homeless set-aside  
14 units. In total, more than 300 affordable housing  
15 lotteries were advertised this year, opening up  
16 opportunities across the five boroughs. And  
17 currently, today, there are 31 rental opportunities  
18 available in Housing Connect resulting in 2,675 units  
19 across the city that people can apply to.

20 This work is about keeping New Yorkers housed.  
21 That's why we've expanded the programs and support  
22 systems that promote long term stability. We've  
23 refreshed our Retention and Stabilization Service  
24 Request for qualifications, which is our document  
25 that we refresh so that there are providers who

support formerly homeless clients, if they choose to maintain a stable tenancy after moving into affordable housing.

For families transitioning out of shelter, we've provided \$2 million in essential furniture vouchers, helping them settle in with stability and dignity.

And with the Council's and the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection's help, we've issued the Ready to Rent program, pairing free financial counseling with hands-on application support, so more New Yorkers can successfully navigate the process from the very beginning.

We also coordinate educational campaigns, trainings, and in person events with the Department for the Aging, the Department of Veteran Services, ENDGBV, the Department to End Gender Based Violence, and other city agencies to work hand in hand and share the most up to date information with our communities.

Another key component of our outreach is the Housing Ambassador Program, a network of about fifty trusted community based organizations at over sixty locations across all five boroughs that work directly with New Yorkers to help them apply for affordable

housing, maintain their Housing Connect profiles, and navigate the tenant selection process.

Many of the council members here today represent districts with active Housing Ambassadors, and we're grateful for your partnership in connecting residents to those important services. This on the ground work is further supported by HPD's Housing Connect Outreach Team, which leads public facing lottery presentations and workshops in partnership with community organizations and in collaboration with elected officials.

In calendar year 2024 alone, this team helped coordinate nearly eighty events citywide, reaching more than 3,000 New Yorkers.

For residents who need help at and outside of these events, our Housing Connect Hotline offers another layer of support. Staffed by a dedicated team of 22 incredible public servants, the hotline represents to responds to over 10,000 calls annually. We also maintain a dedicated customer service email that fields hundreds of questions and complaints each week. Beyond this, HPD's Division of Neighborhood Development and Stabilization, which is a part of the Office Of Neighborhood Strategies, you normally work

with them on planning work, on our neighborhood plans, and individual public sites – they interact with the community and through that work also offer a venue for talking about Housing Connect, learning about Housing Connect. They regularly attend citywide events and speaking engagements to represent HPD's programs and respond to housing questions.

But we also know there's more work to do. We're investing in the future of our systems, starting with a full scale overhaul of Housing Connect. We're committed to making it faster, clearer, and easier to use. This work is already underway and will continue over the next year.

As part of the broader transformation, we're carefully reviewing the legislation being considered today. Intro 1266 would require HPD to create an in person Housing Connect Assistance Program in coordination with other agencies. We recognize the intent behind this bill and it's something we believe in as well, to ensure New Yorkers can get the help they need navigating the affordable housing process. As mentioned before, we have a number of existing relationships with community organizations through our Housing Ambassador Program. Plus, we recently

launched a new Neighborhood Tech Help Initiative in partnership with the public libraries, providing the kind of in person support we believe the Council is seeking. From one on one digital guidance to multilingual application assistance and help with completed paper applications, these programs are connecting New Yorkers to housing opportunities every day. We'd welcome the opportunity to discuss ways we can work with the Council on these efforts.

Intro 1265, which proposes notifying applicants through Housing Connect and allowing them to designate a representative to receive updates presents a really thoughtful opportunity. Whether it's a daughter helping her mother, a case worker supporting a client, or a friend assisting someone without regular internet access, this flexibility can make a real difference. We'd love to explore how we can build this out together as part of the Housing Connect redesign. Our preference is to shape this as a flexible user informed feature, something we can adapt and improve over time. We're currently engaged in testing a set of new waivers and program processes, and we would like the opportunity to test and refine what works best for applicants. At this

time, we'd like to see this process continue before determining if legislation is needed.

Intro 1264, which addresses how affordable housing units that become vacant are re-rented through the Housing Connect portal, touches on the process we are actively rethinking. We recently rolled out a new temporary update, the third update announced over the last few years to improve the process. Re-rentals will continue to be required to be posted publicly and accessibly, but it will not be necessary to send it through HPD's Housing Connect system, though many may continue to do so voluntarily. This added flexibility is one example of ways we're testing strategies to help fill units faster and reduce unnecessary paperwork. Over the next year, we plan to rebuild re-rentals, bring it up to speed using insights from the pilot, housing advocates, New Yorkers, building owners, marketing agents, and recommendations from the Council in this hearing to guide that work.

In closing, I want to be clear, this is a priority for me and we know that there's still more work to do. But we've seen what's possible when we

act quickly, listen closely, and stay focused on what matters.

Thank you for your partnership and for holding us accountable to the New Yorkers we serve.

Thank you to the New Yorkers who use our program every single day and provide us with feedback on how to make it better.

I look forward to working with you to keep pushing this work forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner, I'm taking the "Acting" out.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: (LAUGHS)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So, Commissioner, just to speak it into existence. How amazing would the world be (INAUDIBLE) had Ahmed as Commissioner of HPD? Like, let's make it happen. Okay, you heard it here first.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner, for your engagement on this. Thank you also for the announcement that HPD made this week. I think that's a step in the right direction, of course, on dealing with the issue of re-rentals. And thank you for your

thoughtful testimony. I look forward to hearing, more.

I want to just start off with a couple of clarifying questions on your testimony, and then I'm gonna turn it over to my colleagues before I come back for my — you know, how we roll, the in-depth stuff.

So for starters, very excited to see a reference to a redesign of the Housing Connect System. Can you just talk a little bit more about that? What time... I know you, the agency has been engaging stakeholders. What's your timeline and time frame and sort of the scope of changes that you're considering?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Absolutely. So we've already put in place maybe the hardest part of the work, is making sure that we have both the funding in place, the technical advisors in place, the contract in place to be able to have the team that works through the changes we want to work on.

We've also, again, I'm very grateful to the support of HDC, been able to bring on additional staff just to work through our scope of work and make sure that we have the team in place.



Right now, we believe that the next year is a critical year for us in being able to not only ensure that we have the right business requirements through the conversations we've had with partners. Those conversations happen every day informally, but we've also launched a series of more formal round tables with marketing agents. Going back to last fall, we've had eight so far, and we'll continue to have more with a plan to bring in some subset for user testing when the appropriate time happens.

So from a timeline perspective, we had started this process from the research and analysis, you know, deep dive probably in the fall. We had been going much earlier in terms of building up what we thought we needed since probably the last launch, which was 2020, was the last time we refreshed Housing Connect.

We actually make updates to Housing Connect every two months or so because things come up. New technology is introduced by marketing agents or owners where they are changing the way that they are working with applicants. So are doing regular updates. But this overhaul is probably gonna be the

better part of next year, and we'll hopefully be able to stay track on that.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Can you explain to the to the public, where is Housing Connect hosted? Like who has control of the technology? What does it mean for HPD to make changes? Is that a third party or is that internal to the agency?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So we, HPD is the owner of the technology with HDC as our partner in this work. The actual technology is hosted on hardware housed in a City building. We work very closely with OTI on that. And we are looking actually across our various systems, both the ones that we have, and new ones that we're building, on what the most nimble and flexible technology is.

So there's a lot of discussion about moving to cloud technology as a hosting solution. We just always have to make sure it's meeting our security requirements, that it allows us the ability to make adjustments.

The team that maintains it is the vendor that we have on board that acts as a maintenance partner. We have staff within HPD's Office of Technology that also supports this work. And we have colleagues at

OTI, especially on the hosting component of it that supports it. So all three partners.

And then when changes have to be made or build out, they're the same partners, and now we have some additional support from HCC moving forward.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

Can you share the size of the contract with the vendor that helps to maintain Housing Connect?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I don't have that number, but we're happy to get that number to you immediately.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, noting that.

Just in terms of process, let's say that a constituent has identified that there's a radio button missing. There's no submit button here. Is that something that HPD and HDC work out together with OTI or that you have to go to the vendor to get changed?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So we would go to the vendor and this is actually something that happened recently. We've this happens, uh, people will notice either glitches with the system or will either get email from applicants — often we'll get feedback from marketing agents on, you know, there's a front side

1 of the system. There's also a back side of the system  
2 where the matching happens and applicants are drawn  
3 down. And if they see errors, they'll contact staff  
4 directly or incoming through our customer email or  
5 our phone line. Once we see that there's an issue,  
6 HPD Tech and our PruTech maintenance team work  
7 together to correct that issue. Sometimes it may  
8 involve being able to do it live, so they'll work in  
9 a test environment and then be able to migrate the  
10 solution into the live version of it. Or they may  
11 have to take down the portal for a certain number of  
12 hours, which a notice is provided. We send the email  
13 to marketing agents and put information up on our  
14 website.  
15

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. It's a  
17 great segue to my next question.

18 My team, in the last two weeks, has flagged for  
19 me multiple times, multiple outages of Housing  
20 Connect, which is a really big problem because we  
21 have seniors, per persons that, you know, have  
22 they're digitally divided. Right? And they have  
23 appointments that they schedule months in advance  
24 sometimes because they're a very long waiting list  
25 for Housing Ambassadors. And now the day that their

appointment is scheduled for, Housing Connect is down.

So what is this notice? How far in advance are you telling the public that Housing Connect is going to have an outage?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So as soon as we find out that there's a problem, and I'm gonna actually ask Emily to build where I'm missing. As soon as we find out that there's a problem, often that's the moment we take action. If we realize that there's is an inability to correctly use the site or the site's malfunctioning, then — and if there's not something we can do to create sort of a safe mode environment for it to move forward with, then we'll take down the site and we'll notify people.

But Emily, you could explain for it.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Sure. We're notifying marketing agent partners...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah, bring it closer to you. Mm-hmm?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: I never want to be that person shouting into the mic...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: What's wrong with *SHOUTING*?

(LAUGHTER)

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: (LAUGHS)

marketing agent partners, Housing Ambassadors, our teams, and putting the notice up on the website.

Usually when the site has to be down for just an hour or two, we're working up until that point. So it may be the day before, it may be the day of.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. I would like to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Abreu, and turn it Council Member Dinowitz for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair. Hello, (INAUDIBLE) Commissioner...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: (LAUGHS)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS) I hope all is well, *Commissioner*.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So I want to clarify something for ,you know, someone applies, people apply for housing on Housing Connect and then for a given unit you send out offers in batches of 250 is that accurate?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: So if someone is applying on Housing Connect, so someone submits an application, there's a period of time in which we're collecting applications, then those application...

then the window closes and the applicants are then... there are two parts of it — We have still existing preferences, and then we also have the general lottery. There's a log number built. Everyone's randomized. Right? You don't want to be penalized for...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Right, but I'm just asking, you send out... you don't send out, let's say 10,000 people apply. You don't send out 10,000...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, no...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You have batches of 50.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. What percent of those people are rejected because they don't meet the qualifications in any given batch? What's the average percentage that people are rejected because they don't fit the criteria for a given unit?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Emily...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Let's get back to you on the percent that is rejected per batch.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: People are rejected though, correct?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

2 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And it could be something  
3 on the early part where there is, uh, it's  
4 eligibility for the unit. It could be income  
5 eligibility. It could... if it's in the preference  
6 category, it's a preference piece, and then they're  
7 moved into the general pool. There are a lot of  
8 different reasons why that happened. So we would... I  
9 think we will also try to break it down

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, I

11 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Around that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'd love to see that.

13 And then how long between each batch of offers?  
14 You give a batch, how many weeks until the next batch  
15 is offered?

16 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I think it's a it's a back  
17 and forth, right? So we are providing...

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Like on average, like  
19 you guys send out a batch of 250...

20 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: On average how many  
22 weeks does it take to then offer the next batch?

23 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I mean, two things I would  
24 just say and I would...

25 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure.



COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'm gonna give you a number for one of them. So they're different for different sized buildings, the lottery can be more or less complicated. So we provide a batch of applicants to our marketing agent. The marketing agent goes through that process. When you're done with files and decide whether an applicant is the right applicant or not, that's when we will give more information for them to flow through.

I think the number we're at is around... when it reaches the marketing agent is about 40 to 45 days...  
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: where (INAUDIBLE)...  
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I am going to tell you why I'm asking. Okay, but that's helpful. So 45 days between - we don't know the percentage of people rejected, because they don't qualify, but it's a number.

And here's why I'm asking, and because we do Housing Connect in my office, we work with a number of providers that we fund in the City Council. That the filters on the Housing Connect search, they don't

properly remove listings that don't fall under certain criteria of the filter.

So a user may apply for filter, they say, "I can afford this much, I have this many people." But it pops up a bunch of other options, and they say, "Well, the filter tells me that I qualify. So I'm going to go ahead and apply for those apartments," only to find out that, you know, within 45 days let's say, they don't qualify.

Additionally, a person's income is not relevant if they have a voucher, correct?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: If they... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: If they have a voucher, right?

So there's no option to say, hey, I have a voucher and to block out the income and just show, you know, what your voucher amount is. That leads to confusion.

