

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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March 7, 2025

Start: 10:48 a.m.

Recess: 3:00 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Nantasha M. Williams, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Rita C. Joseph

Christopher Marte

A P P E A R A N C E S

Annabel Palma, Commissioner and Chair of the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Mariela Salazar, Deputy Commissioner for Administrative Services of the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Katherine Carroll, Deputy Commissioner for Law Enforcement of the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Kajori Chaudhuri, Deputy Commissioner for Community Relations of the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Jeanne Victor, Executive Director of the New York City Equal Employment Practices Commission

Nicole Yearwood, Commissioner of the New York City Equal Employment Practices Commission

Russell Ferri, Director of Research at the New York City Equal Employment Practices Commission

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

Maya Williams, Director of Research and Policy at the New York City Commission on Racial Equity

Kiiru Gichuru, Senior Legislative Strategist at the New York City Commission on Racial Equity

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

Cristobal Gutiérrez, Staff Attorney at Make the Road New York and Commissioner of CORE

Mateo Guerrero-Tabares, lead organizer with Make the Road New York

Sara Manaugh, Director of Litigation at Brooklyn Legal Services

Caroline Blanton, clinician at the New York Anti-Violence Project

Hilary Wilson, Senior Policy Analyst of the Community Service Society of New York

Stephen Dunn, Senior Staff Attorney at Community Service Society of New York

Reggie Chatman, Director of Policy at the Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy

Jonathan Eber, Program Officer at Enterprise Community Partners

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Edwin Santana, Community Organizer for Freedom Agenda

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Ministries

Rebekah Cook-Mack, Staff Attorney in the Employment Law Unit of Legal Aid Society

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

Amy Blumsack, Neighbors Together

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mic check, mic check,
3 this is a mic check, mic check. The Committee on
4 Civil and Human Rights, recorded by Walter Lewis in
5 the Committee Room. Today's date is March 7, 2025.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and
7 welcome to today's Preliminary Budget hearing for the
8 Committee for Civil and Human Rights.

9 At this point, going forward, I'd like to
10 remind you all to please silence all electronic
11 devices.

12 At no point is anyone to approach the
13 dais.

14 If you would like to sign up for in-
15 person testimony and have not filled out a slip or
16 have any questions on this hearing, please see the
17 Sergeant at the desk in the back.

18 Chair, we are ready to proceed.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Good morning, and
20 welcome to the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget hearing
21 for the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. My name
22 is Nantasha Williams, and I am the Chair of this
23 Committee.

24 This morning, the Committee is looking
25 forward to hearing from the Commission on Civil and

Human Rights, the Equal Employment Practices Commission, and the Commission on Racial Equity. CCHR enforces the New York City Human Rights Law and educates the public about their rights and encourages positive community relations. CCHR's Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget totals nearly 15 million, which includes roughly 13 million for personnel services to support 141 positions. The budget also includes roughly 1.9 million dollars for other-than-personal services.

Okay, we have some technical difficulties.

All right, take two. Good morning again, and welcome to the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget hearing for the Committee on Civil and Human Rights. My name is Nantasha Williams, and I am the Chair of this Committee.

This morning, the Committee is looking forward to hearing from the Commission on Civil and Human Rights, the Equal Employment Practices Commission, and the Commission on Racial Equity. CCHR enforces the New York City Human Rights Law and educates the public about their rights and encourages positive community relations. CCHR's Fiscal 2026

Preliminary Budget totals nearly 15 million dollars, which includes roughly 13 million dollars for personnel services to support 141 positions. The budget also includes roughly 1.9 million dollars for other-than-personal services. The Preliminary Plan includes an increase of nearly 90,000 dollars in Fiscal 2026 to support the addition of two new positions and an increase of about 550,000 dollars baselined in Fiscal 2026, increasing the added headcount by three for a total of five new positions. The Committee is looking forward to hearing about how the new staff members will impact CCHR's ability to fulfill their mandates.

Today, we will examine CCHR's Fiscal 2026 budget and how it allows the commission to officially carry out its important duties. We are interested in hearing the current vacancy's impact on its mandated tasks and the actions that must be taken to fill those vacant positions soon. The Committee hopes for an honest and thorough conversation regarding CCHR's budget needs. It is essential that CCHR communicate openly and often with the Council.

Following CCHR, we will hear from EEPC. This Commission is tasked with auditing, reviewing,

and monitoring the equal employment practices and procedures of over 145 city agencies. It has a budget of roughly 1.6 million, which includes roughly 1.5 million to support 15 positions. EEPC's budget also includes nearly 90,000 for other-than-personal services. EEPC received no budget changes in the Preliminary Plan. This is very long. We will examine EEPC's budget needs as well as the work they have done in 2024. I look forward to hearing about the auditing process as well as the outcomes of the audits performed in 2024. Similar to CCHR, the Committee is interested to hear about EEPC's current vacancies and the steps being taken to address them.

Lastly, we will hear from CORE. CORE is an independent commission dedicated to holding government accountable to advancing racial equity in government operations and increasing community voice in government decision-making. CORE is a newer agency existing only since Fiscal 2024. I am excited to have them join us at their first budget hearing. CORE's Fiscal 2026 budget totals roughly 4.8 million dollars, which is roughly 3.2 million more than at the time of the Fiscal 2025 adoption. The budget also includes roughly 1.8 million in personnel services to

support 16 positions. It also includes roughly 3 million in other-than-personal services. About 2 million of CORE's OTPS budget is dedicated to Local Laws 91 and 92. In the Preliminary Plan, CORE was allocated an additional 126,000 dollars in Fiscal 2025 and a baseline of 429,000 dollars starting in Fiscal 2026 to support the hiring of four full-time positions and two research and policy interns. CORE's budget also increased by roughly 50,000 in Fiscal 2025 to support a temporary office relocation. The Committee looks forward to learning about how the budget increase will impact CORE as well as the needs that were unmet in the Preliminary Plan. One of CORE's mandates is to review the Racial Equity Plan, which is created by the Mayor's Office on Equity and Racial Justice, and to create recommendations based on the plan. As of today, MOERJ has not released the racial equity plan, and it is now over 430 days late from the original deadline and more than 120 days late from the amended deadline. This delay is unacceptable to New York City residents. The plan is meant to help shape the City's budget to ensure that it is taken into consideration so that the City's budget prioritizes underrepresented and working-class

folks to address racial inequities. As the Chair of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights, I am calling on MOERJ and the Administration to immediately release a draft of the plan, which should include a true cost-of-living measurement as well as guidelines for agencies to desegregate data.

I look forward to learning how the Council could better support the Commissions present today.

I want to thank our Committee Staff for their work, Florentine, Ali, William, and my Chief-of-Staff, Amir Abbady.

And with that, before we begin, I'd like to also recognize my Colleagues, Council Member Chris Marte, who is like the best Committee Member, he's always here, and I will now pass it to Committee Counsel to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Before we begin testimony, I will administer the oath. To all members of the Administration who will be offering testimony or will be available for questions, please raise your right hands.

Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before

1 COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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

4 COMMISSIONER PALMA: Yes.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Yes.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Yes.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You may begin.

9 COMMISSIONER PALMA: Thank you. Good
10 morning, Madam Chair and Members of the Committee on
11 Civil and Human Rights. I'm Annabel Palma,
12 Commissioner and Chair of the New York City
13 Commission on Human Rights. Today, I'm joined by
14 Deputy Commissioner for Administrative Services,
15 Mariela Salazar; Deputy Commissioner for Law
16 Enforcement, Katherine Carroll; and Deputy
17 Commissioner for Community Relations, Kajori
18 Chaudhuri. I'm privileged to speak to you this
19 morning about the impactful work our agency has
20 achieved.

21 For more than 80 years, the New York City
22 Commission on Human Rights has stood as a safeguard
23 for the civil rights of all New Yorkers. Our vision
24 is to ensure a city where all New Yorkers can live,
25 work, and thrive, free from discrimination and bias.

As you know, our work covers employment, housing, and public accommodations. Since October of 2021, I have had the honor of leading this agency, and I want to begin today by making one thing clear. The anti-discrimination work we do matters today more than ever. Despite challenges, the Commission has remained steadfast in its mission, delivering real results for real New Yorkers. Under my leadership as Commissioner and Chair, we have received 12,000 jurisdictional claims, initiated over 2,000 matters, and successfully closed nearly 1,500 cases. We have successfully conducted over 1,000 pre-complaint interventions, all the while securing 30 million dollars in damages and civil penalties for New Yorkers, along with hundreds of housing opportunities, including set-asides for voucher holders.

These are not just data points. They represent lives changed, rights upheld, and justice served. Every success is a testament to the dedication of the Commission staff, individuals who refuse to back down in the face of adversity and who work tirelessly to uphold the rights of all New

Yorkers. I am deeply proud of everyone who has contributed to this fight, past and present.

With that, I will now turn my focus to Fiscal Year 2024. I'm going to highlight some key initiatives with more detail to be found in the written testimony. Two important legislative changes in FY24 have broadened the scope of our agency's work. First, in FY24, the City Council passed the Fair Chance Housing Act, which went into effect this year, prohibiting landlords from discriminating against individuals based on their criminal history when seeking housing. Second, protections against discrimination on the basis of height and weight were added to the New York City Human Rights Law. Together, these protections have provided more opportunities for individuals to seek justice and equality under the law, and we have worked closely with stakeholders to ensure that these protections are known across our city.

To thoroughly prepare for these changes, the Commission produced materials and trainings on fair chance housing and body size discrimination in collaboration with subject experts and advocates. Despite the spending freezes in FY24, the Commission

raised awareness about height and weight discrimination with our Different Bodies, Same Rights campaign, garnering over 12,000 organic social impressions and directing 5,700 unique views to the Commission's website. Overall, the Commission had millions of social impressions and website views throughout FY24.

The Commission continues to investigate and resolve cases with rigor and dedication. Last year, the Law Enforcement Bureau resolved 754 matters through complaints and pre-complaint interventions, securing over 4.6 million dollars in damages for complainants who face discrimination. In FY24, as in previous years, the most common inquiries and claims across our jurisdictions, housing, public accommodations, and employment, were in disability and gender. Employment continues to receive the most claims among our jurisdictions. We enhanced our enforcement efforts in this area by creating updated agency rules on employment protections and launched a live multilingual call line, ensuring culturally responsive support. We also saw a significant increase in Commission-initiated investigations in FY24. We filed 64 Commission-initiated complaints

compared to 17 in FY23, largely in the areas of salary transparency. Finally, last year our team reached a major settlement in a housing discrimination case where the agency was able to secure 850 apartments set aside for voucher holders as well as a million dollars in civil penalties, and this is one of the largest housing civil rights settlements in New York City's history.

The Commission's community engagement and outreach efforts are a key part of our work. Through the Community Relations Bureau, we are focused on providing education and preventing discrimination. In FY24, the Community Relations Bureau reached over 140,000 New Yorkers by leading 2,888 multilingual workshops, trainings, and events. I'm excited to share that projections for Fiscal Year 2025 show continued growth. FY24 also saw the launch of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Visibility and the New York City Human Rights Summit. These are opportunities for us to share information with New Yorkers about their rights and responsibilities and discuss critical issues. Our FY25 Summit focused on housing rights, immigration protections, and LGBTQI-plus rights under the New York City Human Rights Law.

We also strengthened our outreach efforts with legal service provider roundtables that take place across all five boroughs, ensuring our services are available to everyone. I'm proud to say that we have reached millions of New Yorkers through both traditional community outreach and a diverse media strategy.

Looking ahead, my goal remains to enhance the Commission's reach and accessibility to everyday New Yorkers. I look forward to working with you all to build a city where every individual is protected, respected, and empowered under the law. I thank you for today's hearing, and I welcome any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'm going to start with headcount, and thanks for being here again. So, you mentioned, well I read, I don't think you mentioned it, but CCHR uses testers to determine an entity's compliance with the Human Rights Law. As of January 21, 2025, CCHR had three testers, and according to a document you sent to Council Finance, how many testers do you currently have?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: Thank you, Madam Chair, for your question. In our testing unit, we currently have three testers.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Last year when you testified, you said that you were attempting to hire more testers. However, the number of testers remain the same from the end of Fiscal 2024 to mid-Fiscal 2025. Are you still attempting to hire additional testers? Have there been any challenges in hiring additional testers?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: We have not posted to hire testers as of yet.

But is that an interest of the Commission?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: It's always an interest of the Commission to grow the Commission, so we definitely are exploring options for us to increase our staff.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. What is the salary for a tester?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Our testers are in a particular civil service title that, off the top of my head, I don't know the exact salary band,

but they do get paid by the hour. I can get that information for Council Finance after.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. And is there a reason why you haven't posted to hire new testers, if you are interested in getting new testers?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: No particular reason. We have been focused on ensuring that we are able to fill our attorney lines.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. And from your vantage point, what would you say the ideal number of testers would be? Like, if you had a wish list, how many testers would your Commission have?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I mean, there's no magic number for us to fulfill our mandate, right? Obviously, we've had this conversation before. If we have more resources, we can do more with more. We don't have a magic number to be... I can't tell you a specific number of testers. Obviously, the mandate that we have to fulfill doesn't only depend on the testers, but the work that LEB does overall.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think one thing that always frustrates me with all branches of government, including legislative bodies, is that we're often reactionary, and I think the one thing

that is cool about the testers is that this is government proactively testing to make sure people are complying, which I argue is even more important, but I think we spend so much time reacting to things that we don't reallocate resources to do proactive things. And I know you yourself last year said that this was important, but it's unfortunate to see that the numbers remain the same, and it does not feel like there's any priority to hire more testers.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: You know, for us to be able to investigate complaints and proactively do work, we just don't depend on our testing unit. It is a unit that's extremely important to us. I think the work that was done around the City of Yes allows us now to bring on five additional staff members to our agency as a whole. Our testers are not the only way we proactively do work. You know, if we receive tips from the public, our LEB department is ready to initiate proactive investigations, so we're always looking out for any tips or any information that may come through other avenues other than our testing team.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Yeah. Tips from the public is, like, reactionary. Like, somebody

from the public is reaching out to the Commission, and the Commission is responding, and I agree with you. I don't think testers is the only proactive measure. I really appreciate the work of the Community Affairs Bureau. I mean, I've even been having that conversation internally because I think the Council has been really focused on the Law Enforcement Bureau, and the law enforcement is primarily only reactionary work when people come with a complaint, so I agree with you. I do think that, like, the testing component of the Commission is an important one and should be prioritized as such.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you, Council Member. I just wanted to point out that in the last three months, the Law Enforcement Bureau has brought on an associate commissioner, an assistant commissioner, and we're really revamping how we're looking at investigations as a whole to ensure that we can make everything as efficient as possible, and as Commissioner Palma was mentioning, you know, in the next Fiscal Year, we're going to have the additional staff attorneys to really build up our Commission-initiated work, so after we've brought on these new leadership positions that are helping us

take a look overarchingly, we definitely plan to look more at our testing program.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. I appreciate that. I think a lot of times, I think it's great to have leadership, but, like, leadership isn't going to be on the grounds, and I think, in general, people have a tendency to, like, hire top-line folks and not folks on the ground, but I hear you, you're hiring people that can reassess how you do your work, which hopefully is productive.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Chair Williams, sorry if I may interrupt here. You mentioned community relations, right, and this is really critical because a lot of our proactive work is preventative work, which is done through, like, doing know-your-obligations training with obligations holders under our law. We are proud of a partnership that we have with Fordham University where any real estate agent could receive 1.5 of free continuing education credits to learn about housing discrimination under the City Human Rights Law. So preventative and proactive work is done in different spheres other than also testing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, just to follow up, I think, you know, the unique position that CCHR is in in terms of the team that we have, while, you know, while there is a leadership team that is working on assessing how we can continue, right, to strengthen the agency, these are individuals that are also on the ground in the community helping us do the work so it's truly a team effort when we are ensuring that New Yorkers' rights are protected.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. The Prelim Plan includes an additional 86,000 dollars in Fiscal 2025 for two additional staff members and then an additional 429,000 in Fiscals 2026 to 2029 for five additional staff positions. What positions will be created through this increase and what will the yearly salary be for each position?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, we received the 86,000, that's a prorated salary, we are happy to report that because of the City of Yes initiative we have received in this Fiscal Year, an additional two lines. Those two lines are for expansion of our mediation team and specifically that would go for an exec agency counsel

line as well as an agency attorney line. Beginning in FY26, when we get the additional three lines to our headcount, those positions are for our Commission-initiated team, and that is for an exec agency counsel and two agency attorneys.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, it sounds like all attorneys.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Yes, they're all attorney positions.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, what specific positions will be added in Fiscal 2025 and starting in Fiscal 2026?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Those are the ones. The main ones?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: The two?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, so the two for FY25 are the agency attorney and the exec agency counsel and then for FY26, again, for the commission initiated, it's an exec agency counsel and two agency attorney lines.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, thanks. The Fiscal 2025 Prelim Plan included a PEG of 691,000 which reduced CCHR's headcount by eight positions.