But I think the issue here is with a filter that doesn't actually filter properly, you have people applying for apartments who may not qualify. Now that's a pain in the butt for the, but what's worse is that someone in the second or third batch who would have otherwise qualified, their spot may have

1                   been taken up by someone who didn't qualify, who  
2                   could have been told beforehand if the filter were  
3                   properly working, that they're not going to qualify  
4                   for this apartment, so they should apply for  
5                   something for which they qualify for.

6                   So can Housing Connect be amended? Can you guys  
7                   amend Housing Connect to make a more accurate filter  
8                   system?  
9

10                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I would – two parts,  
11                  yes. So this is actually something that we're looking  
12                  at, and I'll let Emily build on it.

13                  I'd say that on the on the voucher piece, it's  
14                  something that we've been talking about specifically.  
15                  We have actually seen some good success with voucher  
16                  holders in 2024. We had about a little over 2,600  
17                  individuals move into units in Housing Connect with  
18                  vouchers out of the shelter system. So we know there  
19                  is a pathway. But (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

20                  COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Which is wonderful...

21                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah, (INAUDIBLE)...  
22                  (CROSS-TALK)

23                  COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: but what I don't want  
24                  to see is someone saying...

25                  COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: "Oh, I don't qualify, because the filter tells me I need to make a certain amount of money."

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: And I guess my follow-up there, is that through that work we're seeing that we can actually make it more clear.

So the frontend filter is one of the areas that's on our scope list...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And do you have a timeline for when that filter...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Is gonna be updated?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I don't have a timeline yet. We can come back to the Council as we would... (TIMER) with updates on where we are in Housing Connect.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I would love to see a timeline on that. And I'd... you certainly love those percentages, because that is going to speak to how... one of the reasons people may be waiting so long is because other people who don't qualify for certain apartments are taking up those spots.

I just want to quickly ask about the efficiency of the system. As I mentioned earlier, we in the

Council — millions of dollars for housing providers.

I know we have Josh Stevenson from West Bronx Housing right here. Great work in our office, and my staff, our staff spent countless hours on Housing Connect, but one of the challenges our providers run into is doing the work for their clients.

And they share with me that a Provider Portal would help the organizations work more efficiently with clients to check the status of applications and work through the lottery process as a whole. And it can include a list of ongoing applications by the provider's clientele.

Could HPD implement such a portal specifically for providers, that we fund with City dollars, to ease the lottery application process for residents of New York City and making their work more efficient?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'd be happy to talk more about it. I think one of the bills here also talks about information sharing between individuals and third parties. A lot... and we saw this when implementing the Emergency Housing Voucher Program and our Housing Choice Voucher Program, there are questions about technology, which we'll talk through, and then there's the security and the data privacy

1 piece. How do you make sure that we ensure it's going  
2 to the right eyes, only the eyes that the applicant  
3 signed off on? And then if there is a separation  
4 between the applicant and the provider, how do you  
5 make sure that that information is no longer  
6 available?  
7

8 These are questions we've answered before and we  
9 should just talk through.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. I would love to  
11 talk through that with you.

12 And just, secondly, because my time's up, and I  
13 appreciate the Chair for letting me extend, is there  
14 any barrier, or what barriers exist that can be  
15 broken down to port documents directly from Access  
16 HRA? Because again, people are already uploading  
17 documents to one system. This is New York City. It's  
18 the it should be the same computer system.

19 What barriers exist between the document sharing  
20 in those instances?

21 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I'll let my colleagues  
22 correct me if I'm wrong, but starting last year, we  
23 actually... Taking a step back, we are using federal  
24 dollars that we received during COVID to build on a  
25 set of recommendations and working group discussions

to bring together DSS, HRA, HPD, DOHMH more closely together, especially as it relates to our homeless placement services. A lot of this work has resulted in us getting to over a 100% increase in placements.

So there are two parts of this – there is setting in place the legal framework for data exchange, which we've been working on since EHV and moving forward and putting those agreements in place. And now we have funding for and building toward a shared dashboard just to make sure that we're looking at the same numbers.

And then the next part would be being able to use document ,you know, reciprocity and documents.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes, I guess the same question – Could you provide a timeline for that document reciprocity?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We can come back to you and tell you where we are in the process.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

Very last thing, very last thing, very quick...(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Ask him...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I've been informed by one of my community boards...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Ask when he's coming back.

(LAUGHS)

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: When is he coming back to me? Thank you.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I have to look... we will after this hearing, I promise, we will get back to you this week with a set of times that we think we can get back to you and information... on answers to all this information.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

And very last, one of my local community boards has reached out to schedule presentations by HPD on Housing Connect, and I've been told they've been having trouble getting that appointment.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Oh?

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We can reach out today.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, we'll speak afterwards about that. Thank you very much.

And, Chair, thank you, and I appreciate the time. Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: (LAUGHS)



CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (LAUGHS) Thank you, Council Member Dinowitz.

Okay, yeah, and I just, you know, to hammer on that point of timeline, you know, I think this this hearing is all about frustrations that constituents, providers, service providers, as well, have had with the platform. And this this feeling like, you know, when they have tried to share feedback with the agency, they've been met with, you know, a lack of engagement. Right?

And we don't need to legislate all these changes. We can talk it out, but only, if and only if, you know, there's that real commitment to a timeline. Like, we want to know when... we're gonna sit down, when are we gonna be able to talk together about this? Because there's you know, Housing Connect was amazing about twelve years ago when it was created. And there was that update in 2020, but there are still these frustrations. And we see AI, we see what's happening in, you know, other technological advancements. So we want to understand how the agency is also taking advantage of these, you know, these available technologies and if there are any, you know, hindrances to doing so.

So on that, I want to go back to this, the questions about the contract and the vendor. Who is the vendor? And can you just share if there are any hindrances with, you know, updating the technology more, you know, in a in a bigger way than just radio buttons or glitches? What does that look like? Do you have to recontract or anything like that?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So, the vendor is PruTech, they've worked with us before. We're working with them on a number of different projects. They have worked with the City for a long time. They've, you know, we have talked to them about really having a pretty broad approach to making dramatic changes to the program. I do feel at this point that within scope there is a lot that we can do. Certainly a lot of what has been mentioned here at the hearing, has been things that we've talked to them about and wanted to work on.

And as we continue to meet and talk, engage with both the public and regularly check-in with the Council on this, I think that we'll be able to fit within our scope what we need to do.

There's always the opportunity. There's always the chance in a tech contract that what we want to do

goes further than where we are, and then it will be necessary to do a contract amendment.

But I don't see that currently as an issue. Their expertise and their record of delivering in the past suggest that they are able to do that work. They gave very strong inferences about their ability to deliver on what we asked for. And so, I feel like they have the tools to do it, plus HPD staff and our colleagues at OTI.

So, I feel like we have the tools to get what we need done. We have a pretty broad approach of trying to really push the envelope, and especially in the things that have been discussed so far, and the feedback we've gotten from marketing agents, that is within the scope of what we want to do.

And then the last piece of it that's always, uh, it's both interesting, and will continue to keep us sharp, is that the marketing agents and the owners are also developing new technology and engaging either through the lottery process, or how they work with their re-rental work, or just how they manage their buildings.

We saw last year a couple of examples of new things that we learned that actually had interactions

with the system that caused us to pause and figure out how to make sure that we can work with them to do what they need to do to work well with applicants, but not create problems for our system.

So that really put into focus the idea that as we build something, it needs to have the flexibility to incorporate new technology that the private market is also working on.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner.

And one more follow-up on the on the notice... the question of notice around outages.

So in my office, I just asked my team, what is the waiting list? So right now, if, you know, someone walks into my office and they say, "I want to apply for an affordable apartment," and we want to refer them to West Bronx Housing or KCC or Kings Ridge Heights Community Center or Arriva or UNHP, we're giving them appointments in July - *July*.

And so if on July 13th, there is an outage, it's a it's really harmful. So can you commit to not having the site go out without, say, a business day's notice or two business days notice, so that we can flag for our partners and troubleshoot?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Two things. One, I'd like to talk a little bit about how the waiting list is formed, because... and what that is versus the mini lottery which has come up, and I'll let Emily talk about that.

But in terms of notice, sometimes... usually if it's a planned outage, yes, we can commit to creating a timeline that makes sense.

The example I gave before about a new technology that was from the private side working within our system and creating issues was something that was developing in the moment and created a problem that we had to shut down. So if it's something external affecting our system, it would be very hard to give advance notice, obviously. But if we have a planned outage, we can work on giving as much time as possible. It may be there's an emergency, we have to shut down, or we know that there is an update we want to make, we're gonna give a nice long timeline.

We also can talk more and think more about the appointment piece, because if there's an in-person interaction that relies on the system information, maybe there's another workaround, because as you pointed out, getting those appointments are very hard

to schedule. So that should be on our list to continue to work through.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But you're going to support 1264, and it's going to be great, and we're going to expand access to in-person appointment help everywhere in the city.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And I would say that, as I testified earlier, we are doing in-person support...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: in person support with our senior centers. I recently visited one, the Sarah Roosevelt Garden Senior Center, working with their deputy director who engages directly with senior center with seniors. We actually did a series of town halls just at senior centers last year based on feedback we got from one specific senior town hall.

So we just did Housing Connect seminars with DOF, US, DFTA. We are also doing similar outreach and work with the Department of Veterans Services and the VA hospitals themselves. We're doing, you know, we're doing work with domestic violence shelters. We're doing a lot of this now plus the Neighborhood Tech Help Initiative.

So I would love to talk more about where the gaps are. I saw that there was a recommendation to be more involved with recreation centers. So there's an email out to the Department of Parks right now to see what we can be doing to work together there.

Again, we did nearly 80 events last year and that was a real highlight for us. We'd be happy to do more.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

Okay, I'm gonna hold you to that.

Okay, so to go back to your testimony, there was... you mentioned some changes that you were making to make marketing smarter, you wrote and you said.

So when were some of these implemented? For example, the email blast that you described emailing applicants when there's changes to their profile. When did you make those changes?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Starting when we built this version of Housing Connect in 2020, there's been a regular quarterly reminder that goes to applicants notifying them, reminding them to keep their profile up to date.

1                   In the interim, if there are changes to Housing  
2                   Connect that first... this doesn't happen often, but  
3                   for some reason requires a person to update their  
4                   profile. Let's say we've made technical change – we  
5                   want them to confirm something, then we'll email  
6                   everybody and put a notice up on Housing Connect.  
7

8                   CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you.

9                   I understand, as I mentioned earlier, that HPD  
10                  is hosting roundtables with housing providers and  
11                  marketing agents to improve the system.

12                 But how about similar roundtables with  
13                  applicants, members of the public to understand the  
14                  user experience? Have you been doing that? And if  
15                  not, can you commit to engaging regularly with  
16                  applicants to update the system?

17                 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes. This is something we  
18                  started talking about earlier this year. We just  
19                  finished the latest round with the marketing agents  
20                  and next is impacted individuals.

21                 So we see this successful actually in our  
22                  Section 8 work, where we have residents advising that  
23                  work, and we're going to implement a similar model in  
24                  our Housing Connect work.  
25



And we'll obviously keep you up to date on how many we've done and who we've talked to. I will say that, again, we get hundreds if not thousands of individual inquiries. I get them directly, personally and I find...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Like now...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah. Just now. And I...we do take those seriously. And much of that actually goes into the scope of works we build, either the bi-monthly updates or this larger overhaul we're doing now.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Moving to the application process itself, on average, how many affordable housing applications does a does an individual development receive or units, whatever metric makes most sense to explain that? And is it possible for you to share breakdown per borough?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes, we can share breakdown per borough. On average, there's about 16,000 applications per development. But again, these are... It depends on the characteristics of the building, how big the building is, the unit distribution, the

AMIs, the eligibility of applicants. But best guess is about 16,000 applications per borough.

You know, in 2024, we received about six million applications, and we marketed about 10,000 units and over 300 lotteries.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Can you repeat those last numbers?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Sure, in 2024, all lotteries received nearly six million applications, over 10,000 units marketed, over 300 lotteries. This does not include the homeless set aside units, which are also part of this process, but separate.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Are you noticing more demand in particular boroughs or areas?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Emily...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: We have a Local Law Report, Local Law 217 of 2019, that I'm looking at right now on my screen to show what we've reported on for applications by borough. And so I would encourage all of us to do that, we can share that with you more directly.

We do see a pretty even distribution across boroughs, generally speaking, with a few fewer in some cases, in Staten Island.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Is there a difference in wait time, or a time to fill units in by borough, by geography that you've observed?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's an interesting question. I don't have that data in front of us, but we will look into it and get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

For an affordable housing apartment, how long does the entire application process take from submission to move in?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So there's two different ways we look at this. One, in our underwriting, the way we plan for it, we are looking at twelve to fifteen months for lease up, but as you mentioned, the MMR has 109 days. So there are two different ways — you can either measure it from when the applicant is selected, and we move through the process to get them in lease up, or from when the application period, the deadline ends, and we get to lease up.

There's the other part of it that sometimes changes this is whether the unit itself is using low income tax credits or not. There's an extra layer of review that goes into that. And that's actually some of the changes that you see in the marketing

1 guideline guidance that we put out yesterday or the  
2 day before, are things that we worked on through  
3 conversations with Treasury and the IRS last year to  
4 limit the number, the pieces of paper that are  
5 required to work with syndicators and work with  
6 lenders to make sure that they could be comfortable  
7 with a different review threshold.  
8

9 So that's part of what we're trying to do to  
10 reduce that time, especially that 40 to 45 day period  
11 with marketing agents where they have, you know, they  
12 have a lot on their plate, they're doing great work,  
13 and they're trying to get through different  
14 applicants who may have different requirements.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Commissioner.

16 On the on the application, on the provider  
17 interface or the landlord interface portion, who has  
18 who has access to these documents? So say I'm  
19 submitting, you know, I don't know... I don't know,  
20 my 2020 tax returns or whatever, who is... who is  
21 able to see those documents on the back end?

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It is just the  
23 approved marketing agents for that project that you  
24 are applying to in Housing Connect. Even though you  
25 may, we provide the opportunity to save some

documents on your own profile in Housing Connect, sort of in your document library if you wish for easy access, when you are applying to a specific lottery, and then notified that you've come up in the batch, you've come up on the lottery log, and now it's time to submit your documents to confirm you are in fact eligible, that is when you choose or upload what you want to send, and that goes directly only to that project specifically.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So Treasury and IRS are not reviewing...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, no...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: IRS has the tax returns, but...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (INAUDIBLE)

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: To get just a little bit in the weeds — So because low income tax credits have to be verified, in fact, occupants of those households go through annual compliance review, we... the marketing agents just has to make sure that those households are income eligible to be in a unit that's been funded with low income tax credits.

And so the handbook and the rules about how much paperwork you need and what the requirements lived on the federal level. So one of our early priorities, going back to 2022 when we issued Housing and Our Neighbors, was to cut paper that we don't need. Whether it's in the Section 8 application or in the marketing world. How hard do people have to prove that they're eligible for this department? How can we reduce it? One of the things was looking at the low income tax credit compliance and seeing if they need as much paperwork as we're currently requiring.

And that was the involvement on the federal level. Nothing at the at the intersection that we're talking about now involves that. That was just getting clarity on guidance that we can then give better guidance to our partners in Housing.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

Switching gears to paper applications. According to the 2025 Marketing Handbook, the marketing agent may receive request from an applicant to submit a paper application. How does HPD keep track that the marketing agent is sending an applicant a paper application? Do you know how many paper applications were added to Housing Connect in 2023 or 2024?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So I can give the numbers, and I'll ask Emily to go through the process.

But in 2023, there were 26,293 paper applications logged in Housing Connect. Yeah, 26,293 paper applications.

And Emily, you want to go through that?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Sure. So the process for requesting a paper application for an individual lottery, also from that development, also means that development maintains a log of all of the paper application requests that they receive. And the agencies can access or request that log of applications.

That is to your question about how do we make sure that everybody who requests a paper application got one?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So are the marketing agents reporting to HPD?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's right.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And at the user level, uh, how do I know how to contact the marketing agent?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: The contact information... are we talking about paper applications specifically still?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: The contact information for the marketing agent is on the lottery advertisement, so that you would see in a paper through advocates, or other services online, if you happen to be online, but certainly not necessarily. The contact information is on that public advertisement. And then the marketing agent responds with further contact information when they're providing you with your application and any follow-up correspondence through the mail. So you'll have more contact information directly from them.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So the marketing agent requires you to mail in your documents?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's right. You can also drop off documents. That's a requirement we have as well, that that has to be possible if that's easier or more convenient for folks.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Are all marketing agents based in New York, New York City, or they have addresses available?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Let me get back to you on that before saying definitively.



CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: That has, by the way, just anecdotally, as I mentioned in my opener, that has not been my understanding. My constituents will always complain that they can't get ahold of housing of paper applications, that they want to submit paper applications but they are not able to.

So I'd love to follow-up offline about what is happening in in those instances.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And just to add, so we actually, a couple years ago, moved the marketing agent... the ability to market in this work, you now have to be a qualified marketing agent. So there's a review, there's an ability for us to hold people accountable. So yes, if people are hearing that kind of feedback, we would work closely with them to see if there are any other... there's any issues that we're not aware of, but beyond that, we now have a way of being able to hold folks accountable.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And sorry, last one on this. Who tabulates the paper applications? Who sort of enters them to where they need to be?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: After the lottery deadline date, when paper applications are submitted, mailed in, then the marketing agent staff enters the

paper applications into Housing Connect as part of a structured organized event that the agency does virtual monitoring of to make sure that everything is going smoothly and that we can answer any questions or issues that may come up during that time.

When all of the paper applications are entered into Housing Connect, they're grouped together with all the online applications for that same lottery. That's when the system applies a random log number to each one, and the batch processing and eligibility review begins.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So there's no different treatment in terms of preference for digital or paper applications. They're treated the same way?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That's correct.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Correct, that's right.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. What is a marketing agent? Who is a marketing agent? What are their duties and responsibilities?

(LAUGHTER)

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: That was such an energetic question.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Who are these people?

(LAUGHS)

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Who are these people? So marketing agents are company... they can be their own companies. They can be departments of housing developers we find. Some have simultaneous... some simultaneously work in property management or development. Others are specifically focused on this marketing process through the housing lottery. There are organizations that, as the commissioner mentioned, have to qualify by showing that they are trained and have capacity in running this lottery process. That means that they need to attend our fairly extensive HPD marketing agent training. That they are trained in low income housing tax credit eligibility, which drives much of our income qualification criteria, as many know, and that they are trained in fair housing by a qualified provider.

We take a look at that as part of the prequalification process, confirm that their facilities, their tools are accessible and up to our standards and meeting those thresholds, then we would approve them to be on our marketing agent pre-qualified list.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Who is selecting the winners of the lottery? Is that the marketing agent or is that happening at the agency?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It is both. The marketing agent is interacting directly with the applicant to do that income eligibility review, all of the detailed confirmation and documentation that's required, and then the agency is confirming that everything is in order before the applicant is offered the opportunity to sign a lease.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Right. But who does this... there are... I think you said something insane, like, a couple million applications for 10,000 units that were went up for rental last year. That universe of applicants that were cycled through to get to those 10,000 winners, who selected that universe?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So if I understand correctly, the marketing agents are the ones reviewing the applicants, they are selecting the ones that are eligible, and we review the file to make sure that they're eligible. The log is how we make sure that they've gone through in the appropriate order based on the log number they were issued after randomization at the top end. The first step is to go

through the existing preference categories, whether it's municipal, mobility, the community preference, and then move into the general population.

So those are the two tiers, but it's randomization, log number, cycle through, the applicants are selected, and then the files reviewed for confirmation.

We do a back end audit now, and that way we make sure — and that way we make sure that things are done properly. But we have at any point the ability to request information or review things that are in process.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. How many marketing... prequalified marketing agents are there?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: There are about 63 right now on the list. We actually, yeah, we have about 63 on the list, and we have made changes to the process to streamline that work in case there are other qualified teams in, you know, in the communities that want be part of this.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you. Are there language proficiency requirements for marketing agents?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: There are language access requirements, so I can get back to you on the specifics or they can be found in our Marketing Handbook. Happy to provide those, but an applicant needs to be able to access the services in the language that they speak or read or use. And marketing agents are responsible per for providing that.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

And can you just again, in terms of the user experience, can you highlight how today HPD marketing agents, how are you communicating with applicants to a lottery from the moment that they apply to onward, to the moment that the building is full or the units are filled.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So when you apply for an apartment, if you are selected as someone who may be a candidate for a unit, and there could be multiple people who are looked at per unit, there are there could be communications that come through the process, whether it's reminders to submit documentation or if it moves even further, to set up a schedule to view the apartment. And then if it gets even further down the line, possibly, you know,

complete the process and be selected for the lease signing. At the end of the process, there is an email that notifies applicants that we have finished a lottery. If they have not been selected, then they are encouraged to apply for other lotteries that are available at that time.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. And so how... what are the intervals of communication from the marketing agent slash/HPD to...

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Certainly. So it starts somewhat with the applicant's choices or preferences on your -- if I'm an applicant on my Housing Connect account, I go to my account page and I choose what kind of notifications I want to get. And if I want to receive notifications about important milestones by email, if I want to be able to also do that by text message to my phone. So that's number one. The points at which the system, but based on actions that we and marketing agents take through Housing Connect, notifies applicants usually you have to avoid overwhelming people with a million text messages and emails, but also make sure that people are getting the key information they need, especially when an action needs to be taken or

1 a decision needs to be made. Notifications happen  
2 when your application has been submitted. So confirm  
3 that your application has been received. If it's time  
4 for you if you've come up on the lottery log, right,  
5 your random number has come up in a batch, and it's  
6 time to confirm your eligibility by submitting  
7 documents, that's a notification.

9 If you set up an in person appointment or a  
10 phone appointment through the system, you'll get a  
11 notification related to that.

12 If you are approved for the unit, certainly you  
13 get notifications about that and information about  
14 move in. If you are not, and let's say it turns out  
15 that based on all of the detailed information you  
16 provide, your income does not qualify you for that  
17 unit. And you receive a rejection notice, you get a  
18 notification about that. You then have the  
19 opportunity to appeal if you disagree or have  
20 corrected information to provide. You get a  
21 notification when the response to your appeal has  
22 been processed with further instructions... (CROSS-  
23 TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I guess... thank you,  
25 that's helpful. And these notifications, I understand



from constituents and stakeholders that they do not occur via text message. So is there... are there some marketing agents and in some cases where there are text messages and other cases where there aren't?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: It wouldn't be by marketing agent. It would be in how each applicant's profile, how they've set up their account, what their preferences and contact information are in their account. So if they have provided a phone number for text messages and indicated that that's their preference, that's when they would be getting the text message alerts as well.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: Often, many do it by email instead or in addition.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you. Got it. Okay.

A couple more questions on marketing agents. Are there any incentives to fill units faster that the agency provides to the marketing agents?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: There's not a clear incentive. I would say the biggest incentives, given the length of time, is that marketing agents who are most efficient and effective are often marketing

agents that we see are able to do more of the work in in in our industry. And then the second part of it is that the market... there are two pain points. There are two places of suffering in the length of time for lottery. There are people who could be in housing faster and there are owners who are delayed the ability to get the revenue they need to operate the building, or they need to reach a certain completion, or sorry, move in rate to meet their LIHTC compliance.

So there's a couple of financial incentives on the part of both the marketing agent, the owner that's hired them, and then of course, the security and stability of the tenant in order to get this done as fast as possible. I think really the root of much of the frustration that we hear about it.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Do you have any sense internally at HPD whether there's difference in performance between marketing agents that are also developers or affiliated with development companies versus those that are independent?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: That's, I mean, this is information we're trying to get from our roundtables now. So we've just started this process of digging

1 in, and we're working with marketing agents to  
2 understand what, uh, when we look at the data, what's  
3 happening for them on their side. You know, one  
4 anecdote I'll point... well, it's actually based in  
5 more fact than that. During COVID, the result the  
6 last couple of years, the same kind of hiring  
7 challenges that we've had on our side of the real  
8 estate market on leasing and property management.  
9 They have had as well. We've seen turnover on both  
10 sides of the work. So there is a lot of newer staff  
11 and so that's the reason why we do bimonthly  
12 trainings in order to get people up to speed.

14 Additionally, you know, there is we are  
15 constantly there's a lot of new information and  
16 changes that we've made just in the last two years.  
17 So that's also something that we're watching to see  
18 if – and this happens in change in change a lot. Once  
19 you start introducing a lot of new things, does that  
20 affect the performance of how quickly you can go?

21 So we're looking at those two things and  
22 watching the data.

23 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

24 Turning to the issue of re-rentals staying  
25 vacant for long periods of time, can you just walk us

through the changes that were announced this week,  
and how these changes will be different from the mini  
lottery system that that existed prior to this pilot?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So for re-rentals, there  
were two options. They could either do the mini  
lottery, which allowed individuals who wanted to  
continue to get opportunities from Housing Connect to  
get notices about units that were available citywide  
through a lottery that we've drawn up based on  
preferences that they listed for units that became  
available through re-rental. Owners and marketing  
agents also had the option of putting together... or  
opting into a waiting list, that drew up a waiting  
list based on those units that they had available and  
they can draw from over time. This newer option is  
focused on looking at the work that our marketing  
agents and owners have done in other ways that they  
market and put people in the housing. So, they still  
need to be compliant with the marketing guidelines.  
However, they are able to use other ways of marketing  
those apartments. They can use StreetEasy, they can  
use waiting lists. Again, as long as they follow the  
transparency and fair access rules that's in

marketing in our marketing guidelines, they can move forward with that.

That's gonna be the case for HPD buildings. We will have a slightly different focus on HDC regulatory buildings because of other dynamics having to do with their regulatory agreement.

So they can work through that process. We're also looking at trying to alleviate an issue around tenant in portfolio moves. So there was a lot of feedback that we got to try to allow for greater flexibility around that. There are buildings that will be able to lease up and bring people into apartments and then provide the file for that for review after the fact.

There are some buildings that, due to the rules that we have in place around some of our incentive programs and our zoning programs and our regulatory agreements, we'll have to provide those files in advance, but we have committed to a rapid review of those files to make sure that they're eligible.