Will this increase be used to fill any of the positions that were reduced in Fiscal 2025?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: The six, you're referring to, you said the 691? The 691 is really a projected expenditure from previously reimbursed funding from the EOC so that is not going to be used for the eight lines that you've referenced because that reduction begins in FY27.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: The additional staff is for the Law Enforcement Bureau only. Which other areas do you need additional staffing for?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Just to clarify, the five positions, two are for mediation which is not in LEB, so only three are going to our Law Enforcement Bureau.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Have you started hiring for these positions? When do you expect to fill these positions?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: We are trying to hire as quickly as possible. We're in the really preliminary stages so we're developing the job posting, but they should be up pretty soon.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. What is CCHR's current vacancy level broken down by department?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: So, we are at a current headcount of 138. We have 109 active employees. That means that we have 29 vacancies. For CRB, we have five vacancies; LEB, 15; our general counsel, since we just got those two new lines, that means that we have two vacancies; Office of the Chair, four; we have one vacancy in our HR team; one in comms; one in our operations.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many positions are needed for the Commission to be fully staffed and was the number communicated to OMB? So, you have these 29 vacancies. Do you feel if the vacancies are fulfilled that is enough or could you use more?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: You know, Councilwoman, Madam Chair, I think for anyone who has experienced discrimination, no dollar amount will ever be enough to do the critical work that our agency does on a daily basis. That being said, we have a legal mandate to enforce the law regardless of the size of our budget, and so we have to continue to ensure that New Yorkers are protected. We will

continue to do that. We will continue to work with OMB to advocate for more resources for our agency, but that will not stop the work that has to continue under our mandate.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Turning my questions to the Mayor's Management Report. In the PMMMR, it is stated that CCHR currently has 21 staff attorneys compared to 12 during the same time period in Fiscal 2024. How has this increase improved the Commission's ability to fulfill its mandates?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you for that question, Madam Chair. I'm happy to report that for all of our metrics in reaching New Yorkers from law enforcement, we've increased access. So, our number of inquiries received has gone up approximately 1,500. Our matters initiated has gone up over 100. Our pre-complaint resolutions has gone up by 34, and our complaints filed has gone up by 25. In addition to that, we've significantly decreased the wait time from the time someone initially contacts the agency to when they get a first formal intake appointment. At one point, it was over six months, and we're currently at three weeks from initial contact to intake appointment. We've

repeatedly heard from advocates that that wait time at the forefront creates a barrier to New Yorkers getting access, and so we're really proud that we've been able to cut that down to a mere three weeks.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Compared to what was it before?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Over six months.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. In the PMMR, it also stated that the number of complaints closed decreased by 19 percent due to the increase in staff attorneys, increasing the number of intake appointments that can be scheduled each week. So on average, how long, oh, you just answered that. How many cases on average does a staff attorney handle?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: When we bring on new staff, we start them with a caseload of between 10 and 15, and then over the first three months of their employment, we get them up to between 40 and 50.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many additional staff attorneys would be needed to handle the increased caseload to ensure the number of cases that you can manage isn't impacted?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: I think, as the Commissioner mentioned, we could always do more with more and there's never enough money for us to be able to combat all of the discrimination that's going on in New York. However, we have really focused on turning to pre-complaint resolutions as a way to get quick access and quick resolution for New Yorkers, while also spending time building out the more complex cases, like the housing settlement that Commissioner Palma mentioned, where we're able to get, you know, a significant amount of set-asides that means real housing for New Yorkers as well as a significant amount of civil penalties that can operate as a deterrent for bad actors. So, we try to balance both the front end of getting quick resolution where we can while also taking the time to build out the large cases that combat systemic discrimination.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. In the first four months of Fiscal 2025, CCHR resolved 134 matters without a complaint being filed, up from 100 matters during the same period in Fiscal 2024, a 34 percent increase. CCHR continues to expand its pre-complaint intervention work as it offers parties the option to

reach an amicable solution without filing a complaint and engaging in investigation and litigation. How does the Commission staff its pre-complaint intervention work?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: We have six dedicated interventionists that focus on this work, but in addition to that, our staff attorneys do engage in pre-complaint intervention when they have an intake appointment that seems like it might benefit from that resolution.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What areas does it offer this in? Is it available in employment cases, housing, source of income, accommodation cases?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: It's potentially available in all areas of our jurisdiction. We find that there's been a focus on source of income because frequently that's where we're able to have the largest impact, but in employment, for example, if someone comes to us and they are pregnant and they need an accommodation and they're still in the workplace and we're able to make a phone call and get that person the accommodation, we evaluate that for pre-complaint as well. It's basically on the assessment we make about the

likelihood of success versus needing to file a complaint.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you talk a little bit about the assessment? How do you determine which cases should be handled through a pre-complaint process?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: First and foremost, we give the option to the member of the public. If they want to file a complaint, we're going to file a complaint for them. If the allegations of discrimination are ongoing and it's happened relatively recently so that the amount of damage that the person has felt as a result of the discrimination, we will evaluate that for a quick resolution.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It seems like this is successful. Do you have a vision on expanding this work and, if so, what would it take to expand this work?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: We definitely want to expand this work, although we do have to constantly balance it with the deterrent effect of a full litigation and being subject to the civil penalties under our statute. We want to make

sure that repeat bad actors aren't always getting this kind of get-out-of-jail-free card by getting involved in pre-complaint intervention and that we're able to file the big cases that make sure that the bad actors stop repeat behavior so it's really a balance between the two mechanisms.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. The MMR further stated the number of complaints successfully mediated decreased by 44 percent in the first four months of Fiscal 2025 to five from nine during the same period in Fiscal 2024. How does the Commission staff its mediation program and how are cases selected for mediation?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: We are excited to have these new two open positions that are going to be coming to help staff up our mediation unit. The way that we determine whether a case is good for mediation is we require both sides be represented so that there's no power imbalance when they're presented in front of the mediator. In addition to that, we look to see if it's a case where there really is a question of whether discrimination occurred or not so that there isn't a power imbalance over who has a stronger case versus the other side.

We also look to see, like I mentioned before, if it's a repeat bad actor that we've seen, we want to make sure that they are getting the benefit of our full investigation and full litigation, and our mediation resolutions are kept confidential. We want to make sure that if there's a repeat bad actor, we're not giving the option to settle confidentially, that we're going to have a public settlement where they're going to be named and shamed for having violated the law.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. What staffing do you think would be needed to mirror the pre-complaint intervention numbers and rates?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: I'm sorry, I missed the end of that question, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What staffing would be needed to mirror pre-complaint intervention rates with the mediation program?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: For us, I think what we proposed for the City of Yes was our intention to grow our mediation team. So as of now, we think that with the two additional positions, that that is enough, at least for right now, for our team.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. MMR, again, stated that during the first four months of Fiscal 2025, the average age of a complaint caseload increased by 13 percent to 592 days, up from 522 days over the same time frame in Fiscal 2024. What is the average age of a complaint now and how many days?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: I'm sorry to say I don't have that number. I've also got the PMMR numbers in front of me, but I'm happy to get it to you after.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. What staffing, again, do you think would be needed to reduce this timeline to six months or less on average and how can the Council help?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you, Chairwoman. The six-month timeline for anything other than a pre-complaint intervention I don't believe is a realistic number for us to be able to do the full deep dive investigations that we do to ensure that we're not just resolving the allegations of an individual member of the public, but also any pattern or practice or systemic discrimination that may be occurring. I think we have, like I mentioned, tried to balance the pre-complaint intervention work, which

can reach a resolution in 48 hours to a week, with some of the cases that are more complex and that necessarily require more time, where we're going to be collecting, for example, in the housing case, where we collected thousands of housing applications and had to sift through them and work with an expert in order to establish our case. So, it's really important to us that we look at each case on its unique basis and make the determination about how to focus our resources based on that.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I would just add, again, anyone facing discrimination, there's no dollar amount that can... you can't put a dollar amount, right, for when you've been discriminated against, but we appreciate your advocacy. We appreciate the Council's investment in ensuring, right, always ensuring that our agency has the resources that they need to be able to do the work so thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. In the MMR, last series of questions, there's an increase in staffing on the Commission's discrimination hotline, Info Line, which has allowed CCHR to receive more inquiries. How many staff members are working on the

Info Line? And the Info Line is relatively new, so how has the Commission ensured the public is aware of this service?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you, Council Member Williams. I just want to clarify that our Info Line has existed for many, many years. What is new under Commissioner Palma's leadership is that we've now gone from just receiving phone calls to being able to take live calls from 9 to 5 Monday through Friday, so we're able to have more immediate and direct access to New Yorkers. But the Info Line has been doing the initial screening for our complaints, I'd say for at least five years, maybe longer.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: And I would just like to add, in terms of headcount, currently we have nine active Info Line staffers.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What languages are offered on the Info Line, and have you received requests for any additional languages?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: To my knowledge, we have not received any additional requests for additional languages. We have the access to the 10 required languages through Info Line.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, and I just
3 wanted to acknowledge that my Colleague, Council
4 Member Riley, is also joining us remotely.

5 How does CCHR translate documents, if
6 applicable? And do you have a set budget for
7 translation services?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: We don't
9 have a set budget for translation services, but we
10 have about three or four vendors that we work with,
11 so any material that needs to be translated, we have
12 that available, as well as interpreters that are
13 available on call for our intakes, and whatever other
14 resources we need.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Now I'm
16 turning to my... yeah, sure.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: As a City
18 agency, we abide by Local Law 30 and ensure language
19 access is vital. Within our agency, our staff speak
20 over 30 languages, and our outreaches are all also
21 done in multi-languages as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do the staff
23 members that speak different languages, like, is
24 their salaries adjusted for the additional languages
25 they speak? And that's a question that I've heard

from some advocates and some folks that work for your agency that have mentioned that they essentially sometimes are, like, doing dual services. Like, they might be doing one particular job, but because they speak a particular language, now they're tapped to, like, do translation, so is there any type of incentives or, again, adjustments to their salary based off of the fact that they're multilingual?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: In the majority, and I would like to say probably all of our job postings, we do encourage applicants that are multilingual, that speak any other language other than English. It is optional for our staff to help us translate, because, like I said, we have vendors that provide translation services. But, no, there is not an additional, you know, increase in salary if you (INAUDIBLE).

COMMISSIONER PALMA: Madam Chair, these are also union positions, and so it goes back to the bargaining agreement, right? That's an issue that will have to be discussed during bargaining negotiations.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes. I've heard from former staffers of that agency about, you know,

again, like, doing dual work. You know, you get hired to be, like, a program manager, but now you're, like, translating documents. I mean, like, people should be compensated if you're not necessarily hired to be a translator and you're actually doing translation work. Like, you should be compensated for that. So hopefully you guys renegotiate contracts that language access and folks being able to speak different languages is something that gets considered.

Okay, so turning to staffing issues, and I just want to acknowledge that my Colleague, Rita Joseph, has joined us. Do you have any questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: I do.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, you can ask questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Good morning. Questions around CCH. You launched the fourth Cohort of Youth for Equity and Solidary. How are participants selected?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Thank you for the question, Council Member. Participants are selected based, like, students fill out an application form. We review them. There's an

interview process, and then they are selected based on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Where can they find those applications?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: The applications for the academic year '25 to '26 will go out later in this year.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Are they found in schools, libraries? How do they get their hands on those applications?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, we use our community. Once our applications are ready, like, we post on our website and social media. We depend on the YES Council Members who have been, like, previously part of this and the network of schools and other partners that we work with to get the information out.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what level are these students, middle school, high school?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: They're all high school.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: They're all high school students. Okay. What is the average age for participants in this program, about 16?

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Yes, 14 to
3 18.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: 16 to 18?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: 14 to 18,
6 because of high school.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. What is the
8 cost to run this program?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: I can
10 provide that information at a later time. I just
11 don't have that with me.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Don't wait
13 too long as we budget out our season. What's the
14 eligibility for someone to participate?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: For
16 someone to participate, they would have to be a
17 resident of New York City and be a part, like, you
18 know, study in any school in New York City. It
19 doesn't have to be a public school. It can be
20 parochial schools. It can be independent schools and
21 have to have a passion for human rights.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Human rights.
23 Okay, okay. Have you collaborated with Council
24 Members or other electeds to host outreach events?

25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: In recent past, we haven't, and we welcome opportunities to do so.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: To do outreach with young people. Do young people get to decide on the programming, or this is already built in? Do they come in and have a voice? How are they part of this program?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, there are different things that are done. Initially, there are some, like, trainings that we provide. Like, we try to ensure that they are aware of the City Human Rights Law. And then they break out, so they decide what kind of committees they want to be part of. So then the committees then decide what kind of programming they would like to do. In some cases, for example, like last year, our YES Council Members were instrumental in the celebration at the United Nations, celebrating the 75th anniversary of UNDHR, and they participated in those spaces. So, like, it is a combination of both our staff guiding them, but also upholding and uplifting youth voices.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is there a survey done at the end of the program to find out what

worked, what didn't work, what would students like to see differently?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. So, in 2024 Annual Report, it mentioned that in 2024, you partnered with Fordham Real Estate Institute to create a for-credit training on NYCHRL housing protection. Is the program still going on?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Yes, it is.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How many people have you seen?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: We can get back to you with that information.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay, wonderful. How many students are accepted into the program? And what are, again, all the qualifications to be accepted into this program?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, just to clarify, Council Member, it's not a program for students so it is a continuing education program. So, Fordham University has a professional real estate program where they partner with us so that real estate agents can receive free continuing education

as they learn about the City Human Rights Law and protections in housing so it is one of our ways, preventative tools so that we're proactively working with the school to ensure that people can receive that training and work with us.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. So, it's kind of working like an ambassador program. How long is the training?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: It's a one-credit training. So, it's a 1.5 credit so it's like a two-hour training.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what kind of outreach are you doing to real estate folks so they are aware of this program. We have a lot of great City programs, and sometimes folks have no idea that they exist. What does the outreach look like?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, there are different ways that we do it. One, we've created a list, looking at websites, created a list of real estate folks and do mailing to them, emails to them. The information is on our website. We also ensure that when our staff are out there in public engagements, they have the flyer with them. So, those are different methods that we've used, and we always,

like, you know, encourage and look forward to, like, partnerships to get the information out more.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: We want to make sure communities that are also underrepresented in these spaces are always there, and they have information that they can use because we see that across the city, and I see that, especially in my field, where we have great programs, but no one knows they exist, whether it's through... Is any language access provided for those that come in, and English is not their first language?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: People can request interpreters, and we, as a City agency, we ensure that people can, you know, access interpreters if they request one.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Executive orders that require that only English is spoken, does that impact you directly?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: You mean...

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Just asking.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: The federal...

COMMISSIONER PALMA: No, we are not impacted by an executive order to speak only English.

Our staff speaks more than 30 languages, and we comply with the Local Law of the New York City 10 languages that we have to provide.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

Okay. I have a whole bunch of community engagement questions, too, but I'm not going to ask you them because when I met with your Commissioners last year, they had a lot of things to say about your Bureau so I definitely want to uplift that and, like I said, I do recognize that this Council has been very laser-focused on LEB, and there's so many other components of CCHR so I've been trying to, like, shift us a little bit to talk more comprehensively about the agency so, for now, I'll go back to staffing questions.

And the first question I have is what is the average length of employment for an attorney at CCHR?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you for that question, Madam Chair. It truly varies. By way of example, I've been at the Commission for 12 years, and we have some attorneys that start their career here and find after a year it's not for them.