And so those are some of the things that we've heard from the industry. Being able to use their own listing strategy, being able to work within their own portfolio to address, you know, in tenant moves and

then, being able to have different ways of getting tenants into units, if they are able to, based on the rules and regs that exist. And then if they have to review it with us before, we commit to a rapid review of those applications.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. So...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And sorry, there's one...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm?

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER OSGOOD: During this rental waiver period process, we also have the resources that marketing agents may use outside Housing Connect, it will all be listed on a page on HPD's website so that applicants can go to one place, see links to follow to access these resources even though they may not be on Housing Connect specifically. That's important to us.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

And the application itself, even if it's advertised on StreetEasy or whatever company, it still has to be submitted through the housing connect portal?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No. For this waiver, it will move through the housing company marketing agent

1 directly. They are responsible for maintaining the  
2 log, the paperwork necessary to prove that they have  
3 followed the marketing guidance. And that is  
4 something that we will be able to ask for upon  
5 request to make sure that people are compliant.  
6

7 At any point, if a marketing agent or owner is  
8 not compliant with these rules, the waiver can be  
9 rescinded.

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. And so how is the  
11 agency thinking about... there's always, in our  
12 conversations, there's always this trade off between  
13 fairness and the amount of time that it takes to run  
14 through, whether it's a new building or the re-  
15 rentals. So what is your assessment in the pilot  
16 program of how fairness is gonna continue to be  
17 insured?

18 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: We've had pretty lengthy  
19 conversations with the marketing agents and owners. I  
20 think they understand, and many of them have been  
21 themselves longtime advocates for this kind of  
22 approach to housing. And they already have, within  
23 their framework, the rules and regs that they've  
24 built through either initial lotteries or rentals  
25 that we have. They will be applying that framework to

an existing in house system and being able to execute thereafter. They understand that the responsibility to maintain that record is real, and that we would come in and check to make sure that that's happening.

We do believe that maybe more importantly, the system that we built around re-rentals did not live up to our expectations about where that is. And there's some percentage of units that are not being rented up fast enough, which is bad for people — we need to get more heads on beds, as I said before. And we also need to allow these buildings that are having their own difficulties with meeting operating costs, the ability to get in rental income so they can provide quality housing for those tenants.

And many of them have maintained connection to people who have been on a waiting list, have met a certain set of criteria and rules. And so this is something we think is worth evaluating, and we believe we are working with partners who have done this already with us in one way, and will transition to this pilot with similar, you know, efficiency.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you, I appreciate that.



How will HPD, after the one year waiver, ensure that these units are better targeted to the relevant applicants and filled as quickly as possible?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So the, you know, the first thing I would say here is that, whether it's our initial or our re-rental, the main objective is to make sure that all our units, which are funded by all New Yorkers, are available to everyone who's looking for housing. The people from Brooklyn pay taxes that build housing and fund housing in the Bronx. So our first step is to make sure that we have a system that that rests on these fair housing principles and access mobility principles.

The last...the next bit of it, is that in the way that we set up re-rentals, we've already had a way to try to get people more clear about the type of housing they would move to and what type of housing is the best fit for themselves and their family. That's actually a key part of doing fair housing mobility work. And so we're going to be looking at that as a critical piece of making sure that we're matching people well.

In addition to the updates to update your profile if your circumstances change, so does your

housing interest, and what kind of re rentals would be a good fit may change. And then also, your status as to whether or not you are currently continuing to look for housing opportunities.

Some people have transitioned into different situations. They moved out of the city, they've maybe purchased a home, they are in a rental situation that they are not looking to leave. How do we get that information into the process, so that when we are drawing that data down, we are matching people to housing opportunities anywhere in the city that's a better match for them.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. We'll continue to stay in touch about the timeline on all of these pieces. That's very helpful.

(PAUSE)

Just running through my questions here, one moment.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I will have water. This is a good water break.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: This is a good water moment.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'll flag for you that. I'm gonna ask about wait list versus lotteries in general.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But that's not my next question. I think I asked many of these.

Housing Ambassadors, can you just walk us through how many Housing Ambassadors, Housing Ambassador partners are there, and what is their capacity to serve? Do you have numbers of applicants served on an annual basis?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: I'm not sure if we have numbers of applicants served, so we'll come back to you on that. But there's about 50 organizations and 60 locations across the five boroughs. If individuals are looking to connect with a Housing Ambassador today, you can call 311 to get information. You can go on our website. And on our website, you're able to look by zip code, and they'll find in your borough where your closest Housing Ambassador is.

Those are, you know, they're largely volunteer organizations, but they're organizations trained by us. They're given a wealth of access to us to help

1                    triage the work that's happening in those  
2                    neighborhoods.

3                    Additionally, there are not official housing  
4                    ambassadors, but we have a network of senior centers.  
5                    DFTA's housing assistance work is, you know, their  
6                    folks are trained by us. We give them information.  
7                    We're working regularly with them. We're working  
8                    with, I mentioned earlier, The Mayor's Office to End  
9                    Gender Based Violence. We're working with Department  
10                   of Veterans Services. We actually meet with them  
11                   every several weeks to talk about housing  
12                   opportunities.

13                   We work a lot with other city agencies, since  
14                   housing is such critical issue, and whether they're  
15                   talking about Parks issues, or whether they're  
16                   talking about, you know, Open Streets, there's always  
17                   gonna be someone who may have a housing issue. So we  
18                   try to make our information available to them either  
19                   digitally or in hard copies if requested.

20                   So there are lighter touch versions of that with  
21                   the information. There are more formal engagement and  
22                   training that may happen through the informal network  
23                   with agencies that have housing specialists embedded  
24                   there. Again, DVS and DFTA, I think, are two good  
25

examples. And then there's our 50 organizations, in 60 spots across the five boroughs.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And just to clarify, you said many of these are volunteer organizations, is there any level of financial support that HPD provides?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: So there is... so we, I mean, huge thanks to the Council who supports the Ready to Rent Program, which is a program that funds nine organizations to do even more in-depth preparation on getting people ready to apply and be successful in the application process if they're selected.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So outside of the Council's funding for nine organizations, there's no other administrative support... administration support?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Again, we support it with multiple staff members both within... there's a Housing Ambassador... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But y'all don't get them money. (LAUGHS)

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: The Housing Ambassador... there are other ways that we support our housing

groups in this program. No, there isn't a dedicated expense stream for it.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Okay. That's an issue.

Okay. (LAUGHS) I can confirm that that is an issue. I mean, I have organizations like UNHP in my district that do incredible work. You know, they work overtime. They're already operating on shoestring budgets, trying to do the best for a community that has so much need, and it would be very helpful if we could buttress what they do with financial supports for staffing.

You know, also, West Bronx housing is here. My organizations are in the house! Northwest Bronx has been on top of you for the whole hearing. I don't know if you know that.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, I feel... I feel them (INAUDIBLE)

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But there is just so much need. So I would love to... Well, we have the bill, but we would also just love to have a conversation. Right?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: We want to get these things right. And often it helps to have legislation to spur us in the right direction of conversation.

Just to make sure I make the – the formality of asking this, we are also hearing Introduction Number 1207 today, by Council Member De La Rosa, which is a bill that would act on DOB. Are you all representing their position today?

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: No, you would defer to DOB.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay. Does DOB have a position?

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

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, can you say that someone said in the Administration... Because he's not under oath, that DOB supports...

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: My understanding, through my colleagues at City Hall, that my former agency, DOB, supports that bill.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

Okay, last question, and I want to end on... I want to end on this bigger picture question.

Over the years, I've heard a lot of advocacy – or just thinking that we should actually consider as

1 a city moving from a lottery system to a universal  
2 waiting list for these affordable housing  
3 developments. There's a lot of issues that have been  
4 flagged – inequity of access, we've talked about the  
5 digital divide. There's the perception of unfairness  
6 or randomness because, you know, it's it feels like  
7 a... it is a crapshoot in in many ways, whether  
8 you're going to be selected. And there's even, you  
9 know, I can't tell you the number of conversations  
10 that I've had in my own community about, "Nah, man,  
11 it's rigged. They put their own people in!" And, you  
12 know, we have had these conversations, I try to  
13 explain to them the process. But, you know, there's  
14 all these different reasons why, you know, there are  
15 certain advocates that have pushed for a waiting list  
16 versus a lottery approach.

18 So can you share just what the thinking is?  
19 How... why do we, as a city, conduct housing  
20 lotteries versus having a wait list like NYCHA?

21 COMMISSIONER TIGANI: Yeah. I think– there's a  
22 lot there, but if one of the outcomes is to get  
23 someone into housing more quickly, uh, and given how  
24 extensive the need, and how long the list would be  
25 for – the waiting list for affordable housing, it is



in fact numerically more likely that being part of a lottery, rather than waiting at the very long line of a waiting list, will put you in a chance to have access to housing faster.

You, every lottery, regardless of when you come, on whether it's, you know, a couple years ago or the day that you apply, there is an opportunity, based on your, you know, eligibility, et cetera, that you can be into housing. We have people who have applied for lottery, and then several months later they're able to get in the housing.

We do, unfortunately, also have people who have applied for lottery, and then they have waited a long time for their opportunity.

We've seen with other wait lists that there have been people on wait list for a very long time, and they have not had the opportunity, or even a chance at being able to move that position any further.

Additionally, some of the feedback that we've got on our re-rental program, for instance, is that waiting lists can go stale. And if you don't have a way of keeping that fresh, it could be very difficult. However, the strategies to keeping that fresh can also sometimes inadvertently remove people

who did not want to be removed. And so you run the risk of doing that as well.

The lottery program, and it's something that, you know, we talk to cities all the time, who are looking, and actually replicating the system that we have. The lottery process allows individuals, at any given moment, to tell us, at a point of time, that they're ready for housing, that this is what they need, and that we give each individual a fair shot, wherever they live in the city, to have access to housing wherever it is in the city.

We do employ a waiting list in certain situations. It's a tool that we have available, but we think it's more appropriate in the re-rental universe than it may be in the initial.

That being said, we are open to having all of these discussions about thinking about what tools work. We've heard some of this feedback as well, and we're trying to study some, you know, people who have better mass understanding than I, are thinking about how we put people in the best position to succeed.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Great. All right, well, thank you, thank you so much. My colleagues are online, I promise.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Commissioner, members of HPD's leadership team. This is an important conversation. I hope you can have... I'm looking at you, Nicole. I'm looking at you, Matt (LAUGHS) I'm looking... I hope that you could have folks stick around to hear testimony from our community members and organizations that have been doing great advocacy.

COMMISSIONER TIGANI: And if I can...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Well, I don't know your name yet, but if you can stick around, too...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do want to introduce to everyone here in the audience and to the Council, Mia Perez, is our new City Legislative Deputy Director and point person, and has already worked very much with communities, and looking forward to her helping us do it better at HPD.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Great. Mia?

MIA PEREZ: (UN-MIC'D) Yes.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Welcome, Mia. Look forward to working with you. Thank you.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: We're gonna take a five minute recess, while I check on my child, and then we're gonna...

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

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Nicole and I will check on my child, (LAUGHS) and then we'll resume.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Hello, everyone. I am happy to report that Yaya is doing just fine.

Okay, I now open the hearing for public testimony. I 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 two minutes to speak on Housing Connect, the topic of today's hearing, including the following legislation: Introduction Number 1207.

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](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

With that, I would like to call the first panel. Which I definitely have handy. Okay, so first, Arielle Hersh, from UHAB, Jumelia Abrahamson from UNHP, and Brendan Mitchell, UNHP.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, and you... whoever can begin when ready.

(PAUSE)

JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Is this better? All right.

Hello, Chair Sanchez, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jumelia Abrahamson, and I'm the

Director of Programs at UNHP and part of a Bronx advocacy group called AHORA, Affordable Housing Opportunities Right Away, that has been working with the Council Member. This group is made up of apartment seekers, concerned local affordable property managers, and nonprofit service providers.

You will hear from a couple of them today here in the room, and in the Bronx virtually, and others will make sure that they submit their testimony in writing, because they couldn't take the time off from work.

This group came together in 2022 out of frustration around New York City Housing Connect, even after the 2.0 remodeling.

University Neighborhood Housing Program has been working with many of these applicants, and we've submitted over 13,000 lotteries since then, because the main reason people come through our door is a need for permanent, affordable housing.

We've offered one on one sessions, workshops, webinars to help apartment seekers navigate the Housing Connect Portal. Even with this hyperawareness in this particular program, only 36 applicants have moved into a Housing Connect apartment since we've

1                   been helping people over the years. And as we like to  
2                   say, they've won that golden ticket.

3                   So only 36 families have won the golden ticket  
4                   out of those 13,000 lotteries we've submitted. That  
5                   means that around 80% of Housing Connect units  
6                   require income that are higher than what the majority  
7                   of Bronxites earn.

8                   For this reason, after serving as a Housing  
9                   Connect Ambassador, and pouring a lot of resources,  
10                  we ended our formal agreement with HPD. And even  
11                  though we continue doing that work, (TIMER) we do it  
12                  very targeted with Bronx residents.

13                 Today, I commend the Council for the attention  
14                 on this issue, and urge bold community center reforms  
15                 to ensure that the system truly serves low income New  
16                 Yorkers, especially those in boroughs like the Bronx,  
17                 where incomes remain significantly below citywide  
18                 averages. In The Bronx, where the median income of  
19                 applicants we serve is below \$25,000, the many so-  
20                 called affordable units remain far out of reach.

21                 We call on the Council to focus on four key  
22                 areas:

23                 One is to mandate deeper affordability, looking  
24                 at requirements that reflect Bronx wages.  
25

Two, better communication and transparency between agent and applicants.

Three, additional fund funding for housing ambassadors and ready to rent providers.

Four, a dashboard that the community organizations can see and track the lotteries that we've been submitting.

So how do we do those four things? And I you guys, I don't know how much time I have, but I'm gonna continue. The current income...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I have to have to say it, though, so you may continue. (LAUGHS)

JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Okay, Thank you.

The current income ban used in Housing Connect lottery is often too high for Bronx residents. So we are urging the Council to look at and prioritize 0 to 30% and thirty to 50% AMI bans.

Right now, if you look, as the Commissioner said earlier from HPD, there's 28 lotteries on the portal, but there's only three that are for Bronx applicants, and most of our clients want to remain living in the Bronx. They work there. They worship there, so they want to stay there.



And the starting income for two of those lottery is \$83,000 dollars, which is not affordable for the people we serve, even if they're doubling up or tripling up.

If we look even at Bruckner Boulevard, which is one of the lotteries currently on the portal, which is a 274-unit development, which is great with an income starting at \$19,372, but there's only 24 units within the 30% AMI. So only 24 families will be selected across the entire borough, and most likely, our applicants would not receive a very low log number.

So we joke in the office that to win that golden ticket, you have to put a lot of prayers and a lot of good energy to make sure that you get a low log number enough that it's 24. Number one through 24s are gonna be the ones that are gonna be first selected.

So this system is not really working for the people we serve. We also demand better communication and transparency. There's a lot of emails that I know the HPD has recently implemented in communicating with applicants, but those emails are being filled up with spam messages on lotteries that are not fit for

our clients. So they're getting frustrated with the process even further.

If I'm getting an email for a lottery that begins with an income (INAUDIBLE) of \$83,000, I feel like...people are feeling that it's a joke, that the City is laughing at them, because they are never going achieve that income.

So these emails should be personalized. When...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Jumelia, if you can conclude...

JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'm sorry, if you can summarize...

JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: Yeah, I will summarize real... real quick.

And then, so better communication, additional funding. Right now, the Ready to Rent Program is serving several organization, but it's only one organization receiving the money, which is Ariva to my understanding. So spreading more money towards that. And then we need a Housing Connect system that lives up to its name, one that truly connects New Yorkers to those that need permanent and affordable housing.

So thank you for the time, and we look forward to further conversation.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

BRENDAN MITCHELL: Thank you, Council Member Sanchez, and your entire team for engaging with us at on this issue.

My name is Brendan Mitchell. I'm the Director of Real Estate at University Neighborhood Housing Program in the Bronx. Among other things, UNHP is a nonprofit community developer and operator of affordable housing.

I wanted to use this time to share about our struggles with the housing lottery from the perspective of a nonprofit developer.

For the last four years, we've had very large units, with very low rents, sitting vacant through a pandemic and a housing crisis. This is not because these units are in troubled buildings. It's not because they're too small or overpriced or for lack of trying on the part of our various marketing agents, but because the housing lottery, in its current form, could not connect interested parties with the housing we have available. As a result,

quality units sat empty for as long as 18 months while we tried to fill them through the lottery.

Our largest project is Reclaim HDFC, which is 10 buildings in total spanning from Southern Boulevard to University Avenue, and was named appropriately, as all 10 of these buildings were once vacant in the eighties until they were reclaimed by the people of the Bronx through community development.

All 10 of these buildings were gut rehabbed in the nineties, and have received various upgrades as needed over the years.

These buildings have larger than average units, compared to what we see being built today, and lower rents, as they have been rent stabilized with relatively low turnover.

These are not the buildings you might expect to see when you log in to your Housing Connect account to apply for new construction projects. They do not have elevators or bike rooms. They do not have free Wi-Fi or, in many cases, laundry rooms. They do have an average tenancy, across 265 units, of over 25 years, and an average rent of roughly \$1,100.

Our regulatory agreement requires that these units be rented to families making anywhere from 40

to 60% AMI with 27 units reserved for homeless families. We like to believe that most people remain in these units for so long because although our buildings may (TIMER) Can I?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You may conclude.

BRENDAN MITCHELL: Thank you, I'll be quick.

Because although these buildings may not have the amenities architectural frills of new construction, they do provide decent, quality housing at an affordable price to low and moderate income families in the community.

The applicants that we've consistently been connected with through the lottery for re-rentals have been uninterested in moving to the Bronx, disappointed that they are being selected for a building that was built over a hundred years ago, unhappy or physically unable to move into a building that does not have an elevator.

By contrast, every single day, we have low income people in the community, walking into our management office asking to rent these units and calling the super for information on how to rent them. And in addition to the people that Jumelia works with at the Northwest Bronx Resource Center,

our direct services arm, to rent these units because they live and work in the community. We also get calls from other nonprofit housing providers looking to place existing tenants in larger units, looking to checkerboard while renovating for existing tenants, or relocating existing tenants due to a fire or a flood.

Working together with these partner organizations in creating, preserving, and maintaining affordable housing is how we get this job done. This is why we believe that nonprofit organizations should be permanently exempt from the re-rental lottery requirement moving forward. The delays involved with filling our vacant units have hurt our projects financially at a time when buildings like this are up against rapidly rising costs and historically low collection rates.

We are grateful that New York City HPD has heard our concerns and recently announced a one-year pause on requiring re-rentals to be filled through the lottery. This will provide us much needed financial relief in the short term, as we can quickly fill our units with income-qualified tenants — like we have for thirty years prior to this requirement.

We look forward to participating in discussions with our agency partners around re-rentals, and the lottery over the next year, and welcome any changes that allow us to fill our empty units quickly and efficiently. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

ARIELLE HERSH: Hi, Chair Sanchez, members of the Committee, good to see you. I'm Ariel Hirsch; Thanks for the opportunity to testify.

I'm the Director of Policy And New Projects at UHAB. For fifty years, UHAB has empowered low to moderate income residents to take control of their housing and become homeowners in the buildings where they already live.

I'm going to submit larger written testimony. And so I'm going to go over like a really quick summary of points. And I'll try to keep it brief. I might go over, but we'll see.

We want to really appreciate the attention to this topic for this hearing, but also wanted to call attention to one aspect of HPD marketing and the Housing Connect process that I don't think we've talked about too much today – which is the subset of Housing Connect that works for homeownership, and

specifically HDFC cooperatives, which are the vast majority of buildings that we serve and also to help develop and create – especially with this waiver process, which includes re rentals as well as resales. I think that this is a really good opportunity for us to have this conversation.

The sort of broad scope here is that most HDFC cooperatives, around like 80% of the 1,200 in the city, don't have any requirements to market using Housing Connect. They use other means. They use a known broker, who understands HDFC cooperatives, in compliance perhaps with their monitor and their property manager. UHAB has a marketing and match program that works very well.

And so there... we know that there are other ways to do this fairly and to do this in compliance with all laws and regulations.

There are also some HDFC cooperatives that now have this requirement because of the regulatory agreement. And there are a subset of new HDFC cooperatives that are being created through programs like ANCP, Open Door, or TPT that will have these requirements going forward.



Generally, for buildings that are coming out of those programs, newly created HDFC co-ops, we find that the issues with Housing Connect mostly have to do with the development process and have, you know, it's a little messy. There's some coordinating that needs to happen. But for the most part, things work smoothly. I'm at time (TIMER) So may I continue?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Please conclude, yeah.

ARIELLE HERSH: Thank you.

Where we see real issues are for resales, as I think has been illuminated a lot during this hearing.

There is that one lump category for, you know, when you're creating your application, you check a box and you say, "I would be open to re-rentals." That box also includes resales for home ownership units throughout the five boroughs, which is a huge category. And so the issues that you are well aware of in having marketing agents working on re-rentals go through thousands and thousands of applicants are also true for resales of HDFC cooperative apartments in the Bronx, in Upper Manhattan, in Brooklyn.

And it is just not necessarily set up or equipped to handle these applications. Housing Connect also doesn't collect critical information

around like asset information for homeownership to understand whether an applicant has sufficient savings for closing costs and down payment.

And it doesn't screen for folks who are affirmatively selecting to participate in an HDFC cooperative, which is something that requires participation. It requires maybe stepping up to be on the board one day and requires some education and training. We want an affirmative sort of pool of folks who have self selected to do this and are interested in participating, interested in homeownership. But the current system that we have is not getting us those folks and also is not helping those folks find the housing that they want and deserve.

I also want to illuminate that the mini lottery process that's been in place for the last five years has not worked for a single resale of an HDFC cooperative — in all three examples that we have worked on — and I believe those are the only three examples that have taken place, it is not possible. And each HDFC that went through this process needed to exhaust a full six month attempt to market through the mini lottery with HPD before they were granted a

1 waiver to go to the private market and work with  
2 their marketing agent to do this. It's added cost.  
3 It's added time. It's added headache. And where there  
4 are hardships, someone needs to sell quickly for  
5 whatever reason, uh, or you have a vacant unit that's  
6 owned by the HDFC Cooperative, where they're not  
7 getting that essential maintenance to keep a building  
8 running on slim margins, this really makes a  
9 difference.  
10

11 And so just to say that with this opportunity to  
12 really rethink Housing Connect and our HPD marketing  
13 system, I want to call attention to the specific  
14 needs and challenges of homeownership and HDFC  
15 cooperatives and keep this conversation open. Thanks.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. In those three  
17 examples, were there waivers issued by the agency?

18 ARIELLE HERSH: Yes, there was waiver issued by  
19 the agency after about six months of attempting to  
20 run the mini lottery through the process that was set  
21 up, that yielded no qualified or willing applicants  
22 for either of the three units, uh, that was  
23 attempted.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Goodness. Thank you. Thank  
25 you for that. And I also just want to thank you UNHP,

1 I want to thank the members of AHORA for meeting with  
2 me in 2022, for highlighting this conversation or  
3 this problem. I think... I understand that the  
4 article that was written about the issue of re-  
5 rentals and the massive delays, was one of the most  
6 highly viewed and clicked on articles in *Gothamist*  
7 and in sort of recent memory. So it just highlights  
8 that your experience with re-rentals sitting vacant  
9 for 16 months at a time, uh, is just one that  
10 frustrates New Yorkers, and just highlights ,you  
11 know, the problems, the challenges with Housing  
12 Connect.

14 And I do want to highlight, Jumelia, for your  
15 points about that mismatch, the deep, deep mismatch  
16 between the level of subsidy that the city of New  
17 York, and the federal government and everywhere in  
18 the state government, the level of support that we  
19 are subsidizing for affordable apartments is just  
20 nowhere near, doesn't get us anywhere near the  
21 affordability levels that we need to reach members of  
22 our community up in the West Bronx. So ,you know, we  
23 have been trying to push the Administration, HPD, to  
24 be more creative in getting to those tiers of  
25 affordability. Of course, if Council passed the

1 voucher legislation, that would provide more vouchers  
2 to low income people, and that's part of the  
3 solution. Also, HPD capital, getting deeper. But I  
4 just want to welcome your partnership. We know this  
5 is a problem of dollars and cents. Right? We partner  
6 in the city of New York with the private market –  
7 and nonprofits – but also the private market to make  
8 ends meet for buildings. So to get more affordable,  
9 to get more deeply affordable, we have to put more  
10 money in. So I just want to emphasize that for the  
11 public, and also welcome your partnership on, how do  
12 we build toward ,you know, applying the right amount  
13 of pressure to get that outcome that need – more  
14 affordable apartments.

15  
16 But, thank you so much for your work on this.  
17 This is really... this wouldn't be happening if it  
18 weren't for all of the work that you put into Housing  
19 Connect. Thank you.

20 I would like to now call on the second panel,  
21 Joshua Stephenson, from West Bronx Housing, Eric  
22 Urquiza, West Bronx Housing, and Howard Slatkin from  
23 Citizens Housing & Planning Council.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Hey.

25 ERIC URQUIZA: Hey, good morning.

Good morning, Council Members. My name is Eric Urquiza, I'm a Housing Specialist and Community Coordinator at West Bronx Housing. I've helped hundreds of people in the Bronx apply for Housing Connect through... for housing through Housing Connect.

The system is not working the way it should for our clients. Many clients don't have computers, don't use emails, and can't reset passwords. They change phone numbers or emails, then they get locked out. When I try to help, the system thinks it's a duplicate account and blocks them. There's no real person to talk to. A text alert or a helpline will help a lot.

I met seniors who worked their whole lives, paid taxes, raised families, and now they're sleeping in shared rooms because rent is too high. Their Social Security isn't enough to live in New York City. They can't just leave, this is the only home they know.

For many, Housing Connect is their only hope for decent housing. I can pay my rent now, but when I stop working, Social Security won't be enough for me either. I worry about that, and I know others do too.

We need a system that's easier to use with text alerts, live help, and something that really works for the people it's meant to serve.

Thank you for your time and for your standing up for housing in our communities.