It is a very intense workplace because there's a lot of vicarious trauma our staff attorneys are subject to at listening to allegations of discrimination and harassment all day long so we do see a lot of attorneys at the beginning of their career who realize this is not the place for them, who move on to a general counsel's office or a policy role. But then there have been some agency attorneys who've been with us for over 20 years, some who are more mid-level have been there for five or four years so it really varies depending on what someone's looking for out of their career.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you have an average? So, if two people have been there for 20 years, but 20 have been there for only two, then the average would reflect that number.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: We can do the math on that and get it back to you, but I don't have it with me.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We have heard previously, and it comes up every hearing, that one of CCHR's issues is the fact that the Commission is not able to follow up to the competitiveness of the private sector. This question is worded so weird. So

essentially you guys are not able to compete with the private sector.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I think that's not unique to CCHR. I think every City agency has struggled with attracting talented legal staff to their team. And so we continue to be part of job fairs, we continue to work with bar associations and law schools to ensure that they know what positions we have available and that we're always actively trying to recruit talented individuals to come work at CCHR.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: And just to add to that, the pay models of the private sector are very different than government. I think as most of our Deputy Commissioners have mentioned through their responses, we are more of a mission-driven agency so a lot of the people that come to work with us is because they truly believe in upholding the rights of all New Yorkers. We're more comparable to the non-profit sector than the private.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think this came up in a hearing last year that the private sector is one thing but also compared to agency attorneys at other City agencies, the salaries

sometimes are a little lower, so I don't know how you've worked to address that. I've saw attorney salaries for other City agencies and they were much higher than the average salary at CCHR.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Thank you for that question. It really varies by agency because every agency is using a particular civil service title. For us, it's agency attorney or exec agency counsel. Those salaries have a salary band from a minimum to an incumbent salary to a max. So, it really depends on who is applying for those positions. Do they have prior government experience or City experience? And then obviously our budget, if they already have let's say more than two years of City experience, can you offer them more a higher salary? But that depends then right on our budget and then ultimately we get OMB approval.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Why do you have to use those civil service titles? Like what undergirds why you are only allowed to use those specific civil service titles?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: So, based on I guess prior collective bargaining agreements and based on the job that we do at the agency, there's

certain titles that we are supposed to use. Some of them are unique to our agency so we can't use, let's say, like a corp counsel civil service title that another agency uses because that may be specific to that agency.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Another issue with hiring is the two-for-one hiring freeze and its impact on CCHR's ability to hire new staff. So, can you talk a little bit about that if it has been an impediment or you've been fine to hire?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: The two-for-one hire freeze definitely restricts our ability to backfill promptly, but we are still working on job postings, we are interviewing candidates, we are submitting for approval to OMB. Currently we have four candidates that are waiting for OMB approval so it's not that it is impeding us to hire, it just delays.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Does CCHR conduct exit interviews when a staff member leaves?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. If so, as you said yes, what are the most cited reasons for staff leaving?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Again, thank you for that question. They have varied. It has been because, as Deputy Commissioner Carroll has mentioned, you realize that this is not the job that you want to do. It could be that they have other personal advancement opportunities that they decided that they wanted to do so it really fluctuates some of the reasoning and, yes, I'm sure that you're thinking about salary that has been brought up as well but mostly it's a lot of the people that have left that have been for other personal advancement.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. CCHR testified that staff members would receive compensatory time if they worked over their allotted hours. What are the positions that are subject to accrue comp time? How many hours is an employee expected to work each week? How many hours of comp time were accrued in total in Fiscal 2024 and how many hours of comp time were accrued on average per employee in Fiscal 2024?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: I can get you that information later because I just don't have those numbers but, overall, our agency has or provides pretty much to all of our staff who may need

to work overtime comp time, and that's usually in less than five hours a week. But, again, those numbers and all the other information that you requested I can provide at a later time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Just to I guess get a little bit more in the weeds about your hiring process. What aspects of the hiring process are fully within your control?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Thank you for that question. For us, it is creating the job posting. We are screening candidates. We're interviewing candidates. Once we submit to OMB for approval, that's another process. But for our end it is creating the job postings, the screenings, the interviewing and then, once we select a candidate and that candidate has accepted our offer, then we submit to OMB for approval.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Let's continue this trajectory. After you've identified a candidate that you wish to hire, what is the process you are required to follow before you can bring them on board?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: We have to provide a lot of details to OMB with regards to the

name of the candidate, all of those important details. Once they do get approval then it's just figuring out or agreeing to a start date. Once we get approval from OMB then it's just a matter of scheduling a start date.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. So, to the start date, in your experience what is the range of length of time it can take from when you identify a candidate to when you receive OMB approval and actually get that start date? When you submit it to them, how much time does it take for them to approve it and for you to actually set a start date?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: It varies. It really depends on the type of position that we have a candidate for. It also depends if that position then requires to be vetted, which then has to go through a separate process with the Mayor's Office of Appointments so it really varies. It could be a couple of weeks to a couple of months.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. What was the last position you hired for?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Our Associate Commissioner for Law Enforcement.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: When did you submit
3 her information to OMB and when did she get a start
4 date?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: He.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I should've said
7 they. That would have been more inclusive.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: No worries.
9 Let me see if I can try to remember the timeframe.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: (CROSS-TALK) have
11 any sense of how long it takes so I'm just like...

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: I think it
13 took about three months.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Pick a candidate
15 and tell me how long it took from when you submitted
16 to OMB to when you actually got a start date. Was it
17 a month? Was it two months? Was it three months?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: For our
19 Associate Commissioner, I think it was about three
20 months.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. That
22 gives me a sense. Okay. Of CCHR hires in the last six
23 months, how many staff have been hired at the top of
24 the salary range? What barriers exist to hiring
25

across the whole salary range? Salary transparency.

How many people are actually receiving the top range?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Again, it really depends on the civil service title that we're using, but also if that candidate has prior City experience. If they have City experience and we are able to offer them the incumbent salary, then that's what we're able to offer. Anything else over that would be that we are promoting the person. It varies.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Does OMB set a hard salary number in a job offer within the civil service title band, or is it CCHR? Who determines the salary band? Is it OMB or is it you?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: The salary band is as a result of the collective bargaining agreement.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. This is an interesting question. There are a lot of talented federal candidates who will be looking for jobs. How can CCHR attract these candidates if you cannot offer at the top of the range for an external candidate?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I think being in public service is a badge of honor. Folks come do this work because they're really passionate about

helping others and committed to the work that needs to be done. That being said, folks right now are without jobs, and we welcome anyone who's interested in coming to work at CCHR who has been laid off at the federal level. I'm sure that if we are allowed to hire them, we're allowed to make an offer, I'm sure that they will be more than happy to be working at CCHR.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Now to the Community Engagement Bureau. According to the MMR, CCHR has conducted 933 trainings and outreach sessions in the first four months. However, the target number of training and outreach sessions continues to be 1,500. Why is your targeted number so low as compared to your past three years of performance?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Our target numbers are on target because we are ensuring... so events happen often seasonally, so there are times that there are more outreaches happening, and in other times, there are less. We have, in Fiscal '24, reached record number of New Yorkers serving over 140,000 New Yorkers, and in terms of people served, that number continues to grow.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you just share a little bit about what types of trainings and outreach sessions the Community Engagement Bureau hosts? I just said this just now to Ali that unless I do a scavenger hunt on your website, I don't really know what you guys do, and I don't know if this is because we're not in regular communication. I know I've been trying to schedule a meeting with you all, which I feel like has been a little difficult having to submit things to even meet with you all just to understand because you should know. I like to know what's going on so I can have informed questions and not say things that are not true or not accurate, and so the more I actually know about what you're doing, the better I can speak to the issues and ask questions that are relevant instead of random stuff because we're just Council Members on a mic asking questions, so I just wanted to tell you who I am as a person as no, I actually just want to know what's going on, so if you can share with us the range of trainings and sessions you guys have.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI:

Absolutely, and Council Member, we always welcome partnerships, like your office, and we've partnered

with regarding the source-of-income resource fair we did in Major Mark Park year before last, so we depend on Council relationships to get the information out. I am happy to talk about our trainings because our trainings fall in three kind of buckets. On one hand are our Know Your Rights training, which are the core of our work, like they are trainings like overview of the Human Rights Law, they are training around housing discrimination. In recent times, we've pivoted and created a new training on Human Rights Law and protections regarding citizenship and immigration status and national origin, and the trainings on Fair Chance Act, so those are our core Know Your Rights, Understand Your Rights and Obligations training.

On the other piece of it are our Competency trainings, so our Competency trainings are typically created in partnership with different entities, whether they are academic partners or other community-based partners, those trainings focus on vulnerable communities, so for example we have our Working with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Communities training, we have our Understanding Jewish Experience and Anti-Semitism, we have our

Understanding Muslim Experience and Combating Anti-Muslim Bias training, we have our Race and Color Discrimination training, those fall in that Competency trainings, which are again part of understanding of different communities and fall into the Fostering of Intergroup Relations part of our work.

And on the third bucket I would say we have what we call our Bystander Intervention trainings. These trainings have been really critical in again ensuring that people in New York City are aware and can look into a situation, make a safety assessment and then use any of the tools of intervention to intervene when they see an incident of bias or discrimination take place.

So, our trainings fall into these three different buckets, and we are always looking to like expand, look at the needs, and then ensure that we're creating new ones to meet the moment.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I think we also, not I think, I know that when we are out in the communities we're always talking about our trainings and trying to create those opportunities to organize trainings, to go back into the community and make

sure that New Yorkers have the information. Last year, we launched a radio show that we do the last Monday of every month, and so we welcome opportunities to engage different speakers to come and be part of that radio show as guests to talk about particular issues. And also through our annual report we ensure that New Yorkers know, right, the kind of trainings that we have done out in the communities.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many people tuned in to listen to the radio show?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I don't have that number with me, but we can get that with you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: One thing about government, like we do things I feel for the sake of doing it but nobody knows about it or listens to it so it's like a quite frankly a waste of our government time and resources. Like I personally don't care about a radio show if no one's listening to it. I mean it sounds good. And I know like podcasting is like super popular so if it's like podcast format, dope. But like how many people are actually subscribing and listening to it? Because if it's only two people, like it's a waste of money.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: We are on Spotify, but we definitely could get you the numbers. I will tell you that it has been exciting for us to be able to do the radio show and it's just another means of communication to New Yorkers, right, and so we'll definitely get the numbers to you, but it has been a success for us.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I would love to understand the success by way of like metrics in terms of how many people are actually tuning in to listening to it versus how much money and staff time, resources that you're spending to actually do it. I value those things. I think we should like provide metrics for them to ensure its success.

So, would you agree that if more people knew about the different trainings that you do, the very extensive anti-discrimination laws we have in New York City and the penalties that they may face, that it would actually prevent someone from potentially violating the law or more people coming to the agency to file a complaint?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: You know, proactive work for us, preventive work is important. We don't want anyone to be discriminated against, but we also

recognize that it happens. It happens every single day to many individuals who call New York City home. Obviously, we don't want anyone violating the law, and so preventive work for us is not only for New Yorkers to know how to protect themselves but also for individuals who have obligations and responsibilities to know what they are responsible and obligated under the law and so we want to ensure that if anyone thinks about violating the law, they should know that we take these matters seriously. They will be investigated and, yeah, the civil penalties, we want the civil penalties to serve as deterrence. Obviously, that's not something that is guaranteed, but it's something that we strive for.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. One thing that I found like really impactful from meeting with your Commissioners is their deep concern for the preventative work and so when somebody now is assessed with a penalty, that means it's reactionary. That means they did something and now they're being penalized for it, and I was just really struck by a lot of the things that they discussed and so, again, I think the Community Engagement Bureau is pretty much the arm of preventative work for the agency and

so that's really the question. So, like if people actually had the information, then essentially you'd agree that they may not find themselves in violation.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: And, Madam Chair, as you know, it has not been a secret that ever since I was charged with leading the agency that my main goal has been to raise the visibility of CCHR, especially through the Community Relations Bureau, and so we continue to do that on a daily basis. I know that I've always spoken about our legal enforcement which is one of the best tools that we have, but equal to that is the work that we do through our Community Relations Bureau which allows us to do that preventive work, right, so the more New Yorkers we're reaching, the more the word gets out. And when I talk about New Yorkers, I'm not only talking about those who could be discriminated against. I'm talking about individuals who I don't want, you know, I want to arm with the information so that they don't violate the law, right, and so we've been doing that by creating roundtables in our five boroughs. We've been going out into the communities. I go out with the Community Relations Bureau, I call it Community Service Week. We're in the community meeting with business owners,

meeting with stakeholders, right, again, not only letting New Yorkers know how to protect themselves, but also letting New Yorkers know what their rights and obligations are under the law so that they don't break the law.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: And if I may add to what the Commissioner mentioned is we agree, like, in our Community Relations Bureau at CRB, we do prioritize prevention work because that's really critical exactly as you mentioned, Madam Chair, a few things that we do, so as I mentioned earlier, the Fordham Partnership is an example of that. The other thing that we do is we ensure, like, it's not everyone can come to a training, so we are there to meet New Yorkers where they are, and a perfect example is our business corridor outreaches, where we're taking information on, like, the sexual harassment posters that are mandated to be posted in businesses, right, and we created a toolkit for business owners on what they need to know to ensure that they are complying with the obligations part of our law. We do regular business outreaches with our other civic agencies to get the information out, so

both in terms of one-on-one outreaches, but also use the training as a tool as well.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, on that, actually, a question that just came to mind, do you partner with the BIDs and the Chamber of Commerces to do the outreach?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: We do reach out to the BIDs. We reach out to Chambers of Commerces. We're always constantly, like, growing different ways to do so. We work with Merchants Association. Just, like, two weeks ago, we did a training on, again, know your obligations in English and Arabic with YAMA, which is the Yemeni Association for Merchants. So those are different ways that we get information on know your obligation and prevention workout.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Last month...

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I'm sorry. Just to add to that point, last month we were out during one of our community service weeks, and we did a meeting with a BID in Washington Heights, and so from that meeting, we walked away with commitments to doing trainings for the members of that BID.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Has CCHR been able to respond to all requests for an information or training session? If no, how many requests did you have to decline for the last two years? And what would allow you to be able to respond to more requests if the answer is no?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: The answer is yes. We've been able to respond to all requests for trainings.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Awesome. The next question I have is, what is the attendance at in-person versus virtual trainings?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, Council Member, it totally varies. We've had trainings where there have been over 100 people. We've had trainings where it's been 10 people, so it really varies, and it does not matter as much whether it's in-person or virtual. It depends on who we are conducting the training with and what is the purpose.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How does CCHR ensure the community is aware of the trainings, and how do you ensure that they are reaching the hard-to-reach audiences?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: So, the training information, it lives on our website. Whenever we are partnering with different groups, when we establish a relationship with a new entity, we talk about our trainings. We often get training requests from entities by word of mouth. Because certain entities have taken the training, they recommend that to other entities as well, so there are different ways that we get requests for our trainings. We also do trainings for our sibling agencies, and finally, as part of case settlements, that our Law Enforcement Bureau does, we often do trainings for the entity as well.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The MMR outlined a percentage of total events held in each borough. How do you determine where to hold an event?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: As you know, we have borough offices and staff in all the five boroughs, so the borough directors and staff plan the outreach for those boroughs. Then, as I also said, we get requests from entities across boroughs as well, so we use different methods to decide where the events would be held. We prioritize TRIE neighborhoods. That's critical for us.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, the TRIE. I have so many questions on the TRIE, but I know it's not you, it's MOERJ. How many events are scheduled due to a specific request versus anticipated need identified by CCHR? You mentioned there's some requested events, some you do. Can you talk a little bit about the numbers of each? Is it 50-50? Do you have more events where people requested you to be there, or are you more so doing events where you proactively said we want to do said thing?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Outreaches or events can look different. They could be one-on-one events. They could be workshops and trainings. They could be actual celebratory events. They could be days of actions or days of visibility. They look different, but in terms of breakdown as to how many are requested and how many we generate, I will have to get back to you on that matter.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Just a few more questions for Community Engagement. When the Fair Chance in Employment Act went into effect in 2015, CCHR had lots of ads on public transit letting people know this law was in effect. Now the Fair Chance for Housing Act went into effect January 1,

2025. What resources does CCHR need to run a campaign akin to what was run for Fair Chance for Employment Act? What resources are needed? Will funds allow for a robust campaign with subway and bus advertising? What more would be required?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Thank you, Madam Chair, for that question. We currently are about to get ready to launch a campaign now. We do use our OTPS funding for comms-related campaigns. As I mentioned, beginning very soon, because we just got the contract approved, we'll be able to do a similar campaign.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That's a yes to public transportation ads?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: Yes, except, I believe, subway.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. So far, how many entities has CCHR trained about the new law?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: Chair Williams, we'll have to get back to you with that answer. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Does CCHR have a plan to do similar outreach to all New Yorkers that New York City Human Rights Law applies to all

undocumented and trans New Yorkers to counteract federal messaging?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: As you know, Madam Chair, the New York City Human Rights Law has not changed. We will continue to message to all New Yorkers that they are protected under the Human Rights Law despite immigration status.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. The federal government continues to threaten cuts to federal aid. CCHR received 683,000 dollars in federal funding in Fiscal 2025 and is expected to receive 691,000 dollars in Fiscal 2026. If the federal aid were to be eliminated, how would that impact CCHR?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALAZAR: The numbers that you just quoted for FY25 and FY26, those are already projected expenditures. We have already received reimbursement from the EEOC for those funds. We don't use those funds for PS really so, if it were to be cut, that amount is small. It won't have a significant impact to our budget.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: On January 28th, the Trump Administration limited transgender healthcare for youth through an executive order. On February 3rd, New York State Attorney General Letitia

James sent a letter to hospitals stating that they would be violating State Human Rights Law if they refuse services to a class of individuals based on their protected status, such as gender identity. Does CCHR expect a rise in cases due to the executive order?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: Thank you for raising that incredibly important issue, Madam Chair. The gender identity and sexual orientation protections under the City Human Rights Law have been in place since 2002. We've long been a trusted entity in this space of enforcement. In addition to that, we are monitoring the issues going on with healthcare, and we can't speak to any open complaints or investigations on the issue, but we have been watching closely since January of this year.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Last question, I think, which is on February 27th, Comptroller Brad Lander and my Colleague, Council Member Tiffany Cabán, sent you a letter calling on CCHR to launch an investigation into the private hospitals that have currently discriminated against youth based on their gender identity. Did you receive the letter? Do you plan to investigate this matter?

If no, why not? If yes, what steps are you taking to begin the investigation? The letter requested that you send a reply by March 10th. Can you share a copy of the response with the Committee?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: We are in receipt of the letter, and we will respond by the deadline, and we definitely will share a copy of the letter with the Committee.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. And can the agency supply the Council with a copy of their Preliminary Racial Equity Plan?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And can you describe how your work and budget for Fiscal Year 2026 reduces, perpetuates, or exacerbates racial inequity in service delivery and the criminalization of communities of color and poverty?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: Can you repeat that question?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes. Can the agency describe how their work and budget for Fiscal Year 2026 reduces, perpetuates, or exacerbates racial inequity in service delivery and the criminalization of communities of color and poverty?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: We have a mandate to fulfill, and our agency will continue to ensure that the Human Rights Law is enforced.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CARROLL: I would just like to add, Madam Chair, that we are going to be expanding our Commission-initiated work, which allows us to target areas where we know discrimination is happening but it's being underreported so, with those three additional lines through City of Yes, we thank you for your support through that, that we will be able to focus more on those areas. And additionally, the Community Relations Bureau and the Law Enforcement Bureau are working to roll out mobile intake clinics for Fiscal Year 2026 so that we will really be able to meet people where they are, rather than having them come to our office.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. This is seriously the last question. The federal government has also increased ICE raids since January, leading to many immigrants feeling unsafe and unprotected in the city. What is CCHR doing to ensure immigrants feel safe accessing our resources? Has CCHR done any staff trainings related to immigration specifically?