JOSHUA STEPHENSON: Okay, I need about... I timed it out, and it's about two and a half minutes.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'll allow it. (LAUGHS)

JOSHUA STEPHENSON: Good morning, afternoon... or good afternoon to the members of the New York City Council's Committee on Housing and Buildings, and Chair Sanchez.

My name is Joshua Stephenson, I'm the Executive Director of West Bronx Housing and Neighborhood Resource Center. So we're a very small organization that provides one on one in person, bilingual, English and Spanish language services to about 1,200 Bronxites per year. That's with a staff of two and a half full time caseworkers.

Setting aside the issue of affordability, which a lot, you know, much smarter people than me have talked about already, I'm here to talk about how prohibitively difficult the Housing Connect process itself is and why my organization no longer regularly

provides Housing Connect assistance — despite doing about 500 applications in the last three years. Of course, unless I get a referral from a council member.

Most of our clients don't really know how to use computers. They barely know how to use their phones. I can't tell you how many times I've logged in to their account and seen them miss four to five opportunities because they just didn't know — and believe me, I've tried to show them and teach them.

You know, we heard HPD say that they send out thousands of text messages. Our clients are receiving thousands of text messages just from scams. Right? These are senior citizens.

What that means is if we created 500 Housing Connect accounts in three years, we'd have to log in to 450 separate accounts every two weeks just to make sure they don't miss opportunities.

What I believe would make our job far easier is a provider portal to which we could link a new Housing Connect account that we just created, instead of having to log in to dozens or hundreds of separate accounts every two weeks.



Attachment One of my written testimony gives an example of a landing page for a current client. In this specific example, all seven of the completed applications were rejections: Three, because they missed the window of opportunity to upload documents, four because there were no more units.

Attachment Two of my testimony is admittedly hideous cut and paste using (TIMER) old school windows, paint.exe. — so don't judge me too hard— of how I imagine a landing portal could look like.

Another glaring issue is the refined search function. So an example, if I filter using the following parameters, two person household, two bedrooms, max rent of \$3,500. The first selection is 111 Willoughby Apartments. This two bedroom lottery, uh, is the two bedroom rent for this lottery is \$4,347. I just set the parameters for \$3,500. What's going on? Why is this filtering apartments for which I don't qualify and or can't afford?

So attachment Three is a screenshot from Housing Connect of the first two lotteries that pass that same filter. Neither of them qualify.

So absent, uh, any major changes in the online process, my organization simply doesn't have the

capacity to help with Housing Connect, which is truly a shame, because the number one question we get from phone calls and walk ins is, "(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)" "Hey, can you help me get an apartment?"

So with that being said, thank you for your time. I also want to thank Council Members Dinowitz, Feliz, and Chair Sanchez for their continued support of West Bronx Housing. You know, we've worked with each of your offices to save dozens of people from outright eviction. It's an honor to work with each of you and your offices.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Josh.

HOWARD SLATKIN: Good afternoon, Chair Sanchez and Council Members, I'm Howard Slatkin. I'm Executive Director Citizens Housing and Planning Council, a housing and planning policy research organization.

I'll try to give the best one-minute and fifty seconds of my written testimony, which is submitted in its entirety.

CHPC is in the midst of a research project about the range of approaches to matching residents with affordable housing units used in other global cities.

We look forward to publishing, this research, but I'll share some key takeaways of relevance.

In defining a fair and efficient system, every city strikes a different balance between speed and choice. It's really important to put people in homes quickly as well as fairly. These goals relate in complex ways and policy often strikes different balances in different situations, as well as over time as cities adapt their processes to evolving needs and conditions.

One of the things that we have found is that rigidity and proceduralism pose risk, not just because of the wide range of individual circumstances, the allocation process in New York City in particular needs to address, and the incredible depth of need for affordable housing and the limited supply of units to meet it.

But also, I should... I'm sorry... I'm gonna move forward.

The long lease-up times that we have identified in our brutal bureaucracy analysis of the lease-up process as well as the delays and re-rentals recently documented, by others here, highlight the need for continuous monitoring and improvement of the process,

as well as the need for an agile and adaptable process for administering this process.

So our recommendations here are that the lottery procedure should not be fixed in law, but that the Council should, as it is doing today, and we appreciate this, use its oversight authority to ensure (TIMER) clarity of goals for the lottery and allocation process, the measurement of results, and that there's an ongoing practice of monitoring and improving upon the process. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And, thank you. Thank you so much.

HPD, I think it's really cool that Josh actually drew this out for you. So, please bring to, what are they called? I already forgot the name of the vendor for Housing Connect.

So just, Josh, and I wonder your feedback on what works in terms of breaking through. You know, our constituents receive many scam texts, many scam calls. Some folks won't understand the difference between WhatsApp and a text message. They'll never check the text message, but they will check WhatsApp. You know, there's so many different examples of the digital divide and how it gets in the way of

1                    notifications. Right? So what do you think is the  
2                    best way to reach people?

3                    JOSHUA STEPHENSON: I honestly, I think it would  
4                    be provider portal because that way I'd be able to  
5                    log in and then actually call them myself. We could  
6                    call them ourselves and let them know, "Hey, you need  
7                    to come in, because we just got a notification that  
8                    you need to upload documents." We are a trusted  
9                    agency in our neighborhood. Our clients usually  
10                    answer our phone calls, but a lot of times, you know,  
11                    because they're getting so many texts, because  
12                    they're getting so many calls, it just... they just  
13                    don't see it, because they're getting so overwhelmed.

14                    So I really think a provider portal where we  
15                    could actually, instead of responding, we could  
16                    actually preempt the issue. Because one thing that  
17                    happens a lot, is a client will find, out on the last  
18                    day that they have to upload documents, that it's the  
19                    last day, and they'll come in without an appointment.

20                    You said your office has a wait list until July?  
21                    People just show up... so do we. But people will show  
22                    up on the last day, and we can't help them.

23                    CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. That's really  
24                    helpful.  
25

And I really appreciate your comments about how making fixes to the interface would also allow you to have the capacity to serve more people, because the filters are just not working.

Howard, thank you so much, good to see you. I, you know, taking your comments to heart on the details of the lottery procedures should not be fixed in law. Right? They also shouldn't be fixed in contract. Because my understanding is that the contract that we have, or that the city has, with the Housing Connect provider, also limits what changes we can ask for and what upgrades. And so I certainly welcome you to share feedback with us, share feedback with HPD about how to write the goals and the, you know, the goals for these procedures and processes in a way that would allow HPD to write contracts the best way also.

HOWARD SLATKIN: I would love to be able to provide sort of more substantive response to that, but I think you've highlighted a really important issue, which is that the procurement process that the City has to use to procure tech services to do these kinds of things, it's a, you know, I am not familiar with the details of this contract, this vendor, or

any of those things — But from my experience in years in in city government, which ended just a couple years ago, these things could be really challenging, and it's... having a tech platform that needs to change and adapt and evolve over time is not the traditional model for how those contracts work, and I think it's worth looking into ways to make that model of adaptable tech work better for this purpose.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: And one question that I was trying to get HPD to respond to, but I don't think I quite got them to is, or maybe I didn't ask it well, but this question about where do you have the talent? Do you have the talent in house to, you know, have web developers, have designers, user experience experts, that sort of thing? Do you have that inside of an agency, inside of city government, or do you contract it out? And if you contract it out, how do you write the, you know, the document that's gonna govern the relationship in a way that's flexible enough?

HOWARD SLATKIN: Yeah. I certainly would not presume to answer in in terms of, like, that that the talent that HPD themselves have. But from my own experience, it was in years at the Department of City

1 Planning, where actually the agency had done some  
2 really innovative things with creating a new tech  
3 development team. It is a very... in terms of the  
4 staffing and labor market challenges that exist for  
5 city government in general, it's like the most  
6 challenging corner is keeping the tech workforce sort  
7 of stable and secure and fully staffed.

9 And I think it poses a particular challenge for  
10 agencies to try to do those kinds of things in house,  
11 I think, you know, in this moment and in even in  
12 ordinary times.

13 So I think it's worth looking at the procurement  
14 process as well as, you know, what is the staffing  
15 component that's sort of a permanent agency fixture  
16 and how much of this process is done through  
17 procurement?

18 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Absolutely. Thank you,  
19 thank you so much. I really appreciate your  
20 testimonies.

21 The next panel is Milagros Salazar, Brendan  
22 Cheney, and Jeffrey Gardner.

23 BRENDAN CHENEY: Good afternoon, my name is  
24 Brendan Cheney, I'm the Director of Policy and  
25



Operations at the New York Housing Conference. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

And Chair Sanchez, I want to especially thank you for your leadership and your advocacy here. We always appreciate your advocacy around housing issues, and especially today sort of highlighting issues to Housing Connects, we really appreciate it.

So I'm going to start by talking about the three pieces of legislation. We very much support the goals of the of the legislation. We really want to see a single portal that has all affordable housing and rentals on the portal. We really want to see a portal that has notifications, and we really want to... and we do support a robust housing ambassadors program, but we are concerned about legislating these three things.

We're concerned about unfunded mandates, especially in an environment where federal housing funding is really under threat. And then for 1264, especially, I think just concerned about legislating something that the Housing Connect Portal isn't prepared to do effectively right now.

But obviously very much support the goals of those three bills and really appreciate your leadership on that.

So look, Housing Connect should provide transparency and access to affordable housing, but right now between the functionality that exists, and bureaucratic hurdles, it's not meeting those goals. It's leaving units vacant for months at a time.

We appreciate HPD's willingness to grant waivers for re-rentals right now. As you've heard, and as you've heard before this, the re-rentals are causing a lot of long vacancies and revenue issues for the providers. We appreciate HPD's pause on this while they're working on a longer term fix.

As they work for a longer term fix and longer term solutions to those issues, we request the changes – prioritize speedy and efficient re-rentals, and really increase the capacity of the (TIMER) portal to meet all the goals that we really want to see Housing Connect have.

So I think, just to wrap up, over the next years, they're looking to make those changes. We want to make sure those changes really do deliver Housing

Connect that we all want to see. So thank you. Happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Ms. Sanchez, do you want me to translate from now?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You have her testimony, right? Why don't we let her finish, and then you can do yours.

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

(TIMER) (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) (TIMER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) Before I translate, I just want to (INAUDIBLE) give me a second just before.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Sure.

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) (TIMER)

Okay. Hello, Ms. Sanchez, and Members of the Housing Committee here in New York.

First of all, thank you for the opportunity to allow me testify today. My name is Milagros Salazar,

a member of the group called AHORA. AHORA means "now" in Spanish.

And in the day of today, I had come to share my testimony with Housing Connect about my experience submitting the application for this program.

This is the eligibility process, the accessible process in order to obtain an apartment for people with low income like I am.

I live and I work in the Bronx for more than ten years. I'm a member of Housing Connect since the year 2017. The moment before I did that, I applied for around 63 lotteries in total, according to my earnings, according to my yearly earnings. And after I submitted all these applications, I never got any responses. Finally, after I was doing all this, I obtained my own apartment.

I'm one of the few people who was lucky about this. And the reason is, yeah, community preference that was in that area where I was living that helped me.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Yes. I'm working as a health worker. I am working as a homecare aide. As you know, my

earnings are low because of my job, and I'm working regularly in different runs since (INAUDIBLE) Housing Connect.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

Okay, I was working with two patients in the home health agency, and I was working for more than fifty hours per week in order to be able to afford things. In order for me to achieve the income (TIMER) that they were requesting for me to have in order to have the apartment.

This is not really to be accessible for somebody. This is not right for people that have a low income like me. We are working very hard for a better future.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

So we deserve to have a (INAUDIBLE) housing for people like us and also for our families. And saying thanks to God and thanks to UNHP that they are helping me with the complex process, and these processes are very demanding for all the people who are applying.

My monthly rent, or the apartment I have now is \$1,245 U.S. dollars. And the days like today...

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

And the days like today, I came here to testify, and I'm not getting paid for the day of today only for me to come in to testify.

In December of the year 2003, after six years, I was able to obtain my first apartment, and I'm here to be the voice for the ones who are going through the same process I went through, and the ones who need a house like the day of today, and who wanted to request help with these entities.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

And the entities that are present today, so they need to improve the process so we can have more affordable homes and affordable apartments here in New York City – especially for people who have a low income like me, and who deserve to live in a good home and in a decent home.

Before obtaining my apartment, before getting this apartment, I suffered from a lot of anxiety.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

And I was paying attention every day to receive an email message from Housing Connect. And I obtained two opportunities to do selection interviews, but I was very disappointed and I was very discouraged.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

It's just an explanation, one more second.

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Okay, okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE)

I went to two interviews, and the first one I  
had was a building that was divided in three parts.

Ms. Sanchez, basically what she tried to  
explain, those apartment buildings are divided in  
three different apartment buildings, similar to co-  
op, but for people with low income. Uh-huh.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

And the building was right next to the other.  
The first building, I had to put together many of the  
requirements that they were asking for me, many of  
the documents that they were putting together, and I  
was only denied because of my earnings. At the moment  
of the interview, I only had \$100 missing. So, when I  
tried to say was only \$100 less than the requirements  
that they were asking for, and I was only denied the  
apartment only because of this.

Okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) They were  
saying that I needed to demonstrate that we'll be  
able to pay the monthly rent, and this apartment was  
just \$550. So basically, because it was only \$100

less than the requirements, I was denied the apartment. And I was paying \$700 to rent just a small bedroom in one of the apartments for several years and with all the (INAUDIBLE) the place.

Okay, when I finished the third building of the same project, they communicated with me, and they wanted to know if I was still interested in obtaining this apartment. And they also wanted me to know there were also some apartments that were available in that area, and also in my income will qualify for those apartments. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: This was one of the same apartments or the three apartments I mentioned before. So quickly, I put all the documents together. I asked my employer to give me a free day so I can go to the (INAUDIBLE), and I called my employer to explain everything to him, right? I was also looking for my income tax returns, and I was also looking for the pay stubs. But again, when they review everything, the answer was again the same. I didn't qualify because I didn't live in the community in (INAUDIBLE) priority community.



Miss Sanchez, what she means to say is the place where they're supposed (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'm sorry...

TRANSLATOR: Yes?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I understand...

TRANSLATOR: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: But we need to move on. If you could just try to summarize little bit.. (CROSS-TALK)

TRANSLATOR: Yes, we're almost finished. My apologies. The letter is very long, Ms. Sanchez.

It's where the community is located, they didn't have priority, that location, okay?

I was very surprised about the situation, because this building was located right next to the other building. I feel very frustrated. I feel very depressed, and I was confused at the same time. And how it's supposed to be that they are looking at your profile, right? And they're looking at the profile of every applicant, and they're just denying you like that. You know, they know where you live. They already know your year earnings and your monthly earnings. And after that, they wanted to verify your application request, and after that, they were just

Okay. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

And they only give you ten days to put all these documents together and to hand all these documents to them. When in the majority of the offices, they take a long time to surrender these documents, they're only giving you ten days there. Some of them also require you to manage technology very well, because you have to submit the application to a webpage, right? You have to... I would load all these documents to the portal of Housing Connect, and also to send many email messages in order to qualify for this. And sometimes it's very difficult, because they don't give you the (INAUDIBLE) for people who don't know how to use this technology well.

1                   Lastly, where I live right now, not perfect,  
2  
3       it's a mixed place, and there are many apartment  
4       units that are rented for people who have subsidies.  
5       Like, subsidy means like housing vouchers. And some  
6       of these people who have these housing vouchers are  
7       people who are mentally ill, people with mental  
8       problems. So, it's very... this makes for you  
9       difficult ways to live in these buildings, because of  
10      the kind of people who are living in these buildings,  
11      and because there's a lot of insecurity, and also  
12      it's a big mess inside of these buildings.

13           We need assistance of housing that makes the  
14      owner for the name that they're offering, right? We  
15      need a program that will make the New Yorkers to  
16      connect each other, especially the ones who are very  
17      vulnerable, right? And the people who have options to  
18      have real houses, not only temporary housing, but  
19      permanent houses, and also that's accessible to  
20      people in New York who have low income. Because on  
21      the contrary, the people with low income will have so  
22      many problems, especially in places like the Bronx.  
23      And we will live without any home, and we will not be  
24      able to live in a place with dignity or a (INAUDIBLE)  
25      place.

Thanks to all of you for the opportunity to share my story and to be able to talk about the big necessity and the big need that we had to simplify this housing process.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) So I'll just say that in English:

I think that when she and I met for the first time, she was actually still living in the in the one bedroom. And, you know, it was such a hardship, six years of waiting. But I am just so thankful for the work that UNHP does in the community that we have these success stories, but we want to make this the rule, not the exception. So I look forward to working ,you know, working on these, uh, maybe bills, maybe just reforms. Sometimes we move legislation in order to get policy changes. And I don't think it's a coincidence that there was an announcement by HPD earlier this week on re-rentals. But we do what we can, right, to make policy move and to deliver for New Yorkers.

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So... (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) I was answering so she could understand... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. No, you, you go ahead. No, go ahead. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Ms. Sanchez, is it possible to send the testimony in Spanish, right? It will be okay, right?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yes.

TRANSLATOR: So, she doesn't have to translate everything into English now, right?

MILAGROS SALAZAR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Oh, yes, they have translators in the organization to...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. Thank you so much.

And New York Housing Conference, thank you for your policy brief in February that also was very helpful in moving this along, thank you.

Okay, I now want to call on the next panel: Shane Canada; Shashir Sammy, from Local 30; Brendan Benn, Local 30; and Richard Bess.

And thank you for your patience.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: So the way you determine who goes next, is you have to fight to the finish – I'm kidding...

(LAUGHTER)

BRENDAN BENN: Good afternoon, Chairperson Sanchez, and members of the Committee, you for the opportunity to testify.

I am Brendan Benn, Business Representative for the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 30, representing stationary engineers who operate building systems throughout New York City. I express our strong support for Intro 1207, which corrects the qualifying experience requirements for high pressure boiler operator engineer license. This legislation addresses a critical issue by allowing apprenticeship training to count concurrently with supervised work experience. This restores the original intent of the code, which was altered by a grammatical correction in previous revisions.

Currently, apprentices must complete their program and then accumulate three additional years of experience before qualifying for a license. Our apprentices already gain valuable, hands on experience during the training. As the only New York

State Department of Labor approved apprenticeship program in our field, our three-year program ensures an apprentice works forty hours weekly under the direct supervision of a licensed engineer, plus attend unpaid schooling after work hours.

The current code prevents counting their supervised work time towards their experience requirement, creating an unnecessary barrier at a time when skilled trades face workforce shortages.

This amendment maintains all safety standards while creating a more efficient pathway to license. Applicants will still need three years of supervised work experience within seven years preceding the application. We are simply acknowledging that apprenticeship work is qualifying experience.

(TIMER) Can I finish?

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yes.

BRENDAN BENN: I speak on this issue not just as a union representative, but from personal experience. I, myself, went through the apprenticeship program, and at the time, my supervised work experience was counted concurrently with my training. This opportunity made a profound difference in my life and for my family. It provided me with the economic

stability, career advancement, and ability to support my loved ones while developing valuable skills that serve our city's infrastructure needs.

The current interpretation of the code has created unnecessary barriers for the next generation of engineers who deserve the same opportunity I had. This change is not about lowering the standards, it's about restoring the original intent of the licensing requirements while maintaining safety protocols.

On behalf of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 30 and the next generation of stationary engineers, I urge this committee to support Intro 1207. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

SHANE CANADA: Good morning, Chairperson Sanchez and committee members.

My name is Shane Canada; I was accepted into the stationary engineer apprenticeship program 17 years ago. This program was a catalyst for understanding theory and principles of HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and the like. The immersive method of learning while working in the field helped hone my trade skills in real time versus the traditional route of attending



college but lacking the hands-on skills obtained by applying what I'd learned immediately.

The apprenticeship program has served as a bookend in my life. I was constantly searching for a career that either provided a sense of purpose or a career that would allow me enough financial security to become a homeowner and raise a family in these inflationary times. I have been afforded both, a true blessing.

It's challenging to believe that any of the things I have accomplished to date would have been possible without the apprenticeship program. Prior to applying, I wasn't aware of what a Stationary Engineer was nor the importance of the position in the day-to-day workings of facilities. I have not yet obtained my high-pressure license. With the passing of this legislation, I will be eligible to sit for the exam this coming September of 2025. This change would recognize that my apprenticeship work experience counts toward my licensing requirements. Removing two years off my eligibility requirement at the age of 43 is immensely beneficial. It's giving me a leg up in achieving my own financial and career goals.

I strongly urge you to support Intro 1207, as it will make a meaningful difference for apprentices like me. Thank you.

RICHARD BESS: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon, Chair Sanchez, good afternoon, Committee.

My name is Richard Bess, and I graduated from the Stationary Engineer apprenticeship program in June 2023. The apprenticeship program has taught me all the necessary skills and hands on experience to excel in this trade. With practical experience provided by Local 30, I am now able to handle various types of machinery safely and properly.

During my time in the apprenticeship program, I was able to earn two years of steam time from the program, which pushed me ahead to qualify for my high pressure boiler license. If this were not done, I wouldn't be able to sit for my license; therefore, extending the waiting period an extra two-years and six months, rather than six months.

The apprenticeship program gave me the opportunity to get my high pressure boiler license at accelerated pace. And I am grateful for the apprenticeship program, as it helps to achieve my goal of becoming a high pressure stationary engineer.

I urge the Committee to support Intro 1207 to recognize the experience gained from the apprenticeship program, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. The only thing is that there's no way you can be 43, I thought you were actually 17.

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: No, thank you. It's so helpful to see the real life example of what we're changing when we pass these corrections. So I want to thank you. I also want to thank you for your great advocacy to get this bill supported by so many council members so quickly and to have us move. I'm very glad that we could move it through the process, because it's an important change. So thank you for being here, and thank you for your patience.

PANEL: Thank you

UNKNOWN: Thank you, and, uh, (NO AUDIO)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: No, thank you, she's usually my co-chair, but she gave me a chance today, so thank you. (LAUGHS)

UNKNOWN: (NO AUDIO)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: There you go, I get that, thank you.

2 I will now call the next panel: Eric Lee from  
3 Volunteers of America Greater New York; Victoriano  
4 Mejia; and Valentina Mejia.

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, you can begin when  
7 ready. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)  
10 Are you translating for her?

11 TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) Yes, (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
12 LANGUAGE)

13 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

16 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. Thank you for the  
17 opportunity. My name is Valentina Mejia, and his name  
18 is Victor Mejia.

19 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 TRANSLATOR: So I have a question. I have one  
21 question for you. So since 2012, I've been submitting  
22 applications. So I submitted an application for  
23 \$175.00. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

25 (TIMER)

TRANSLATOR: (UN-MIC'D) (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: So, I get an application and there are two buildings. (INAUDIBLE) apartments.

VALENTINA MEJIA: Uh-uh.

TRANSLATOR: And I actually had to take a train to get there. So, I remembered that I used to go to Ms. Sanchez's office. And, then, they were following up with my applications. And I remembered that commission then transferred me to Ms. (INAUDIBLE) office, and then I remember that I just started to apply over and over and again. And I did get a call back for a couple of applications, maybe three of them.

VALENTINA MEJIA: Mm-hmm. Okay, (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: So, I had a voucher, and we went through the process. But the thing is that, since we are a couple, they were only approving me for one bedroom. And then I was asking his doctors to get two bedrooms instead of one. But I wasn't able to.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

(TIMER)

TRANSLATOR: And, then, since I had to take the train, uh, I had to take the train or the subway to go to Ms. Sanchez's office, then I actually only stayed at Ms. (INAUDIBLE) office, because they were following up on my case. So I applied for an apartment that at 3001 Grand Concourse, (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: That's next to where I actually live. It's nearby to where I live.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: So I submitted the documents twice. And then they told me that I had to appeal. And I actually submitted the documents to her office twice. Then, they told me that I had to appeal after I was rejected.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: So I actually had to start working as a home health aide, even when I had another job. So I had to change my schedule. I had even to work with three different agencies. And I had another job. But I had to be able to work even up to 50 hours with

three different agencies just to be able to apply or meet the qualifications. So even though when he has two vouchers, and he is receiving Social Security, I have been on the waiting list for two years.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: And that is a very tedious process. You have to work a lot. And you have to be submitting documents, you have to apply, and it's (INAUDIBLE) half days such to apply for it and submitting the documents.

And I want to ask you, why? Why do I have to be on a waiting list for two years? And I have to (TIMER) to be processing this for over six months.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Since 2012, I have been applying and paying my own money, for example, and I have a job. Like, I had... I have had a job all this time at (INAUDIBLE). I used to work at a school. I worked at a school, and even having the vouchers, having his vouchers, and I just couldn't achieve anything on the applications. And I want to say that both of us, we

are living between cockroaches and mice — between cockroaches and mice even when we are able to pay and we are paying the money. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

(TIMER)

TRANSLATOR: So we live between cockroaches and mice. And I don't have any shame to say this. And I just ,you know what? I just can't keep doing this, because even having the money, I can't just submit it and put the money into the applications. Because the thing is that, he almost does not go out. And I can't kill him, right?

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: That's what she said...

(LAUGHTER)

TRANSLATOR: I know, but...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (LAUGHS)

TRANSLATOR: So I just (INAUDIBLE) the cockroaches and the mice just walk in between us. And I do have money. So actually, I went to work at 7:00 p.m. yesterday. And I went out of my job at 7:00 a.m. So, even working twelve hours, I can't keep going on like this. So I just let the (INAUDIBLE) roam around freely.



2 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. (SPEAKING  
3 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

4 Is there anything you want... Do you want to  
5 come up?

6 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: (NO MIC) Yes, I will just  
7 add that...

8 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You have to speak into the  
9 mic.

10 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11 So I just want to say that she has highlighted  
12 her story. She's worked a twelve hour shift. She's a  
13 senior. They're both elderly. They don't want to be  
14 working so much, but they have to, because they feel  
15 that that's the only way to afford the rent that they  
16 have right now.

17 And they are constantly denied after being  
18 invited to multiple interviews. So they're confused  
19 with why this process is not working for them after  
20 applying to so many applications, after getting help  
21 from so many different agencies, and still not  
22 winning that golden ticket that I spoke about  
23 earlier.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Yeah.