COMMISSIONER PALMA: As you know, we have always made sure that New Yorkers know that when you come to CCHR, we don't ask individuals of their immigration status. We will not ask anyone of their immigration status. That's just been the way we have met our mandate, and we will continue to do so. All staff knows that we do not collect immigration status information, and we don't share immigration status information.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHAUDHURI: And to add to what Commissioner mentioned, the community roundtables that we are hosting in all the boroughs is to reassure partners about our law and commitment. As I mentioned earlier, we've created a new training, the City Human Rights Law Protections Against National Origin Citizenship and Immigration Status Discrimination. This training is available in English, Spanish, Bengali, Mandarin, and French, and we are in communities getting this information out that no matter what, in housing, in employment, in public accommodations, people are protected against actual or perceived discrimination based on their national origin, citizenship status, race, and other protected identities. We are working with trusted

messengers to get the information out, both in terms of training as well as our materials. We are in constant communication with sibling agencies like MOIA, and similarly, again, reminding that we do not ask people about their immigration status, and we provide language access.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for your testimony. I look forward to continuing to work with you in our upcoming meeting and just encourage you to use the Council for a lot of your community engagement work. As an example, HPD would come into our districts. OATH works directly with Council Members to host events, and so you mentioned mobile clinics. I think it's helpful when Council Members feel a part of the work that you're doing and can get the resources directly into the communities that they serve. I know that you all do your thing with community engagement, but it's helpful when Council Members actually see the work that you're doing, and I think that you do your work quietly in a vacuum, so it's hard to engage.

COMMISSIONER PALMA: I would say that we have been lifting the voice of CCHR, and we will continue to do so. I will welcome your partnership

when, I think next month, I do the Queen's Community Service Week, and I will welcome your partnership in walking the neighborhoods that you represent and doing the work that we go out and do on a daily basis.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, I would love to. If you invite me, I'd come. I don't get invites. You're welcome. Have a good day.

The next panel is EEPC.

All right. Thanks for joining. I will turn it to Committee Staff to swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi. Before we begin testimony, I will administer the oath to all Members of the Administration who will be offering testimony or will be available for questions. Please raise your right hands.

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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I do.

COMMISSIONER YEARWOOD: I do.

DIRECTOR FERRI: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great. You may begin.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Good

afternoon, Chair Williams and Members of the Civil and Human Rights Committee. I'm giving remarks today on behalf of our Chair, Aldrin Bonilla, who could not be here today. With me is EEPC Commissioner Nicole Yearwood and Russell Ferri, Director of Research at the EEPC. My name is Jeanne Victor, and I'm the Executive Director of the Equal Employment Practices Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the EEPC at this Preliminary Budget hearing.

The EEPC was created by City Charter Chapter 36 in 1989 to audit and evaluate the employment practices, programs, policies, and procedures of City agencies and their efforts to ensure fair and effective equal employment opportunity for minority group members and women. This year, we have all seen the contraction and even vilification of equal employment opportunity programs, particularly as it relates to the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, both at the federal level and in private industry, despite all of the evidence that shows a diverse workforce is beneficial to the bottom line.

In fact, the Equal Opportunity Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington, D.C. currently has no quorum, and DEI initiatives have been erased from federal agencies and federal government programs. But here in New York City and at the EEPC, we continue to value these programs and what they represent to the City's workforce. As EEPC Commissioner Nicole Yearwood noted during our January board meeting, equal employment practices ensure access and fairness, and that this came about because of the glaring absence of certain demographics, including gender, in the workplace. This is not to take away from anyone in particular, but to ensure that others have the opportunity. It is more about creating a system of fairness in a space that has a long history of unfairness and unequal access for different groups. It's a leveling of the playing field, and not a lowering of it, as was noted by our Vice Chair Elaine Reiss. I couldn't agree more, speaking on behalf of the entire EEPC Board of Commissioners, and Chair Aldrin Bonilla would have emphasized, had he been here today, that nothing has happened in the past couple of months that will alter the work of the EEPC. We will continue to do our

work, and if anything, we will do our work even more robustly than before. I would like to start by thanking you and the Committee for your past and continued support.

As an extremely small agency, staffing is a very important matter to the EEPC. It can be the difference between doing the bare minimum and making a real difference to the city. In 2024, we had a total of 11 staff members, and in January 2025, we actually dropped to 10. As we work with OMB to receive approval to fill the three-head count that were restored to the EEPC by City Council and the Mayor's Office at the start of the Fiscal Year as well as fill two staff vacancies, one which is a part-time Executive Agency Council, we will finally be approaching a more workable staffing level. Despite the staffing challenges in 2024, it was a very busy year. The EEPC audited 32 City agencies and assessed 161 corrective actions. In June, the EEPC held a symposium featuring Dr. Beverly Tarulli, Clinical Assistant Professor at New York University, which focused on how the City can better attract diverse personnel to join its workforce. Dr. Tarulli highlighted the importance of understanding what

motivates people to apply for positions in City government and how to appeal to those motivations throughout the employee life cycle. She suggested we choose a specific area of the employee life cycle, whether it is in attracting, recruiting, onboarding, developing, retaining, and separating employees and alumni, that if we act on it, will yield the best outcome as one way to attract and retain diverse talent. Our research unit is primarily focused on fulfilling the requirements of Local Law 13 of 2019, which over a period of 10 years requires the EEPC to conduct a citywide analysis of racial and ethnic classification underutilization and provide recommendations for addressing, among other things, a) chronic or systemic underutilization, b) how the City might reach citywide affirmative employment objectives, and c) increased diversity in the recruitment, selection, retention, and promotion of City employees. We are commencing year five of this 10-year project. Throughout 2024, the EEPC's research team conducted a pilot project to review and assess certain aspects of a City agency's efforts to ensure women and people of color have equal employment opportunities. The ultimate purpose of the pilot

project is to better understand what City agencies are doing to address underutilization and develop practical recommendations for entities to continue to reduce it. Also in 2024, the EEPC proposed a creation of a handbook, which is currently in the process being prepared for use by the agency's EEO officers. The purpose of the handbook is to ensure all EEO officers understand the EEPC's audit standards and what they need to do to ensure their agency can get into and stay in compliance before, during, and after the EEPC's audit.

In addition to our regular work on audits on Local Law 13, planned projects for 2025 include identifying those obstacles that often impede the hiring and promotion of women and people of color into those job groups with systemic underutilization. We may find the answers through working directly with the agencies to better understand what they are doing to address underutilization, while also looking into pay disparities and occupational segregation, which is found in certain job groups, to determine what, if any, obstacles exist to prevent upward mobility. The EEPC has been without an executive agency counsel for nearly two years, but I have to note we just

onboarded our executive agency counsel this week. So, as we onboard our executive agency counsel, one of the first assignments will be to conduct a review of the City's current EEO laws in relation to our report findings to see what recommendations we might make to amend existing laws or propose new ones consistent with the requirements of Local Law 13.

Thus, the EEPC will play a critical role in addressing underutilization in our City's workforce. We have published now six reports with recommendations pursuant to Local Law 13, one baseline report in 2021, one report in 2022, two reports in 2023, and two reports in 2024, but few know of our work and recommendations as we are not public-facing. If the EEPC had a communications director to oversee the professional creation of our materials and reports and craft communication strategies around the dissemination of our findings as well as to manage the messaging of internal and external communications about our work, we could acclimate our City stakeholders and the public to the upcoming legislative regulatory and budgetary changes to come. We would also request funding for one computer specialist trainee to assist our computer

specialist in the management of the EEPC's data and computer systems, and one human resources generalist trainee to assist our director of human resources with the administrative work of the unit in order to ensure our agency is not hampered by the loss of personnel and institutional knowledge. In addition, the EEPC's funding for other-than-personal services, OTPS funding, has not increased in tandem with our recent staffing increases, but has remained flat at 86,555 dollars. An increase of 350,000 dollars would account for the salaries of the requested staff as well as provide some needed OTPS funding for advanced staff training and industry certifications, necessary software purchases and required software updates as well as hosting symposia and other events with industry experts and stakeholder partners for the benefit of our City employees and colleagues.

Once again, we greatly appreciate all the support we have received from you, Chair Williams, and the Committee on Civil and Human Rights, City Council, the Mayor's Office, and our representatives at OMB. I'm happy to use the remaining time to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Neither the Fiscal 2025 November Plan nor the Fiscal 2026 Prelim Plan include any changes in EEPC's budget. Have you requested any PS or OTPS funding to OMB and haven't received it, or is EEPC fully budgeted?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Well, we've been working with OMB and back in, I believe in September of last year, we submitted a request to OMB for additional funding as to what our plans would be going forward. This is reflected in the remarks that I presented to you today. I would not say that we're fully funded at this time, and those requests that we made to OMB at the time back in September, there really hasn't been any movement on that.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. In our budget response, the Council called out the Administration last year's budget response. The Council called on the Administration to increase your staffing levels by five. In the Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget, your staffing levels were increased by three positions. Have you been able to fill the three new positions? I know you mentioned the agency attorney. If not, why not have you been able to fill the three new positions? What is the job description and salary for

each new position? Do you still have any additional staffing needs going forward?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: As for the three positions that were given back to us as part of the budget hearings from last year, we have just recently, back in February, actually on February 18th of this year, we were able to fill two of those positions, two of the three. One was an EEO program specialist. The EEO program specialist handles the audits for the EEPD, and it's an entry-level position, and the other one is for a research analyst position that would be working on the research unit team. The third position, we had also selected a candidate. It would have been a research analyst position. The candidate dropped out of the process before we could actually bring her on board because the process was taking a little too long. It has taken approximately six months to fill those two positions, and we're working on replacing the candidate that we lost for the third position.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You hired for two?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We were able to hire two of the three.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you. Do you still have any additional staffing needs? That was the other question.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: If so, what positions?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We were looking to the City Council for a communications director to help us to craft our materials and the message to be consistent with the findings that we're making from the reports that we are currently drafting. As I said in my remarks, we do have six reports that are out there, but no one really knows of us because we're so small and because we're not public-facing so we would be asking for someone to help with our communications. We would also be asking for some entry-level positions to account for the fact that in City government, the process for promotions and the like result from being on lists, on civil service lists, moving from agency to agency. We've experienced a great deal of loss of personnel over the last few years so what I was requesting was an entry-level person on the computer side and an entry-level person for human resources to account for

the fact that we need to grow new people into these positions so that when people move on, as they inevitably do, we do have some backup and we're not starting from square one and waiting many months before we can get somebody to come on and help us out.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

The Fiscal 2025 Adopted Plan included 1,000 dollars for a training program for City employees in Fiscal 2025. In the Fiscal 2026 Prelim Plan, there is 10,000 dollars allocated for the training program in Fiscal 2025. What type of training will be provided with the 10,000 dollars? How many employees will be trained? Why do they need the training? Are there any additional training scheduled or needed in Fiscal 2026?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Okay. For 1,000 dollars, when we see the 1,000 dollars in the budget, we use that money for training through DCAS programs. When we do training, and especially when we bring on new personnel, we look to get them through the Cornell training program, which is a certification program in EEO. All of our staff go through the program so that they're knowledgeable

about the EEO laws, about investigations, about EEO reporting. We would like to continue to do that, and especially as we bring on a couple of new personnel, we'll be required to train those new employees as well. I'm sorry, I don't know if I answered all your questions.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. The Cornell program though, you have to pay for it, right?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So the 1,000 dollars covers that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Not at all. The Cornell program is approximately 1,600 dollars per person. There are six classes that they have to take for certification.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And how many people are in each? Because it's per person, so how many people are in each training?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, we have four people on the audit team, and if possible, we would like to have our research analyst trained as well. That would be another three people.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. The Fiscal 2026 Prelim Plan includes a contract for general

services in Fiscal 2025. This contract was not included in the Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget and is not anticipated for Fiscal 2026 to 2029. What specific service is contracted out, and do you foresee needing additional contract budget in Fiscal 2026?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, I'm sorry, if I understand your question correctly, is it what specific programs would have to be contracted out?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. So, in the Prelim Plan is a contract for general services, but it wasn't included in the Adopted Budget and is not anticipated for Fiscal 2026, so is there a specific service that was contracted out that you no longer are able to utilize? I don't know if your agency is contracting out services.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We don't normally contract out too much, but last year we contracted out the removal of old equipment because we're an independent agency. We're not covered under the City's program, so we have to pay for our own disposal of equipment. That's the one thing that comes to mind when I'm thinking about contract services.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Turning my questions now to auditing questions, which is your wheelhouse. EEPC is responsible for auditing 145 City agencies at least every four years or when the City Civil Service Commission or City Human Rights Commission request it. I didn't even know this, which is quite interesting. How many audits did you complete in the Calendar Year 2024?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, we completed 32 audits in 2024.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And how many audits are scheduled to take place before the end of the Calendar Year of 2025?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, we have approximately the same number. We generally take our 145 agencies and we divide them into four because we have to audit every agency once every four years so we have approximately 10 large agencies and the rest are community boards for the rest of this year.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many audits are scheduled for next year?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: For next year, probably we'll have a heavy load. It'll probably be in excess of 35, probably closer to 40 because we'll

be starting a new audit cycle and we'll be starting a new focus on what we'll be looking for during the audit.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. How has EEPIC had difficulty meeting its Charter requirements for audits that is set for every four years?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, the City Charter requires that we audit agencies once every four years, and we have taken this to understand that final determinations from our office to the agency during the course of an audit is the completion of the audit and that there may be times when agencies audits carry into the following year, and last year was one of those times. So, we issued eight final determinations in Calendar Year 2025 when we specifically strive to have all final determinations completed in the calendar year in which they were initiated. So, I think the reason for that was because the staffing issues finally caught up to us and we just couldn't overcome the fact that we had new staff and we had lost staff and we just were not able to get all of the agencies completed within the calendar year.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. How often does the City Civil Service Commission or City Human Rights Commission request an audit from EEPC?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I have not had a request from them since I've been here.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How do you receive a request to audit from these agencies? Like if they were to ask for an audit how would you receive the request?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, if they were to ask for an audit in any way that they asked, if they wanted a meeting or if they wanted to send an email or something to say that we need the EEPC to conduct an audit, we would do so.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And are you in frequent communications with the Civil Service Commission and CCHR?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We have some relationship with CCHR more so than the Civil Service Commission, but recently I know that CORE had organized a meeting where all the small agencies got together and we were a participant in that as well so we are establishing more relationships with some of the smaller agencies in City government.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Is it
3 possible for the public to submit an audit request?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: For the public
5 to submit an audit request?

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes.

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I don't know
8 that there's a mechanism for the public to submit an
9 audit request. However, if there are issues that are
10 public in a particular agency, that is something that
11 we would probably be looking at.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. If an agency
13 is found not to be in compliance with the Equal
14 Employment Opportunity requirements, what steps does
15 your agency take to rectify the situation? I know
16 this is a question we have asked often, but I always
17 think it's important to acknowledge I'd argue the
18 lack of teeth that you have sometimes around holding
19 agencies accountable.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: There are
21 three things that pretty much happen. If an agency is
22 not in compliance by the end of their compliance
23 monitoring period, I have been advising the agency
24 heads that they will need to come before our board
25 and speak with our board as to why they have not been

in compliance and when they expect to be in compliance. So far, we have not had to resort to that.

The second thing is that they could receive a certificate of noncompliance and then they would be audited in the following calendar year. We've had that happen on a couple of occasions since I've been here, which will be four years next month.

The last thing is that we would make a statement in our annual report which goes to the Mayor's Office and goes to City Council as to the fact that we have an agency that has not been in compliance.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you share the agencies that are not in compliance based off of your last report?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Fortunately, as of our last report, all the agencies were in compliance.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. EEPC can develop research studies, inquiries, require attendance of witnesses, have public and private hearings, and provide OATH with the purpose of determining whether City agencies fulfill the

requirements of equal employment opportunity. Can you share of the most recent time that you did a particular research study or held a public-private hearing or any other action?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, I guess it's a two-part question and part of that we might go to our research side, but I can tell you from the audit side, I've been using those provisions to stress to the agency heads that we would have the ability based on those provisions in the Charter that you read, to have the agency head come in to meet with our Commission, our board, and to explain why they have not met their compliance requirements. As far as research is concerned, we don't hold public-private hearings per se for research, but we do hold symposia or events, receptions, that kind of thing.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: EEPC oftentimes within their reports will provide several recommendations to agencies and entities. How often are these recommendations taken and established?

DIRECTOR FERRI: So, it depends. For the past few years, the primary one has been... so the Local Law 13 series reports on disparities in the City's workforce compared to the availability of

women and people of color. We rely on DCAS to determine what is the availability of women and people of color, and those numbers have not been updated for over 10 years now. But we do know that DCAS is working to update their systems and the estimates, and that process, from what we understand, is pretty far along. So that's one example. We've also talked about drivers to understand why are people leaving. As you know, there's been a lot of attrition in the past couple of years, but you all passed a law now requiring exit surveys and interviews at City agencies. I can't claim that that was entirely because we were recommending it, but I hope that we were one voice that contributed to the importance of that. So those are two examples.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Just turning the questions to community engagement, which I think speaks to your concerns and sort of requests for a comms director. So, on your website, it is specified that EEPD is not authorized to investigate individual complaints of employment discrimination. Is there a referral process if an individual contacts the Commission regarding a personal discrimination

experience, and what kind of public awareness outreach does EEPC perform?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, if someone would contact our office with a complaint, we refer them to CCHR. We refer them to the Feds at that time or even New York State. We don't really have any public-facing profile for the public because we deal mostly with the agencies and whether or not their programs are in compliance so we don't really deal with the public at all.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. And do you have direct contacts for these other government entities, or are you just sending them a website and saying go talk to CCHR?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Well, I do try to help them when they call, and I give them phone numbers, and I work with them, and I also tell them, if you can't get through to that number, call me back, and we'll see if we can find another way to get through.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, and I know CCHR is still here so I would encourage you all to coordinate with EEPC so they have a direct line into your agency. If people are reaching out directly to

another City agency, they should be able to get a seamless service and be contacted directly to someone at CCHR for their complaint. I don't know about state, but I'm like, at least within the City should be communicating and talking to each other. Okay, awesome.

So now turning my questions to the auditing report, in 2024 the annual report stated that there were 20 auditing standards that agencies were held accountable to. Can you explain each of the standards and how you determine the standards, and if the standards change every year or if they remain the same for the full four years of auditing?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: So, the audit standards remain the same for four years so all the agencies are audited against the same standards. So, we had 20 audit standards in this particular audit cycle. The first couple of standards relate to whether or not the agency has a policy statement, and if the agency head has issued a policy statement to their employees, and whether or not the EEO policy has been distributed to their employees, or posted, and we try to make sure that the agencies tell us where the policy has been posted, or the policy

statement has been posted, and whether or not employees know where to find it. So, we request evidence of the fact that if it's been posted that perhaps it went out to employees via email, we want to see the emails to know that the employees know where to find the policy, and the policy statement.

The next one on the complaint tracking system, we want to make sure that the agencies are using and utilizing a complaint tracking system so that EEO complaints are being moved along in the process in terms of whether or not the agency is recording the names of the parties and whether or not the timeframes are being met and whether or not the complaint comes to resolution.

At this point, for this particular audit, we're just auditing whether or not they have a tracking system. We're not focused as much on the dates, but we'll probably be focusing more on the dates in the next cycle, which is next year.

Another audit standard revolves around whether or not the agency has submitted its EEO plan and quarterly reports. Those are due to DCAS. So, when DCAS wants the agencies to file their annual EEO plans and quarterly reports, they also submit a copy

to the EEPIC. It's another check and balance to make sure that these documents are also given to DCAS.

Then what we do is we review the EEO plan to see what their training plan is, and we check with the agency to see if they've complied with their own EEO plan, if they've trained people in accordance with their EEO plan, and if they haven't, then we require them to train their people, train the employees on all of the required and mandated training as mandated by DCAS before we can sign off on their audit.

Another thing that we do is we make sure that the EEO professional has been appointed and has been properly trained as an EEO professional, that if there are other EEO professionals within the organization that there's a hierarchy and reporting structure. As I said, we look for training, whether or not there's been a disability rights or ADA coordinator designated by the agency, and if so, what do they do. We ask whether or not they've distributed their reasonable accommodation process and whether or not they have a tracking log for that. We look to see if they're utilizing the Section 55A program, and if they haven't, why not, and make sure that employees

are aware that the program exists. We make sure that agency heads sit down with their EEO professionals to review their workforce data to see if they're talking about underutilization and how they address underutilization within their agency. We also ask to see their applicant and candidate log to see if they're tracking candidates and if they're looking at the demographics of the candidates as part of their hiring process. We look to see if there's diversity in their entity-produced content. In other words, are they using the appropriate language for postings that says, in essence, that we don't discriminate. Is content that is produced by the agency, does that have diversity in it or does it not?

We look to see whether or not they assess recruitment efforts for discretionary titles. We look to assess recruitment efforts for non-discretionary titles, for civil service titles, whether or not a career counselor has been designated by the agency, whether or not an HR professional, what the HR professional does, and whether or not they are providing agency-wide job information to the employees.

Those are the standards that were selected. The focus is on underutilization, so each one of those standards, we felt, had some nexus to underutilization, so when taken as a whole, we wanted to see if, in fact, the agencies were doing the things that were required to address underutilization.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Have you started to develop the standards for the next round of audits, and do you involve the workforce at all in determining the auditing standards?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We're just at the beginning stages of considering what the audit standards should be for the next audit cycle. We just got a part-time executive agency counsel on board this week, this was her first week, so we want to include her. It will be the research team. It will be the audit team, obviously. Also, all of our Commissioners are very interested in what the audit standards will be for the next cycle.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The report states that EEPC held a symposium in 2024 for City agencies to discuss how to increase diversity

within their agencies. Was this the first symposium held to discuss this topic?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: This was not necessarily the first symposium held to discuss this topic. We had an expert from NYU who came and spoke to us in 2024 and also two years prior in 2022. Different perspectives, but the same kind of topic. She's an HR expert and deals in workforce planning, so she was able to talk to us from different perspectives of the same topic.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many people attended, and how many agencies had representatives attend, and what were those agencies?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: In our first symposium in 2022, we had roughly, the number of 280 or so sticks out in my head. In this particular round in 2024, we had just over 100 participate. I have to admit that was our fault. I don't think that we, our technology, we didn't do well enough with our technology to get everyone to attend. Major agencies attended, but we weren't able to encompass everyone that we wanted to at the time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you just name, do you have any agencies that you can name that attended this round?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: In the last round?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes. I'm particularly interested in if FDNY attended.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I don't recall.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Or Department of San...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I don't recall.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Historic agencies that lacked diversity.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Yeah, I'm not sure.

DIRECTOR FERRI: We could get that to you, but we could get that offhand if they attended.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Good to know. Thank you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I'm sorry about that.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It's okay. All
3 right. What feedback did you receive, and how will
4 you use that feedback? Did you receive any feedback
5 from agencies?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Yeah. You want
7 to take that?

8 DIRECTOR FERRI: I think the presentation
9 was helpful in the sense that a lot of times HR and
10 EEO people focus on recruitment, which is obviously
11 very important, but Dr. Tarulli's presentation also
12 focused on retention and trying to sort of understand
13 people's career trajectory and how they can grow
14 within a particular organization or entity or within
15 the City as a whole. We got some positive feedback
16 that people were thinking about those things in a way
17 that they probably had not before. It's not just
18 always about recruitment, but it's also about keeping
19 people on board once they're in.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Did you
21 include the Commission on Racial Equity in the
22 symposium last year?

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I really don't
24 recall.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. All right. I think that... oh, okay. This is more questions. Okay. Can the agency supply the Council with a copy of their Preliminary Racial Equity Plan? I don't know if you all had to submit a Racial Equity Plan.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: We have not submitted a Racial Equity Plan.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Were you asked to submit a racial equity plan?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: No, we weren't.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, interesting. Can the agency describe how their work and budget for Fiscal Year 2026 reduces, perpetuates, or exacerbates racial inequity in service delivery and the criminalization of communities of color and poverty?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I'm not sure I understand the question.

DIRECTOR FERRI: Could you repeat the question?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Essentially, based off of your knowledge and the work and the budget of your agency, can you share how your agency works to either reduce, continue to perpetuate, or even

exacerbate in some cases, racial inequity in service delivery? In this case, it would be the internal issues that we have as a City and our workforce and how that works to disadvantage communities of color.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: I don't know if that's directly on point to what we do because what we do is we work with the agencies, and our work is to increase diversity and ensure that there's equal employment opportunities for all so I don't believe that anything that we would do would exacerbate or, you know, hinder, you know, that discrimination.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I think I'm done. Thank you so much.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VICTOR: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And yes, feel free to share your recommendations if you feel we need to be doing things better legislatively. I'm looking forward to what your new attorney will uncover with whatever amendments you think are needed for Local Law 13. You're welcome. Have a good day.

The next panel will be CORE.

Hi. How are you? Awesome. I will turn it over to Committee Counsel to swear you in.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Before we begin
3 testimony, I will administer the oath. Will members
4 of the Administration raise their right hand.

5 Do you affirm or swear to tell the truth,
6 nothing but the truth, and answer honestly to Council
7 Member questions?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I do.

9 SENIOR LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST GICHURU: I
10 do.

11 DIRECTOR WILLIAMS: I do.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Linda, this
14 testimony is very long.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: I wanted to
16 give a full picture.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Shorten the
18 testimony to the best of your abilities.

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Okay. I will
20 do my best. I will say that advice was given to me
21 before I came here, just to honor the advice that I
22 received. Okay.

23 Good afternoon, Chair Dr. Nantasha
24 Williams and Members of the Civil and Human Rights
25 Committee. My name is Linda Tigani, and I have the

honor of serving as the Chair and Executive Director of the New York City Commission on Racial Equity. I lead CORE in partnership with 14 Commissioners and 11 staff members. Today, I'm joined by Maya Williams, our Director of Research and Policy, and Kiiru Gichuru, who's our Senior Legislative Strategist.

I'm excited to share an overview of the accomplishments from CORE's work this past year and a snapshot of what we have planned for Fiscal Year 2026. New York City residents overwhelmingly voted to establish CORE, a 15-person-led independent commission responsible for holding New York City government accountable to advancing racial equity in government operations and increase community voice in government decision-making. Commissioners and staff both represent the diversity of New York City. At a time when efforts to abide by federal, state, and local civil rights laws are deemed suspect at best and misrepresented as illegal at worst, CORE is committed to upholding its mission to eliminating the gap between the letter of these laws and the daily experiences of New Yorkers harmed by racism and social injustice. As public and private institutions around the country disavow the pursuit of racial

equity and social justice, we take heart in the fact that our mission is enshrined in a Charter whose preamble proudly declares that our city is a multiracial democracy and that our diversity is our strength. Our work is focused on holding New York City government accountable for protecting and promoting the well-being, safety, and economic stability of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, North African, and other people of color, women, religious communities, immigrants, people who are LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, youth, elders, people who are incarcerated, and people who are unhoused. To do justice to this mission, CORE's small staff works tirelessly to form and sustain community partnerships, collect and synthesize data on existing racial disparities and well-being, and support the development and implementation of projects arising from community and legislative priorities. I am going to skip over some of the work that we've done in the first year because I know we have talked about that extensively at previous hearings. I do want to note that a copy of our 18 community equity priorities are

submitted with today's testimony so that they can be entered into the record.

I will now provide an overview of CORE's accomplishments. One of CORE's central pillars, as dictated by the City Charter, is to increase community voice in government decision-making. Our organizing and engagement team is focused on ensuring that the needs and the campaigns for change in government are heard and supported by all of CORE's staff. In Fiscal Year 2025, CORE wrapped up our first round of organizing and engagement, reaching over 4,000 people, 40 organizations across New York City, and we are continuing to build relationships with organizations fighting for economic and environmental justice as well as the rights of LGBTQIA+ community members. We have reached approximately 700 New Yorkers in addition to the 4,000 that we reached in our first cycle and have attended over 73 events, some of which were facilitated by CORE.

Our hyper-local community conversations on equity priorities will relaunch April 2025. Starting in April, we will ensure that we close out and finalize community equity priorities by October 1st of 2025, which will also mark the beginning of

the next racial equity planning process. CORE will circle back with our partners with an improved community feedback form to help us better understand the level of urgency that New Yorkers associate with each priority. Engagement will span all five boroughs and be offered in multiple languages. We will be hosting in-person and virtual conversations, some of which will be led by CORE and some will be led by community organizations. Organizations may receive funding up to 2,500 dollars per conversation, which includes 20 dollars stipend for each community member that participates. Funding provided by CORE covers all costs associated with each conversation.

In Fiscal Year 2026, our community organizing and engagement portfolio will expand to include the engagement work for Local Law 91, establishing a Truth Healing Reconciliation Plan, and Local Law 92, formulating a study on reparations, and will introduce two new pathways for engagement. To begin, CORE will continue the CEP community conversations to receive ongoing feedback from New Yorkers on how government should solve the inequities our priorities seek to address. We will ask community members how they would like to measure change and

what goals and strategies they would like to see government implement. CORE will work closely with community partners to co-develop curriculum, workshops, and toolkits to peel back the history of racial capitalism, develop a deeper understanding, and increase community participation in racial equity and social justice campaigns within government and campaigns seeking to change how government operates. The curriculum will incorporate community equity data profiles, research conducted by CORE research and policy team, and provide relevant historical information. For example, CORE and the community can collaborate on a short curriculum that explains the difference between racial equity and equality in the fight to end segregation and disinvestment in our school system. This comprehensive curriculum will be used to increase community consciousness on the role that government plays in creating, sustaining, and exacerbating racial disparities, gather feedback from New Yorkers about local disparities, and how communities can grow their advocacy power to concretely shape government decisions related to policy, budgeting, and accountability. CORE community sessions across both pathways are designed as hyper-

local conversations, serving 15 to 25 unique participants in each session for at least one hour.

As CORE awaits the release of the preliminary 2024 Racial Equity Plan, we've developed a robust and clear process for community voices to provide feedback that we will incorporate in CORE's response to the plan. However, at this time, the City has failed to specify a release date. The City's failure to abide by the timeline prescribed in the Charter will require CORE to simultaneously review and respond to the inaugural plan and lay the foundation for the FY26 plan, inevitably straining our already overextended staff.

Publicly sourced information is the bedrock of our government accountability work. CORE's research and policy team works across all departments, campaigns, and CORE's Charter mandates. In Fiscal Year 2025, our research and policy team developed community equity priority profiles to provide CORE Commissioners with a snapshot of what public data could tell us about each priority. At the start, our director, Maya Williams, a team of one, combed through Open Data portal, met with City agencies, reviewed published reports by City Council,

the Comptroller's Office, and City agencies to provide an accurate and up-to-date account of each inequity a draft priority addressed. Profiles were utilized by Commissioners in the decision-making process for the final community equity priorities. CORE only uses publicly available data to ensure transparency with the public.

Unfortunately, our team has encountered several challenges relying on publicly available data. CORE made an intentional decision to only use publicly available data to ensure transparency to communities and to further understand the limitations in this data. CORE discovered that existing data sets were not designed to measure structural change and did not allow for easy matching across data sets, which is needed for a full and accurate picture of the social injustices we're seeking to address. Publicly available data revealed that much of it is not only outdated, but it did not have the necessary disaggregation of communities in New York City. Given our city's diverse population, different races, genders, gender identities, and ages, our existing data and research must reflect that diversity. In November 2022, New York City voters approved a

measure that enshrines the definition and use of data disaggregation in our Charter and calls for standard disaggregation guidelines to be used by all City agencies in all of their work and specifically the racial equity planning process. To date, the Mayor's Office has not released the guidelines. Without comprehensive data disaggregation, we risk overlooking the critical disparities that affect communities and exacerbate policies and practices that fail to address the root causes of inequities.

In Fiscal Year 2025, our research and policy team identified interim data disaggregation guidelines, which we will be using until the standard guidelines are released. With respect to race and ethnicity, we will give community members the opportunity to identify with one or more of the following categories, Black African American, Black Caribbean, African, Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Central or East Asian, White, Eastern European, Adopted or Unknown, Middle Eastern, North African, Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or Prefer Not to Say. We also ask all participants if they would like to provide their ancestry or ethnic origin. If the respondent

identifies as Indigenous to the United States, we do offer them the opportunity to share which tribe they are a part of, regardless of whether or not the federal government recognizes that tribe. With respect to gender, we provide the following categories, Women, Man, Transgender Woman, Transgender Man, Non-Binary Person, Gender Queer Person, Prefer Not to Say, or that their gender is not mentioned and it is a write-in. We also ask that if participants have chronic illness or disability as well as their level of education. The questions and categories shared allow for CORE to have an inclusive and diverse respondent pool that creates a space for every New Yorker to show up with all of their identities and be heard.

The racial equity process requires data disaggregation to occur at collection, examination, and reporting stages of any research and policy practice. We also look at disaggregation according to zip codes and boroughs. In April 2025, our team will release updated community equity priority profiles reflecting the final community equity priorities. It is our goal that these profiles serve as a snapshot of our community equity priorities and will allow for

a more comprehensive approach to inform future policies, budgets, and local laws, ensuring that they address and ultimately eliminate racial inequities.

In Fiscal Year 2025, CORE will also launch its first ever borough-based community equity profiles, which will provide the City with aggregate responses from our first engagement cycle. When released, the profiles will be made public via our website and shared with borough presidents, community boards, and local leadership.

In Fiscal Year 2026, our research and policy team will focus on setting up CORE in Open Data so that the public can use the data that we collect and develop a system to monitor and track the City's progress on their compliance with the racial equity plan. The research and policy team will also continue to support Local Law 91 and 92 by playing a key role in supporting researchers that will be working with CORE. Lastly, the team will work closely with community organizing and engagement to identify one or two specific questions and projects that are coming from our community engagement work to begin our original research next year.

Our conversations with community members and the broader patterns and practices our research team discerns through its data analysis form the basis of CORE's legislative work. Guided by these sources as well as public complaints of City agency action that may have the effect of exacerbating racial equity disparity, CORE continuously monitors and promotes legislation that serves to advance the City Charter's central tenets of justly valuing all talents and contributions, ensuring the condition of thriving for every person, and embracing vigilance, remedy, and reconstruction.