25 JUMELIA ABRAHAMSON: So thank you.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm?

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

VALENTINA MEJIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you. We're good. Thank you (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

Thank you so much. She is highlighting that we met before, and my office said that we would help her, and here we are today, and she still doesn't have a unit. So ,you know, it's just such a common story and a painful one. So we hope to make changes that help us to meet this challenge.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: You go ahead.

I said, they're not keeping you company. You kept them company.

ERIC LEE: It's okay, but, yes.

Thank you, Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee for allowing me to testify today. I'm Eric Lee, I am the Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York or VOA-GNY for short.

I will submit written testimony following the hearing. We greatly appreciate the Committee for holding today's hearing on improving access to affordable housing and the Housing Connect system.

My organization, VOA-GNY, is one of the largest human services providers in the region and an active developer of affordable and supportive housing. We are extremely proud of two of our most recent projects in the Bronx, including East Clarke Place Senior Residence, which is newly renovated in the Jerome Avenue Highbridge Concourse neighborhood in the Bronx, as well as our YP Senior Residence, is actually in your district, Chair Sanchez. We would love to have you come visit.

We are currently just beginning to start moving tenants in. When we finish, we will be fully occupied with a 117 low income seniors, including 37 formerly homeless senior households.

Affordable housing is extremely limited, as we've heard today. It's an extremely precious resource, and we must do everything we can to maximize use of every single unit within the city given the overwhelming need.

We understand the Council and the Administration's shared goal of making the affordable housing process more equitable, but until the City can ensure that Housing Connect is positioned to effectively achieve this goal, the City must continue to use more flexible options, like the one-year waiver which HPD implemented, to more quickly match qualified candidates to affordable housing.

VOA-GNY staff are currently being trained by HPD to become qualified marketing agents to gain access to Housing Connect. However, the training process and the approval process for prospective agents can take well over half a year to complete. (TIMER) We welcome the Committee's support in prioritizing additional funding for HPD.

Sorry, do you mind if I wrap up? Thank you.

So we appreciate the Committee's support in prioritizing additional support for HPD to both increase the frequency of the scheduled trainings for

1 marketing agents – because we heard there's only 63  
2 citywide currently – as well as shorten the timeframe  
3 to approve them once they go through the training  
4 process. More frequent trainings and faster approvals  
5 means that there's more hands to do the work. It  
6 would allow us to be able to list and lease up our  
7 own units. This is especially important for re-  
8 rentals, because at any given time, there's a very  
9 few number of units within our entire portfolio that  
10 are being turned over. And it's just simply not cost  
11 effective to hire a third party to do the re-rentals  
12 as marketing agents. We imagine more providers would  
13 also want to do this themselves, given the HPD's  
14 stance to move towards Housing Connect as the main  
15 way to do re-rentals in post April 2026.

17 With regards to the legislation heard today,  
18 VOA-GNY supports 1265 to require email or text  
19 notifications. This can be especially helpful for  
20 shelter residents, as our case managers or housing  
21 specialists could help track pending documentation  
22 requests.

23 We know that our clients often have many things  
24 that are time intensive, including full time jobs,  
25 and being able to have active eyes on this is really

helpful to make sure their application does not stall.

And we also support Intro 1265 to require in person assistance from HPD in the community. Elderly and low income households have very limited access or familiarity with the online platform, and we recognize bringing the services to them in the communities they need can make sure that it's not a barrier to them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so much, I appreciate your testimony.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, we will now turn to remote testimony. Once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you, and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the go ahead to begin. Please wait for the sergeant to announce that you may begin before delivering your testimony.

I will now call Karen Baez.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KAREN BAEZ: Good afternoon, Housing Chair Sanchez, and members of the Committee.

My name is Karen, I am testifying on behalf of Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, a 50-

year-old member-led organization organizing for racial justice and economic democracy.

As you might know, Northwest Bronx started around housing decades ago, in response to redlining and disinvestment. Unfortunately, is still one of the most important issues facing Bronx residents that are facing displacement, poor housing conditions, and a lack of affordable housing.

I have helped multiple Bronxites apply through the Housing Connect system, and they've all always... we always experience, like, difficulties, navigating the system.

We strongly support the package of reforms being considered today to improve Housing Connect and the affordable housing lottery system. Every day, our members experience profound frustration with the system that often feels inaccessible, confusing, and unresponsive, especially for low income Black, brown, immigrant, and older residents.

Filing vacant re-rental units more quickly is a critical common sense step. It is unacceptable for units to sit empty while families desperately search for affordable homes. And streamlining re-rentals

will move us closer to a system that serves people,  
not bureaucracy.

We also applaud the proposals to require text  
and email notifications and provide in person  
application assistance. Access to information is  
access to housing. Too many residents miss out on  
opportunities because they never receive updates or  
because they face technological barriers they cannot  
overcome alone.

These bills move us toward a more just,  
transparent, and accessible system. We urge the  
Council to pass these bills and continue to build a  
Housing Connect system (TIMER) that really connects  
our communities... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
expired.

KAREN BAEZ: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Karen, I was  
wondering who was behind the Northwest Bronx logo.  
You have been up on the screen the entire hearing by  
the way. Thank you, Karen.

I will now call on Robert Desir.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.



ROBERT DESIR: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Robert Desir; I am speaking on behalf of the Legal Aid Society and speaking in strong support of Intros 1264, 1265, and 1266.

First, I want to thank Council Member Sanchez and the Committee for taking time to address these issues with care and urgency. These bills reflect a deep understanding of the real barriers New Yorkers face, especially seniors and vulnerable residents, that they face when they're trying to access truly affordable housing. And the testimony that we've heard has been a testament to those experiences.

Intro 1264 would make the process more transparent and accountable by requiring that applicants be notified clearly and directly when a unit matching their preferences becomes available. It shifts responsibility off the individual and puts it where it belongs on the system.

Intro 1265 improves transparency and usability by allowing applicants to receive updates by email or text and to designate a trusted representative. That's empowering. A simple, standardized consent form would ensure applicants understand and approve

who has access to their information, helping prevent misuse while still allowing trusted support.

Intro 1266 will make a real difference by requiring HPD to provide weekly in person housing help at local community centers. This is a critical step towards ensuring that older adults and others who are not digitally connected aren't left behind.

As HPD designs its outreach program, it might be useful to prioritize high need areas within each district and ensure accessibility by public transit.

Together, these bills will create a more inclusive, user friendly and just housing application process. We urge their swift passage. And, again, thank you, Council Member Sanchez for leading on this.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Robert, I appreciate your testimony.

I will now call on Alex Martinez.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

(PAUSE)

ALEX MARTINEZ: Hi, everyone, thank you.

Good afternoon, I'm Alex Martinez; I am here testifying on behalf of Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, KHCC,

has been a housing ambassador since 2017. And in that time, we have supported over 2,000 constituents with Housing Connect.

The reality is that the need community members have for navigating the process and portal exceeds CBO's capacity as little to no funding is provided by HPD. In our experience, annual funding has only been made available three times since 2019. And the reality is that the fifteen to twenty (NO AUDIO)...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Oh, you froze...

ALEX MARTINEZ: (INAUDIBLE) efforts made by HPD to clarify the housing lottery definition of affordable housing, many constituents are often frustrated by how high the income requirements are for the buildings, often requiring incomes over a \$100,000 (NO AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) not meet a lot of the needs that we see in the Bronx.

The portal has grown more and more glitchy, and the website is often down. It is a disservice to the clients who come to our weekly walk-in hours, only to be turned away because the website is not working.

The constituents who need the most support are those with limited access or comfort with technology. This is especially challenging and true for

constituents to navigate when there is a limited digital literacy or language barriers.

As housing ambassadors, KHCC is most qualified to speak on the legislation proposing the email text notifications and in person application assistance. Many constituents unintentionally miss critical updates and deadlines if they are unable or unaware to log in to the portal, or they do so (TIMER) but are unable to...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has expired.

ALEX MARTINEZ: (INAUDIBLE) the... Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. And please do submit your testimony, because we lost you for a little bit, and we want to make sure to capture that, thank you.

We now call on Sonia Simpson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

SONIA SIMPSON: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Sonia Simpson, and I am part of a Bronx advocacy group called AHORA, Affordable Housing Opportunity Right Away.

I have been applying through Housing Connect since my children were young. I have been selected for a unit, but the time allowed was not able to put the document in a timely fashion due to the crunch time and the poor communication.

I have a fixed and limited income. There are very few apartments on Housing Connect for which I am eligible. I need an affordable, clean, and healthy apartment. I find the Housing Connect portal difficult to use. I tried to use my phone to update my application; I have worked with UNHP to get help. I receive constant emails from Housing Connect for apartments that I cannot afford and I'm not eligible for it. This is frustrating, and I can only imagine how frustrating this must be for the elderly or non English speakers.

Going forward, I would like to be able to talk to a person when I am selected for a unit. Email should be sent only to those who are eligible for the unit. We need more units for low income families and individuals. There needs to be more help on Housing Connect in communities.

Thanks for your time (NO AUDIO) thanks for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, thank you so much, Sonia. Let's try to make those changes, thank you.

Next, I would like to call on Mbacke Thiam.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MBACKE THIAM: Hello, everyone. My name is Mbacke Thiam. I am the Housing & Health Community Organizer at Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York. We advocate for people with disabilities in the five boroughs of New York City, and thank you for having this.

A large number of our consumers use this housing lottery portal to find housing. We advocate for a fair and just proceeding of housing applications to combat discrimination that people with disabilities may encounter when their disabilities are being disclosed. This discriminatory, that is why we strongly advocate for fairness in selecting applicants for apartments and homes without people with when they live with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations and modifications so that they can fully enjoy their homes. Denying special

services, refusing modification, and not accepting service dogs can be seen as ableist.

And (BACKGROUND NOISE) (INAUDIBLE) we support Intro 1207 in relation to allowing for time spent in apprenticeship to count toward the supervised practical experience time requirement for granting of high pressure boiler operating engineer licenses.

We also support 1264 in relation to affordable housing unit, which subsequently became vacant and rented through the housing portal.

We also support Intro 1265 in relation to notification regarding application in the New York City Housing Portal and designation of representative to receive notification.

We also support intro 1266 in relation to requiring the Department of Housing preservation...

(CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has expired.

MBACKE THIAM: (INAUDIBLE) to recreate an in person housing portal assistance program. It...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Mbacke, we really appreciate your testimony.

I would now like to call on Kevin Wolfe.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KEVIN WOLFE: Great, good afternoon, and thank you, Chair Sanchez. I can everyone hear me okay? Okay, great, thank you.

My name is Kevin Wolfe, and I'm with the Center for New York City Neighborhoods. And I would like to thank you for holding this hearing on Housing Connect.

I thought there was a lot of good testimony specifically on rentals, but we wanted to talk about homeownership and how Housing Connect impacts homeowners.

The top line message that that we have today for the hearing, is that Housing Connect 2.0 needs reform. It's not working for home buying and purchasing affordable homes in New York City. And we would like to see some significant reforms.

Notwithstanding, we understand that HPD just sent out an email last week saying that they'll be temporarily offering a waiver for the re-rentals and the resales. We understand that and that's good. But we want to see a comprehensive overhaul, since Housing Connect 2.0 was designed (NO AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) not homeownership. And so what we



would want a do is have something that is designed specifically for home ownership.

Before I get to the recommendations, do want to say this, Chair Sanchez, the City already provides ample resources for home buying, but right now it's not connected, ironically. And so we have HomeFirst and a huge commitment of over \$40 million to home buying. (NO AUDIO) (INAUDIBLE) That the City Council funds of nonprofits that provide first time home buying counseling. They're not connected to a Housing Connect. We'd actually like to see training and funding (NO AUDIO) will be one of our recommendations.

We have affordable housing programs offered by the state through Housing Connect. (TIMER) And so what we would like... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has expired.

KEVIN WOLFE: (INAUDIBLE) more synergy and more connection between those two items. And I have my written testimony, so we can submit that as a follow-up.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so much, Kevin.

I would now like to call on (INAUDIBLE) Salas.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

(NO RESPONSE)

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, hearing no one, I would like to call on Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, uhm, hello? Sorry. (BACKGROUND NOISE) Hello, my name is Christopher... Hello, my name is Christopher...

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: (BACKGROUND NOISE) (INAUDIBLE) you in person, but I don't... okay.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, I'm in... I'm inside the, uhm, the City Council Hearing for Housing. (BACKGROUND NOISE) So for housing... And so I want to speak on... I mean, so just speak on support of the Housing Connect, but at same time, they need to make sure that these nonprofits are not involved with this stuff. These nonprofits are not involved with this with this... with this type of projects. So I'm gonna (INAUDIBLE) the Kevin Riley zoning hearings. I'm kind of, like, I'm kind of, like, yeah... I'm kind of, like, kind of busy. So but thank you. I'm here showing my support. Okay? Thank you so much. I'm here showing my support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

2 If we have inadvertently missed anyone that has  
3 registered to testify today, and has yet to be  
4 called, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, if  
5 you are testifying remotely, and you will be called  
6 in the order that your hand has been raised.

7 If you are testifying in person, please come to  
8 the dais.

9 (PAUSE)

10 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Seeing no one, I will now  
11 close the hearing. Thank you to the members of the  
12 Administration and the members of the public who have  
13 joined us today.

14 This hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 29, 2025