CORE's legislative team will also continue to implement special projects arising from legislative and community priorities. In Fiscal Year 2025, we launched a special project with the Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy housed at the New School to adapt an equity budgeting tool that would allow New Yorkers to score the City's budget across the following categories, transparency and accountability, inclusive community engagement, equity-focused decision-making, equitable resource allocation, and equitable resource generation. Our conversation held on March 6, 2025, with your support

is the first in a series of equity and budgeting conversations that our office is leading in Fiscal Year 2026. We look forward to collaborating with your team, as well as the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice, and our City and community partners to increase community voices in government budget decisions and ensure that the FY26 and '27 budget cycle will do a better job of meeting the needs of the community. To that end, our office has put forward the following questions for all Council Members to ask agencies during the Preliminary Budget season. Can the agency or office describe how their work in the budget for Fiscal Year 2026 reduces, perpetuates, or exacerbates racial inequity in service delivery and the criminalization of communities of color and poverty? Can the agency and their office explain whether the policies or investments presented for FY26 is based on needs and goals expressed by impacted communities? Does the investment reflect the foundational principles expressed in the preamble of the Charter of the City of New York?

To achieve the multiracial democracy we deserve, we must ask these critical questions of all

City agencies at every opportunity. Asking on record will allow us and the public to build trust which will ensure an enduring partnership on the long road towards racial equity and social justice for all.

A strong partnership between government and community is critical for redressing longstanding harms that include but are not limited to the history of genocide against indigenous people of this land, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and the legacy of race-based exploitation, oppression, and discrimination.

In Fiscal Year 2025, CORE, via our legal and legislative team, begin operationalizing Local Law 91 and 92 of 2024. Our first action was to create a cross-function team with members from each Department that will see both projects to completion. We then convened a small working group which includes all named consultant agencies to receive periodic updates and provide feedback to shape each step. In Fiscal Year 2025, CORE along with our partners across government, released a request for information pertaining to Local Law 91 and 92. While the request was open for comment, we began meeting with different jurisdictions, leading truth-healing and reconciliation work. CORE hosted two public question

and answer sessions with an approximate 70 members of the public. We have also met with community groups focused on truth-healing, reconciliation, and reparations to receive their feedback. City agencies were able to join one of two question and answer sessions which were completed this week. We invited racial equity planners from all 45 City agencies...

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Linda.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That we expect to have a Racial Equity Plan.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We were just talking about how thorough and amazing you are and how we would love for you to...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Stop?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Fast forward...

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Fast forward? Okay.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: To maybe talking a little bit about your budget ask.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Well, what I do want to just make sure to say on record is we did get really great feedback about Local Law 91 and 92, and this is the first time that we're getting to talk

about that. I do want to make sure that that is
uplifted here.

We spoke to approximately 80
representatives across New York City government. We
spoke to roughly 60 to 80 people in the public, and
they gave us some really great feedback on what they
want to see. They recommended first community members
ask for frequent, consistent, and robust updates
throughout the project. They recommended that we not
only place the key dates and milestones on our
website, but that we actually provide summary updates
as we move along with or without a public release.
They would like for us to start hosting public
hearings sooner and make sure that they are in-person
with virtual options. Community members requested
that they be able to see the work that the
researchers are doing, reading their scope of work,
reading their outlines, providing feedback on their
chapters, and what they're going to be providing to
the City in their final report. They have also asked
that we provide video, audio, and written format for
truth-telling. One recommendation was to pair
historians with community members so that as

communities tell their truth, we can pull history and data to back up what they're saying.

Okay, I will move forward. We have some great stuff in here, but I will move forward.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I mean, you're answering a lot of the questions, so pretty much after you testify, then it's like all right, have a nice day.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's great. Okay. So, one additional note with respect to the work that we're doing to advance racial equity in the City. I do want to highlight a particular partnership that we have with the Department of Records and Information Services. This partnership crosses all of our lanes, but primarily research and policy led by Maya Williams and communications by Isis Ossebi Iyolo. We have launched a project starting February 3rd, I believe, whereby we take racial equity history in the city in our archives and publicize it on all of our social media. It's actually modeled after the Equity Justice Initiative social media project, and we started with the school walkout from February 3rd, 1964, against segregation.

I will now move to our asks. I instead will finish our communications, and then I will go to ask. So, in Fiscal Year 2026, our communications team is going to continue to highlight our CEPs and amplify our community voices. We have also launched and expanded CORE Talks, which is an initiative that highlights advocates and experts fighting at a hyper-local level to improve the living conditions for all New Yorkers with special consideration for communities harmed by racism and social injustice. We conduct street interviews, and we also do interviews of our staff and our Commissioners to highlight critical legislation, public hearings, and key topics that communities feel is most urgent for them. We will also be launching a public education campaign in relationship to Local Law 91 and 92.

Moving now to our budget and our budget asks. So, in Fiscal Year 2026, the CORE budget will increase to 4,398,741 dollars. The increases are due to allotments for the following projects. We received 1 million for truth, healing, and reconciliation in the first year, and 1 million for reparations in the first year, both of which is FY26. In FY27, we are expecting another 500,000 dollars to complete truth,

healing, and reconciliation, and 1.3 million dollars to complete the New York City study on reparations. We've been working closely with the Office of Management and Budget, where we were able to baseline 660,000 in OTPS funds, which is specifically for our work with community organizations. Our personnel budget is approximately 2 million dollars, which pays for 15 full-time staff and then two internship lines. At our last budget hearing, OMB granted us 93,000 dollars for Commissioner reimbursement, which is required by law. We also received four full-time staff lines, so that's a part of the 15. We were approved to hire a compliant senior associate, a fiscal senior associate, a special project senior associate, and a community organizing and engagement associate. Our internship lines were approved to join the research and policy department. All lines will be supporting Local Law 91 and 92 in addition to our Charter mandates.

Over the past few months, CORE has worked with OMB and Council Finance to identify gaps in staffing and funding that must be closed to meet our mandate and fulfill Local Law 91 and 92. We very much are still in the launch phase, and we are working

through getting licenses for key programs, buying office supplies and equipment, and we will incur costs at the top of Fiscal Year '26 as we move into our new space.

To meet our mandate, we will need additional operational and personnel support. At this time, I'm requesting additional staff lines to ensure that every team is fully staffed and can increase the efficiency of the organization. I've submitted a request for a chief-of-staff, a racial equity impact associate, a research and visualization designer, and a research and policy associate, and another community organizing and engagement associate.

As a reminder, CORE is required to work across all five boroughs and to review and comment on over 40 agency racial equity plans plus the City's overall plan. We are required to track and monitor hundreds of data points across all City agencies and respond to community concerns about racial equity disparities. To do this work right, we need a bigger team. This work is too important to be understaffed and under-resourced.

I would like to take this time and opportunity to place CORE's own FY26 budget within

the context of the City's overall blueprint for the allocation of public funds. One of the many reasons people voted for CORE is because if budgets are moral documents, the New York City budget continues to be immoral in how it fails to address poverty and implement true structural and institutional change. Robinhood recently released its report on poverty, and it should come as no surprise that poverty has continued to increase in New York City. If you recall, last year's 112.4-billion-dollar budget was mostly restorative and did little to ameliorate high costs of living experienced by New York City residents, especially those living in poverty. When the public voted for CORE, they envisioned structural changes that would chart a new way of life in which New Yorkers can afford necessities, enjoy equal access to decision-making, and live without fear of abuse at the hands of police and other City officials. Structural change requires effort, will, and investment, an imperative explicit made by the Racial Justice Commission when it was introduced in the City's Racial Equity Planning Timeline. Noting the importance of budget and resource prioritization to the racial justice process, the Commission

unambiguously expressed its intent for racial equity plan to intersect with the City's process. In departing from this mandate, the City is not only in violation of the City Charter, but it is eroding trust in city government and undermining its capacity to ensure that all New Yorkers enjoy this opportunity to thrive.

Finally, structural change requires accountability, and it is clear that we are in violation of the Charter in failing to produce the preliminary racial equity plan to inform the budget process. Chair Williams, I cannot emphasize enough how the Mayor must provide the preliminary racial equity plan on time to communicate to the larger New York City community that structural change and equity is a must, and we must do better.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, and I really appreciate your testimony. In my opening remarks, I definitely mentioned that the racial equity plans are over 430 days late, and that is truly unacceptable as we kickstart our budget hearings this week.

The first question I have is in the Calendar Year 2024, CORE received the new mandates of

Local Law 91 and Local Law 92. Local law 91 of 2024 required CORE to create a truth, healing, and reconciliation process through which New Yorkers can publicly name and acknowledge the past, present, and ongoing harms and traumas caused by and associated with slavery and its legacies in the city. This law required CORE to study the impacts of slavery and its legacies in New York City and recommend potential reparative measures for resulting harms. What is the status update of these local laws? You mentioned a lot of it in your testimony, but if there's anything you want to add here, please do. And both of these laws require various reports to be published. What is your plan to publish reports on time, and will these reports be submitted within the required timeline? If not, explain why they might be delayed.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Sure. So starting with Local Law 91, which is the creation of the truth, healing, reconciliation process, we have started to identify groups as well as a payment pathway to provide organizations the proper funding to participate in the planning process. That first report, I believe, doesn't come until, I think, January, so we do have time. There's no reason to

assume that that would be late. Right now, we are setting up a structure to bring in communities, and we are setting up a structure for truth-telling. We have spoken to several jurisdictions as well as small teams to better understand what is a supportive and inclusive hearing and how do we navigate the multiple harms in one session so right now, again, it is largely planning.

For Local Law 92, which is a New York City study on reparations, that work has moved at a faster pace. We have issued a request for information. We have created a connection and are in constant communication with the Executive Director for the New York State Communities Commission on Reparation Remedies. We have started to outline what the RFP is going to look like, and we are looking to release that RFP within the next month, month and a half. We are expecting to close the full RFP process by June so that we can have an awardee that would be submitted in the July report. So, we're thinking of the July report as a progress update of who we spoke to, what was shared, what are the recommendations to New York City to address each aspect of the reparations study outline, and then also what was the

RFP, who won the award, and what is the scope of work. Since that money isn't coming in until July, we've decided to spend this time to do some planning and make sure that also community members can shape this work. So, we've invested a lot of time in building with groups like New Yorkers for Reparations to ensure that they have a voice, and they're able to shape this process as we go along.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah. You just said that, it made me think of something. So, there's like different factions of the reparations space, so how are you engaging with the various factions?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We're talking to everyone who approaches us, and we're seeking out groups as well. At the end of every session, we do ask if there's someone who we should be talking to, please let us know. It's extremely important that we are really clear with the public, and we have been. There's no sides from CORE on any of these questions. We want the process to actually occur properly. So, the RFP questions are going to be based in the human rights framework and the United Nations framework, and everyone and anyone is going to have access to the RFP and be able to apply. We are going to hold

additional Q and A sessions as the RFP is out so that people understand what we're looking for, and our focus is also to create safe spaces for people to come together. A lot of the work from truth, healing, and reconciliation with respect to how are we setting up hearings, how are we bringing people together, what is the social-emotional support that we need to have ready in the room. We're going to be applying that to reparations. We have already seen a call for that, and community is asking for that as well.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. We also know that CORE is expected to release an RFP, as you just mentioned. Have you released it at the plan date, which has passed. If not, I think you have, right? You released it?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We released a request for information. We did not release the RFP yet. In earlier conversations with your office as well as the other elected officials that sponsored this work, we wanted to release in February, but we were not able to.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. When will you be releasing an RFP?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We're hoping
3 to release it likely by the end of March or the top
4 of April.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Have you gotten any
6 responses from your RFI yet?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: With respect
8 to the RFI, we received, I believe, less than three,
9 certainly less than five written comments. All the
10 comments and feedback that's coming in is coming in
11 verbally. Just to note the context of an RFI,
12 anything that is submitted to the City is FOIL-able,
13 and I think in this current political climate, people
14 are feeling more comfortable talking to us rather
15 than writing it down, and so what we've done is just
16 make ourselves more available. I do want to note that
17 we don't have any staff to work on this project, so
18 part of the delay in getting the RFP out is we still
19 have five Charter mandates that we are consistently
20 working on, and the call for community to have more
21 time to talk with us, to inform what the RFP is going
22 to look like and what are the aspects that we need to
23 take into consideration is why we are currently
24 delayed.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The November plan released in 2024 including 1 million dollars in Fiscal 2026 and 500,000 in Fiscal 2027 for the implementation of Local Law 91. It also included 1 million in Fiscal 2026 and 1.3 million in Fiscal 2027 for Local Law 92. Do you believe this funding will be sufficient to carry out the mandates? If not, how much additional funding will be needed to fulfill the mandates?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's a great question. I think for truth, healing, and reconciliation, the 1.5 million is sufficient to support community organizations' participation in creating a plan. We are learning more about the truth-telling aspect of Local Law 91, and we are currently seeking out more accurate numbers to get a better understanding of how much is it going to cost to have more video and audio support for truth-telling. This is what community is asking for. Also, the latest recommendation was to bring in historians or researchers into the room when people are telling their truths so that when a family member says my grandmother, my great-grandmother lost her house, the City took it from her, we don't know why, we

actually, in that situation, would need a historian or an archivist to better understand that full picture. People are going to be talking about their trauma. They're not going to be bringing paperwork all of the time, and so pairing up someone who takes oral history for a living, someone who wants to tell their story, and an archivist or historian is actually a really powerful combination to get a fuller picture. However, these recommendations just came to us, and we're still in the process of pricing them out so we will likely be coming back asking for more funds.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: When do you think you'll be done with your assessment on the additional funds needed?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: For truth, healing, and reconciliation, I will have a better understanding likely by June at the very latest. I'm still talking to a bunch of groups. For reparations, which was also one of your questions, I do think that 1 million dollars to start the project is exactly what we need. This amount was determined using industry standard salaries for historians, around 100,000 to 127,000 dollars a year. We do expect that

this is going to be a large team. We're talking about studying the history of over 45 City agencies and the birth of New York City government and its relationship and growth for rules and policies, procedures, and investments that not only allowed for chattel slavery to continue, for Jim Crow to be born, and to be enshrined in our New York City government, but also that there are several practices in the private industry that were allowed by government, and so we need a very robust team. We do expect that a million dollars in the first year is sufficient.

Now, the second year, and what I've communicated to OMB, is that reparations is a multi-year project. We expect that 1.3 million in the second year. We will have a better understanding of how much more history and work needs to get done. We are committed to filing the reports on time and ensuring that community is getting updates, but I am expecting that we will need additional funds to do deeper dives in some of our longer-standing agencies, like the Health Department that's been around for 100 years. We may need a full team for them. We won't know or have a full assessment until we have the RFP completed and a vendor on board so that we can sit

down and talk through how many staff they have, how many interns they have, and what are the particular areas of harm or areas of government that we need a deep dive on.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And I apologize if I missed it, but when is your new projected deadline for the RFP to be released?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Towards the end of March at the top of April.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. So, the additional funds that you may require, you're not seeking for those funds to be in this upcoming Fiscal cycle. This is for FY 2027?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. And a question that I had that I feel like is somewhat answered, but just to make sure, while people might be truth-telling, I'm wondering what level of due diligence is being done on the back end to kind of fact-check, not to say that people are going to straight-up lie and I don't want to be pessimistic, but I'm just wondering, is there going to be a fact-checking component, but I suppose that is where the historians would come in.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's where the historians come in and the archivists come in, and what I want to offer is that there is certainly a time and place for fact-checking as well as a time and place for storytelling, and what we are trying to navigate right now is how and when to do both or one or the other. People are going to come and tell their stories and open their wounds of intergenerational trauma, and if we cannot back that up with data, actually the local law says whether it is disputed or not, we would still be accepting it, right, and so for some, there will be a second step of the process where we take people's stories, and if they're okay with us diving in deeper, then we will do that back-end research.

I also want to note that there's a critical part to the legislation that states that these stories and the work that we're going to do has to live on our website, so as we're taking it in, we are trying to figure out how do we categorize it and tag it and then make it available to the public, and what does that community member or family need in terms of support and confidence to tell their story? And I think that's where this question comes in, how

do we make sure we're telling a robust story. We think that we will need archivists and historians. We may need other folks, but we're just starting this process.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. One aspect of Local Law 91 is leading a public education campaign. What is the exact timeline to do so, and when do you expect to roll out this portion of the campaign?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We are asking for a research and data visualization designer also in part to support with the public education campaign. Part of how we envisioned the funds for truth, healing, and reconciliation is that organizations will be able to participate in crafting the campaign and pushing it out with CORE. We expect that work will start once we can begin to bring in organizations. We're going to work through a master contract in the City with Citizens NY to be able to fund organizations to do this work. As a part of the agreement, the organizations are going to sign up to support the public education campaign. Once organizations sign on, which we anticipate to be towards the end of the summer at the latest, we're going to start to roll out the first phase of the

public education campaign, but it will be ongoing throughout the two years, and then we want to keep that campaign going for the year in between the report is submitted to Council and the Mayor's team and when the racial healing conversations must begin.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: The 1 million dollars that was added in the November Plan will be used to fund organizations, as you mentioned, and it seems that it's a little bit commingled together. Is there a separate pot specifically for public education or is all the money going to non-profits who you then expect to engage in public education?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: All the money is not going to the organizations. We are going to hold back up to 50,000 dollars to pay for a public education campaign through CORE, but we do want to make sure that the campaign is crafted by organizations, which is why a majority of the money is going to go to them. We want this to be co-created with them. In the second year, there will be an additional 500,000 dollars in FY27 for truth, healing, and reconciliation, and that's also where we would expect to hold about 50,000 dollars within the CORE OTPS budget so that we can continue supporting

organizations pushing out a public education campaign.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Just a few questions on the Prelim Plan changes and headcount. In the Prelim Plan, it included 136,000 dollars in Fiscal 2025 and 429,000 dollars of baseline funding starting in Fiscal 2026 to cover four full-time staff members as well as two part-time interns. What are the role and responsibilities of these additional positions? What are the responsibilities of the part-time interns, and how many hours are they required to work?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you for those questions. I'll say we were just talking about the interns the other day and the hours that they are going to be required to work. Our interns are going to go according to a semester-long internship and will be allowed to continue or roll over into the next semester if the project that they're working on could use some more time and they're working out, and their school or their other life arrangements allow for that.

Right now, we're stating that interns cannot work more than 25 hours a week. They are also

allowed a hybrid schedule, and they will be working with the research and policy team assigned to the fundamental areas by the fundamental values, which is the Justly Valuing All Talents and Contributions, Ensuring the Condition of Thriving, and Embracing Remedy and Reconstruction.

With respect to the other lines, I just want to go back to my budget section to make sure I get the names right. With respect to these lines, the first one is the compliance senior associate line. That line is going to be a part of our operations and administration team. They are our EEO officer. They are going to be our... every report that City Council requires, any report that the Mayor's team requires, our language access and disability access. Right now, all of those roles are spread across the team. None of those roles were a part of the team's original job descriptions, and so we were able to work with OMB to create one line. We have a fiscal senior associate coming in, and that senior associate is going to be responsible for all of our budgeting and payments, whether it is for operational needs or working with our contractors for making sure that our community organizations are getting paid. Our special project

senior associate, that individual is working to coordinate Local Law 91 and 92, but also may be taking in other projects as projects are shared with CORE. The compliance and fiscal senior associate are both going to the director of operations and administration. That's who they will be reporting to. Our special project senior associate, which is Local Law 91 and 92, will be reporting to Caro (phonetic), and we have an additional community organizing and engagement associate. That person will be reporting to Lorenzo, who is our Director for this lane. That role is also specifically going to be spending 50 percent or more of their time coordinating across Local Law 91 and 92, specifically community-facing. They will be building the network of groups that are interested in early and often updates on reparations, and then also making sure that the groups that are participating in truth, healing, and reconciliation are getting everything that they need and are fully supported by CORE.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thanks. Can you speak to any additional needs that CORE has asked on before and has yet to receive?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We just put in the ask for FY26 for additional lines. We have not received those yet, but that right now is actually the only outstanding ask. Those lines are really essential for the office. This includes a chief-of-staff. Right now, I'm the only Executive Director and Chair of a Commission without any support for myself. I certainly have a senior leadership team, that's an amazing team, and we have junior associates that are wonderful, but I do not have a chief-of-staff or an executive assistant or a special assistant, and that is really required to make sure that we have organizational efficiency.

I have also asked for additional support for the teams as the projects continue to grow. We did ask for a research visualization designer. What we're hearing from community groups is that they want more infographics. They want more videos. They want more audio. We have a communications team that's two people, and they're wonderful and great at their job, but they are responsible for all Charter mandates as well as Local Law 91 and 92, so we want to build up that team.

We're also asking for a research and policy associate. Maya has one staff person. They do all of the work for the community equity profiles. They're analyzing over 4,000 pieces of data. They are also responsible for developing a system to track and monitor what the City agencies are going to be doing with respect to racial equity. The research and policy person that we're asking for is also going to be supporting Local Law 91 and 92, and we do need another community engagement associate. When I spoke to OMB in the last budgeting round, we did talk about what is the potential growth for CORE, what are the roles that we need. As a reminder, I was not here when the organizational chart was first created, and so when I came in, I had to restructure the chart, and I also had to ask for more money to be able to support our organizations. I anticipate having to ask for more money in the future as CORE continues to build out its base, which is great, but for right now, we actually need the staffing support so that we can meet all of our mandates.

We're also asking for a racial equity impact associate. That person is going to focus on Charter mandate number four and five. We are

receiving complaints from the public about how agency conduct may have the effect of exacerbating racial equity disparities. The language in the Charter indicates that it is not on the public to make the determination about whether or not racial equity disparities are exacerbated. It is actually on CORE to make that determination, and we do not have staff to do that work.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The Prelim Plan also included 54,000 dollars in new needs for a temporary office relocation into the Law Department. Are you still located in the Law Department facilities as of this time?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. So you don't have a new address yet. You have a new address, or you are still there?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: We do have a new address. We are moving permanently into 22 Reed Street, and that space is actually just being renovated. We expect that it will be completed by June 30, 2025, and so we will move into our new permanent home in July of 2025.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Do you feel you will need additional resources to settle into your new office? Do you feel that the space is sufficient to support your full staff? And then how often is staff working in-person versus remotely?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Well, I would say actually now in the Law Department as well at 22 Reed Street, we have enough space to support all of our staff. We also currently have enough equipment to support all of our staff. We will need additional funding for new equipment as these lines come on board. We believe that the new space is going to have everything that we need. However, and I just want to put out there that because this is a new space and we have not had a baseline budget, we are working very closely with OMB to get to a point where we know how much it actually costs to run CORE. We are going to have to buy things like printers and scanners. We need to make sure that the desks are ADA compliant. We need to make sure that the exits are ADA compliant so we are expecting more moving costs when we go to 22 Reed Street. However, those will be one-time costs. And then I anticipate that a year at 22 Reed

will tell us what the baseline cost for CORE actually is.

With respect to staff schedules, all of our staff have hybrid schedules. They're able to work from home two days out of the week and they're in office three days out of the week. We have two staff members that have reasonable accommodations, and so they come into the office once a week. And our office is normally always full. I would say the only other exception may be our community engagement staff is actually always in community, which is really great. All staff are in the office on Wednesdays, and that's really our admin day, and it's a time for all the cross-functional teams to meet as well as for the senior leadership team to meet.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. You kind of answered this, but just to give you another opportunity, if anything was missed in your testimony, you mentioned launch costs, and so do you have an estimate of what those launch costs will be? I know you need to sort of wait until you understand the baseline cost for operations, but do you have a particular number for the launch costs?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: At this point, we don't have a number for the launch costs with respect to the space, but we are going to be building a CORE database system, and we're working closely with OTI and OMB. Right now, that is priced at approximately 208,000 dollars, but that is just an estimate as we work through what are all of the components of the system that we need so we are expecting to go back to OMB with that cost. We have spoken with them on numerous occasions and have filed that particular cost as a launch cost because we've never had a CORE database system. And as noted earlier, we're taking in data across City agencies and from Open Data, and so we need a structured system to do that.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you currently have any vacancies?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Well, we have one vacancy from our original staffing chart of 12, but that vacancy will be filled March 17th. That person is coming on board, and we're really excited. After that, we have the four lines that were just approved. Those job postings are going to start to go up within next week, and we stagger them because

1 hiring is a pretty involved process and we still are
2 a small team. So, our internship roles are going to
3 go up next week, and then shortly thereafter,
4 compliance and then our fiscal associate following.
5 So technically, I think in the reports, it will say
6 that those four lines are vacant, but they were just
7 approved.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Is CORE subject to
10 the 2-for-1 hiring freeze?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Yes. CORE is
12 subject to the 2-for-1 hiring freeze, and it is my
13 understanding that that freeze does not change
14 regardless of the size of the organization. I have
15 spoken to OMB about that freeze. It now applies to us
16 because we have grown past the original 12, and so
17 I've talked to them about what happens when a staff
18 member leaves. We're too small of a group to have a
19 vacancy, and OMB said that they're willing to work
20 with us. We would likely go through the justification
21 routes if anyone left and we needed to rehire for the
22 role.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. This is
24 my last question. You mentioned something as you were
25 answering another question around the fact that

people don't feel comfortable submitting something in writing because of a lot of things that are happening federally. This agency, the entire agency, is pretty much in direct conflict with what is happening at the federal government. How are you thinking about that? How are you adjusting to that? How are you putting any guardrails in place? How are you thinking about this as an agency?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: That's a great question. One, I think it's fair to say we are always thinking about this. Also, in the recent weeks, a lot of City agencies and staff across City agencies have asked me the same question, what is CORE going to do in this moment? We've remained steadfast in our mission. The federal laws that support equity are still in place. It is our job and it is our legal duty to support racial equity and social justice in government as public servants. We are very clear as a group of Commissioners, as a group of staff, what our role is, but I just want to uplift that it does have a social-emotional toll. It does have a psychological toll. As part of my responsibility, I also have to put in place opportunities and moments for the staff to debrief, to vent, to breathe, and to be re-

grounded. A few things that we do is now we do have break time on Wednesdays where we can sit down and breathe with each other. We're starting to do that with Commissioners, but this is brand new with them as well. We do stay abreast of the news. We do have conversations about them. We are talking through what is the CORE statement in this moment. Our work has not changed. Our social media postings have not changed. Our commitment to advancing this work in community has not changed. We're continuously going out, joining campaigns, joining events, and talking with folks. One thing that I've noticed is that there is a lot of confusion about what we can do as public servants and what may be legal or not legal. I just want to be very clear for the record. It is absolutely legal and a moral imperative to advance racial equity and social justice. We are in the right when we do that. That is our job. It is our mission and vision. We are moving forward.

What I also want to offer is that this is the time for government to step up their Work Well services, their EAP services, because of the toll that this takes on people. We have also provided some additional support, even in interviews, in screening

calls, so that candidates who want to do this work don't feel scared to tell us who they are and be excited about racial equity and social justice when they are applying for work at CORE. We also support our partners across City government by offering spaces, whether it's in one-on-one conversations or sometimes it's in the reparations conversation that we have, or the truth, healing, and reconciliation conversation, where we're bringing equity leaders across government and providing some space for them to be free, to be themselves, and to talk amongst each other.

Lastly, we are moving more towards conversations and less to RFI written comments. We do offer both, but we have noticed, and I would say a little bit before the election, and Maya can speak to a little bit of this, people were already concerned to tell us their identity on the form. We had a lot of missing or prefer not to answer because people were... our inference is that people were concerned to tell us how they identify according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and chronic disability. We are constantly putting out a message that says one, CORE is a safe space, two, we remain

steadfast in our work and our commitment to the public and our commitment to the city, to the law. We are trying to encourage people to be in that space with us, to be in community with us, so that we can build the coalitions that we need to move forward from this moment.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I just thought about another question. You mentioned the future process of truth and reconciliation and the fact that people might be reliving traumas. Have you put any thought into other types of folks who could provide therapy? How you unpack things, packaging it back in so people can walk out and not be reliving the trauma now after they've told a particular thing. Maybe some people are fine and they don't have that experience, but I'm just wondering how you were accounting for people's emotions in this very delicate conversation.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TIGANI: Thank you for that question. That came up also in one of the reparations Q and A. Most people in, at least in my field, I'm a trained social worker, and so people would say, we need social workers in the room, we need mental health counselors in the room, and absolutely, we do want to have that. We also need

religious leaders and spiritual leaders of all faiths and beliefs and practices, and that's part of what we want to do with the organizations because it's such a variation across communities. Part of what we want to see in the plan is what types of spiritual or faith leaders or mental health counselors do we want in the room. We are also thinking about what does that mean for the very first session. Even when you're not telling your story, but you're thinking about how to create a space for others to tell their story, whether you share or not, pain may come up, and it rests and lives in our body. We're also thinking about how do we integrate movement into these spaces. This is part of what we will be spending the 1 million dollars on is being able to contract and pull in not only organizations that want to lead the racial healing conversations, but organizations and collectives that can provide the support so that, and the way that I frame it is we are opening up wounds, like we're inviting people to, and they open up a wound, and that wound could have happened a day before, two days before, or two generations before, and they carry that, so what do we need to make you whole so that you can walk back out? And that's going

to look like everything from food, to childcare, to mental health, to spiritual health, to faith, but also it has to be continuous, and that is something that we're also looking into. What happens when they get home? Who can they call? Where can they go to? We have a lot of resources in New York City, and part of our planning is to be able to pull that together and create a little bit of a toolkit or a resource guide that says these thoughts are going to come up when you think you're laying down, when you're putting your head down, after you've had dinner, here's the number that you can call for support. We're really lucky in New York, and also in the nation, to have 9-8-8, which connects you to New York City, our New York City line, where you can talk directly to a mental health counselor, where you can get immediate services in over 200 languages, so we want to be able to leverage those resources so that we can spend our dollars on having support in the room and building out support in the communities that we're talking about.

I'll say lastly, when we talk about the hyper-local communities that are going to be doing this work, that have also experienced the greatest

disinvestments, intentional disinvestments, based on racial discrimination, language discrimination, citizenship discrimination, we are also talking about communities that are diverse in language, and also communities that may be considered as federally designated mental health shortage areas, and that's a very critical component of this conversation. We need to be able to find healers, faith leaders, social workers, and support that community says looks like them, and can support them, and that's one of our challenges that we're seeking to work through in this process.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you so much for your testimony. I look forward to continuing to work with CORE to advance the work that I really believe in. I appreciate all that you're doing with such limited resources and a political and moral climate that doesn't always feel supportive of the work that, again, I feel is so important for New Yorkers, so thank you so much.

Alrighty. I will now open the hearing for public testimony.

I want to remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding, and that

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

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

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

If you have written a statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

And with that, we will call the first panel. Cristobal, Mateo, Sara, and last but not least, Caroline.

Whoever wants to start, and I just want to acknowledge that I know we have a Commissioner of CORE also testifying, Mr. Cristobal, so I just want to acknowledge that you're here also and a Commissioner of CORE.

Commissioner, you start.

CRISTOBAL GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Well, good afternoon. My name is Cristobal Gutiérrez. I'm a Staff Attorney at Make the Road New York. I'm also a Commissioner of CORE. My testimony will verse mainly on increased funding for CCHR. We're a part of the New York City Human Rights Law Working Group, and we're asking for increased funding for CCHR, mainly because we cannot go, as of now if our clients are trans or non-binary, we cannot go to federal agencies. State agencies are inexistent, and if our clients are undocumented, we don't want them to go to a federal agency. And this is all in my testimony, we've heard how undocumented workers are being targeted at the Internal Revenue Services to get their information. We would never counsel our

undocumented or trans workers who were told that the EEOC told them that they were going to remove gender identity as a priority, and we can't just let them go to those federal agencies right now. So, the only solution that we have is the Commission on Human Rights, and the Commission on Human Rights, as we have testified many, many, many times, is extremely underfunded and understaffed. We have a case that I named in our testimony about a woman who was sexually assaulted by her employer nearly 10 years ago, and the Commission has still not found probable cause. (TIMER CHIME) So, with that, the asks and requests that we have for this Preliminary Budget are included in our testimony and in every one of the Working Group's testimony so you can read it from there.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I don't know if you heard CCHR's testimony earlier, but you know...

CRISTOBAL GUTIÉRREZ: I did not, but I heard that they did not ask for more funding, which is...

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No, and they did mention that they are hiring, I think, three attorneys will go to LEB, and two attorneys will go

to the Mediation Unit. I mean, their MMR shows a little bit improvement, but I guess from the advocacy side, what would you say would be ideal? Because sometimes in these hearings, especially with the agencies, we're like, oh, did you ask for more? But then, how much more do we think is suitable for them to actually do their job more robustly and to even take on more additional complaints? Because the numbers really might reflect an increase, considering everything else that's happening in the federal government.

CRISTOBAL GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, yeah. The numbers will only grow. We cannot go to the EEOC. The Department of Education has closed its Office of Civil Rights. Fair housing grants have been eliminated from the budget. The numbers will grow. That's not a question. We're asking for the Commission to be allocated 21 million. We're also requesting for them to be eliminated from PEG because they are a public safety agency. We're asking them to be excluded from the allotment process, two for one. We are also asking to increase the other-than-personal services, OTPS, funding so that they can do public service announcements to the public. As Make

the Road, and this is not as part of the Working Group, we are also asking for what Mateo will talk about, which is the transequity fund to fund it for 10 million because of the same scenarios that I've just described.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you. It's frustrating dealing with CCHR, but I appreciate it.

MATEO GUERRERO-TABARES: Good afternoon, Chair Williams and everybody in the space. My name is Mateo Guerrero, and I am a lead organizer with Make the Road New York, particularly with the Trans-Immigrant Project. On behalf of our 28,000 members and staff, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share concerns with Fiscal Year '26 budget and its impact particularly on trans, queer, and nonbinary immigrant New Yorkers. Make the Road believes firmly in safeguarding dignity and fairness across our communities, and over the years the Council has done so much to ensure that New York continues to be a city that welcomes all our communities regardless of their immigration status and genders. In the face of a horrifying anti-immigrant and transphobic attacks, our communities need the City Council support more

than ever before. The City must fortify rather than undermine the critical services and funding for our diverse communities and protect New Yorkers of all immigration statuses and genders. We ask the Council to use every available tool to reverse the Mayor's attacks on immigrants and working-class New Yorkers of color. Federal immigration informants must not be allowed to come into our city and terrorize our people. The services that organizations like us provide are essential. We help the most vulnerable New Yorkers stay healthy, access medical care, and reduce HIV, AIDS, and STI transmission. We organize immigrant communities to stand together against hate violence and organize for policies that bring real safety and not criminalization. These are some of the examples of the funding that we are requesting. One of them is the trans equity programs. We are requesting 20,000 for this initiative to support our trans immigrant project and develop the leadership of trans Latinx women in Corona, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, and Queens. We're also echoing the calls of our allies across the city that are demanding that the trans equity funding be expanded to 10 million so that (TIMER CHIME) more organizations that are trans-

led are also included in that funding initiative.

Support for persons involved in the sex trades. We're requesting a total of 110,000, 50,000 of that through the Speakers Initiative, from this initiative to support our work to provide know your rights training, outreach, and also provide information to communities who are in the sex trades. And as well as the Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative, we're requesting 35,000 to support our work to expand awareness about the rights, benefits, and community support available to sex workers in North Brooklyn while developing the leadership of our (INAUDIBLE) community members. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for protecting the vital services for trans immigrant communities that they depend on. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Do you know what the current budget is now?

MATEO GUERRERO-TABARES: For the trans funding?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MATEO GUERRERO-TABARES: I don't remember. I think it's shy of 3 million dollars, so we're asking that it gets expanded to 10.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

MATEO GUERRERO-TABARES: Thank you very much.

SARA MANAUGH: Good afternoon, Madam Chair. My name is Sara Manaugh. I'm the Director of Litigation at Brooklyn Legal Services, which is part of Legal Services New York City. Legal Services New York City, or LSNYC, is the nation's largest civil legal services provider with offices in all five boroughs. LSNYC works to protect the rights of people with disabilities, veterans, immigrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, and other vulnerable communities. We deeply appreciate the City Council's longstanding support for legal services and for its championship of our mission and our work.

Thanks in large part to the dedicated efforts of Members of this Body, the City Human Rights Law provides the most robust protections of any Human Rights Law in the country and exceeds in many ways the scope of anti-discrimination protections in the state and federal law. When the Commission is working well, it provides critical assistance in enforcing the City Human Rights Law for New Yorkers who have experienced discrimination and

abuse at the hands of employers and landlords. The Commission's investigatory powers, authority to enforce the law, and skilled mediators can be powerful tools on the side of defending the rights of New Yorkers to be free from unlawful discrimination. This is crucial in our efforts to represent our clients, but it's also vital to people who lack legal counsel but who can nevertheless invoke the Commission's process to seek and obtain redress for unlawful conduct. The Commission is a vital resource for our clients such as Mix M, a non-binary transgender teacher whom we represented in the Commission in a discrimination complaint filed in early 2022. Mix M taught high school history and film at a girls' charter school in Brooklyn from 2019 until their termination in May 2021. During their employment, Mix M was harassed, retaliated against, and ultimately terminated in their efforts to advocate for proper pronoun usage, not for themselves but for non-binary transgender students at the school. When Mix M requested permission to make an announcement regarding one student's pronouns (TIMER CHIME) at a staff meeting, the head of school rejected this proposal and instead forced the student

to attend counseling and then to make a presentation to the entire school about gender. Cutting this anecdote short, I will say we filed Mix M's complaint at the Commission in early 2022 and met to mediation in November 2023. And thanks in large part to the work of the Commission's mediator, the case was ultimately settled with Mix M receiving a fair monetary settlement. Those kinds of outcomes are increasingly rare because the complaints now can expect to wait almost three years for a resolution and with only one mediator on staff, less than 1 percent of complainants were able to have their cases mediated. By contrast, the EEOC mediates about 10 percent of its cases. Needless to say, with the EEOC and FHEO less willing or able to protect transgender, gender nonconforming, and immigrant New Yorkers against discrimination, the Commission's work will be more essential than ever. I realize my time is up, but I'll be submitting my testimony. Thank you very much for the time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

CAROLINE BLANTON: Good afternoon, Chair Williams and Committee Members. My name is Caroline Blanton, and I am a clinician at the New York Anti-

Violence Project, or AVP. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and I want to thank the Council for your continued support of AVP's work as the only organization in New York City that provides LGBTQ+ specific victim services. For over 40 years, AVP has offered free and confidential mental health counseling, advocacy, and legal services to LGBTQ+ and HIV affected survivors of violence, as well as operating in a 24-hour crisis hotline.

Right now, AVP's clients are under attack. The current administration is explicitly targeting the communities that AVP serves and the federal funding that we receive. Amidst rising hate violence, political polarization, economic instability, and social isolation, our clients are struggling to find hope for the future. Where do you turn when those in power question your right to exist? For many of our clients, the answer is AVP. I received an email recently from a former client of mine, a 59-year-old transgender woman who sought counseling at AVP after experiencing hate violence last summer. When we first met, she could barely leave her house due to the severity of her PTSD symptoms. Over the next six months, we worked

together in weekly counseling sessions to process the trauma she experienced and restore her sense of inner safety in a world that is increasingly unsafe for her. She told me early on that her lifelong dream was to take a cross-country train trip. When we ended counseling in December, she resolved to embark on that trip before the current administration came into office. A month later, I had the joy of reading an email from her with photos from her journey and a few words I'd like to share with you all today.

Caroline, you can take some hope from me today. I took a solo trip as a transgender woman across the country and back. I haven't enjoyed myself that much in years. This world is not safe, but I'm (TIMER CHIME) glad you're in it. I'm strong today, and you helped me so much to get back to this place. I'm very grateful.

Committee Members, I'm asking you today to give AVP the gift of saying yes, of telling a caller on our hotline that we can help them, that our services are available and free and not going anywhere, despite the instability all around us. We can't do that without each of you and your ongoing support. Increasing the City funding AVP receives

will serve as a powerful line of defense to ensure that AVP can continue providing the life-saving services our clients so deeply need and deserve. Thank you for listening to my testimony today.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thanks for being here. I'll call the next panel. Thank you.

Next up, I'll call Hilary, Stephen, Jonathan, and Reggie. And thank you all for being here. I see faces that have been here since this morning so thank you for your patience.

Anyone can begin. I said anyone can begin.

HILARY WILSON: Thank you, Chair Williams and Committee Members, for this opportunity to testify. My name is Hilary Wilson, and I'm a Senior Policy Analyst of the Community Service Society of New York, or CSS, which uses research, advocacy, and direct services to increase economic opportunity for low-income New Yorkers.

CSS has long championed policies that expand access to affordable housing and promote fairness in the labor market. The success of these policies depends on robust enforcement by CCHR. So today, we from CSS urge the City Council and the City

Administration to adequately fund and staff the Commission at levels necessary to achieve effective and efficient enforcement. CSS, along with its partners, has been at the forefront of the fight to expand the City's primary voucher program, CityFHEPS. In 2024, the program helped 13,400 voucher holders find permanent housing. However, voucher holders continue to be illegally denied leases by landlords and real estate agents who are disinclined to have tenants pay rent using vouchers. This phenomenon, known as Source of Income Discrimination, or SOI, is illegal and punishable in the city, and yet it thrives, as we show in an in-depth report published jointly with UnlockNYC. CCHR is responsible for combating SOI discrimination, and while we applaud the Administration for proposing an increase in the agency's budget for FY 2026, the proposed staffing level is well below what it was before the pandemic. This is particularly concerning given the expansion of the CityFHEPS program over the past few years. Moreover, by short-staffing CCHR, the City is actually not saving money. Instead, it is paying multiple times more in prolonged shelter stays and homeless assistance services for voucher holders

encountering SOI discrimination. CSS also fought to pass the City's Salary Range Transparency Law. Since it went into effect in 2022, compliance with the law has been almost universal, in part thanks to the enforcement (TIMER CHIME) actions of the Commission. However, inquiries to the Commission have increased, while the number of complaints closed or mediated has declined. And I'll close. CSS is now advocating for amendments included in Intro. 808, which would strengthen the Salary Range Transparency Law and ensure all New Yorkers are paid fairly. Their successful implementation will require that CCHR is sufficiently resourced.

To conclude, at a time when our human rights are imperiled, when our civil liberties are at stake, the City needs to show its commitment to upholding the rule of law by fully and adequately funding CCHR. And I'll submit written testimony online. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What did you say needed to be amended? I don't see that in the testimony.

HILARY WILSON: Sorry?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You said something
needed to be amended?

HILARY WILSON: The Salary Range
Transparency Law, and I...

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I don't see it. I
don't see it in your testimony. Do you have a written
testimony from us? I didn't hand you one.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. Stephen's
testimony. Got it.

STEPHEN DUNN: I don't think Hilary knows
that we actually work together yet, so...

HILARY WILSON: Oh. Hi.

STEPHEN DUNN: Hi.

HILARY WILSON: It's a large organization.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah. I was
like...

HILARY WILSON: And I'm new.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It says CSS. I did
not look at the name. It would be great if you could
submit testimony or just email me, because I don't
know what you said in terms of the amendment.

HILARY WILSON: Okay. After this meeting,
I will.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

STEPHEN DUNN: Good afternoon. My name is Stephen Dunn. I'm a Senior Staff Attorney at CSS. So, I work in the legal department, so we're coming to the ask for an increased CCHR from a slightly different angle, okay? Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify here today. Over its 180 years, CSS has powered a more equitable New York with a unique combination of research, policy, advocacy, and direct services to support low- and moderate-income people who are the main beneficiaries of an effective CCHR. With a robust and predictable budget, CCHR can effectively enforce the rights of the low-income New Yorkers we both serve. It can move faster than the court system but award the same monetary damages. It can also assess civil penalties, which go directly to the City's general fund, and it can mandate policy changes and remedial actions that are difficult to achieve in court. Finally, it can issue policy guidance and make rules that can change industry practice without filing any complaints at all.

The work that I do is I work exclusively with folks with conviction records, and so the Commission is vital to protecting the rights of the

817,000 New York City residents with conviction records. Protecting against discrimination in employment and in housing is how we all work to drive down recidivism. And so we're here to echo the calls that have been made by others to increase the funding to CCHR to 21 million dollars. This level of funding should be ongoing to both rebuild capacity and to plan for the future. As the Commissioner stated, they can do more with more. Increased funding is not all, though. I mean, we also believe that the Law Enforcement Bureau, because it is revenue-generating, should be exempt from OMB cuts, and the Council should continue oversight of the way OMB makes it difficult to hire people willing to accept below-market wages to work at CCHR.

And so I'll just end by noting that with rollbacks to worker and civil rights protections across the federal government, it is more important than ever that New York City maintains an (TIMER CHIME) effective Commission on Human Rights. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Is CSS a part of the Human Rights Law Working Law Group?

STEPHEN DUNN: It is, yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, good.

REGGIE CHATMAN: Thank you, Chair Williams and Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Reggie Chatman, I'm the Director of Policy at the Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. One policy we've put a great deal of effort into is the Fair Chance for Housing Act, which prevents housing providers from denying people with certain criminal convictions access to housing. I'm also a formerly incarcerated person who spent 25 years in prison, and so as with many other people, my conviction record made it difficult for me to find housing. And so my lived experience and professional experience in respect to this issue gave me a great deal of insight. The City Council's previous perspectives and passing of the Fair Chance for Housing Act was a great first step. However, in order for the law to provide true protection, the Commission on Human Rights, who is responsible for enforcing the law, must receive adequate funding. If it is unable to do so, this will have adverse impacts in respect to several issues, two of which are public health and overall human rights. Council, housing

security is a public health issue and a social determinant of health. Research shows that without it, individuals experience high rates of chronic illnesses, mental health challenges, and substance use disorders, all of which place an undue burden on our healthcare and social service systems. The need to strengthen local Human Rights Laws is more important than ever. Under the new administration, the federal government has dismantled several critical civil rights protections, particularly those related to fair housing and racial equity. This has left millions of New Yorkers vulnerable to discrimination, thus the Commission on Human Rights is the only line of defense that they have left. Given this reality, the City cannot afford to underfund its own civil rights enforcement agency. If the City Council increases the Commission's budget, it will be able to conduct public education campaigns and community outreach to ensure that vulnerable populations understand the legal protections and that housing providers understand their legal obligations and responsibilities. And so the Fortune Society urges the Council to increase the Commission's overall budget and exempt it from any budget cuts or

hiring freezes. (TIMER CHIME) In conclusion, expanding the Commission's budget will allow it to enforce civil rights, invest in the communities, which is essential for more equitable, just, and safe New York City. Thank you for allowing me to testify.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

JONATHAN EBER: Good afternoon. My name is Jonathan Eber. I'm a Program Officer at Enterprise Community Partners. We are an affordable housing non-profit nationwide, but I do state and local policy work in New York. Thank you, Chair Williams, for the opportunity to testify today.

I join members of the Human Rights Law Working Group in calling for the Council to allocate at least 21 million in this session to CCHR. A well-funded CCHR is really crucial to fulfilling New York's commitment to fair housing in New York. In 2019, Enterprise co-led a coalition to ban SOI discrimination statewide, and in New York City, those laws have been on the books for even longer than that, and yet it's still a very pervasive issue. It's the second most common complaint type reported by CCHR. Vouchers are really meant to give New Yorkers affordable housing choices and reduce segregation in

New York, but they are failing to do so because of SOI discrimination. Recent analysis by City Limits found that CityFHEPS voucher holders are overwhelmingly concentrated in just a handful of zip codes, and that the top 10 zip codes for voucher holders all had a median income below 40,000 dollars. Additional analysis by the NYU Furman Center found that in 2022, only 53 percent of NYCHA Section 8 voucher holders found housing within the allotted 180 days, which also just suggests discrimination as a major barrier. It's a really crucial time. Executive actions in Washington are already rolling back fair housing protections, including HUD's AFFH rule, and they've slashed the Fair Housing Initiatives Program, which provides non-profits doing supplemental work to CCHR's anti-discrimination work, cut those budgets. It all speaks to the need for adequate and robust enforcement. 21 million dollars will help bring staffing levels back to pre-pandemic levels, and will also help invest in the mediation program at CCHR, which can help quickly reduce the backlog of cases. (TIMER CHIME) We also call for greater reporting transparency, and that the Council exempt CCHR from future PEGs and the two-for-one allotment process,

similar to other public safety agencies. Thanks very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I just have one request, that you, in your efforts, also speak to my Colleagues, and I know, hopefully, I'll have a meeting with the Human Rights Working Law Group soon to just talk about strategy, because one thing I noticed about CCHR, because it's such a small agency, and I don't think people always associate, like, when we pass these laws that an agency then has to implement the law, I don't always feel widespread support by my Colleagues for CCHR, and I have to always, like, drag them, kicking and screaming, and not because they don't care. I think Members have their priorities, and so whether they care about immigration or criminal justice or housing, like, being able to connect that particular issue to the proactive and reactive ways that CCHR can be of support, especially in this moment, is important so this is just a plea for you to help me get the message across, because I think we did a better job last fiscal cycle getting Members to understand the connective tissue, but I think, you know, collectively, me, you, could always do better at

allowing... not allowing, do better at proactively engaging Members so they understand the implications. Again, I don't know if you were here when CCHR spoke, but with fair housing in comparison to what they did around fair hiring, essentially, they had all of these ads and things, they essentially said they're not going to have subway ads. They said they will have a public campaign apparatus, but that they did not confirm that they're going to have ads on subways, which to me, not to say comparing apples to apples, but at the same time, if you're not even going to have ads in a place where millions of people travel, like, I also question their ability to provide robust public education around new protections under the law, specifically in housing, so you talking about housing made me think about that, so I don't know if you heard them say that, but I, you know, LEB is one, but the public education is important, too, and I don't think that they have budgeted appropriately to push out information around fair housing, and groups that deal with folks who are formerly incarcerated, people who really care about affordable housing opportunities really should be raising the alarm about that, because the worst thing

that I see a lot of times is that people don't even know that these protections exist, and for the people that know, when they complain, you know, you all have been testifying, there's long waits, and a bunch of other challenges, so that's my homework and request for you all, and thank you so much for your patience and being here today, and look forward to working with you.

All right. Next up, Edwin, Christopher, and Sharon.

Chris, you want to start? Yeah, go ahead.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thank you, Chair Williams, for hosting this hearing today, preliminary hearing. Like, this is my third time saying it, I know there's, like, a broken record, but I want, since this is about human rights, with the deliveristas getting racially profiled by the NYPD, I am calling on you to support Chair Avilés and Chair Brannan, I know you're a Chair of this Committee for supporting deliveristas with intro in the State Senate, former State Senator Iwen Chu, S9924A, that will make it a class E felony for anybody to assault a deliverista. I know that this is about human

rights. When you assault somebody, that's part of human rights, being against human rights. Nobody has the right to be assaulted by anybody, especially when they're delivering food to people, and delivering pills, let's make that clear. Like I said before yesterday, that 4 million dollars should be allocated to two non-profits, La Colmena, that's based in Staten Island, and the Worker Justice Project, that's based in Brooklyn. And one more thing I have to say is that, you know, the City Council needs to start really checking the Mayor, Eric Adams, and start calling out the Immigration Commissioner. I know you're the Human Rights Commissioner. You should invite out the Immigration Commissioner, or Mr. Manny Castro, and call them out as the Chair for him not saying anything about why he couldn't criticize Trump for his immigration policies. I understand there's a crime problem in the City of New York, but just because a certain small percentage of people committing other crimes that are migrants doesn't mean that all migrants are bad, you know, but, I mean, you should have got the Immigration Commissioner to come (TIMER CHIME) and speak on like why he didn't, bash... why he can't bash Trump, you

know what I'm saying, so basically that's all I gotta say, and thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

EDWIN SANTANA: Hello. Good day, Madam

Chairperson, and my name is Edwin Santana. I am a

Community Organizer for Freedom Agenda. I am also a

formerly incarcerated individual, but most of all, I

am a human being. I am also here to tell you that New

Yorkers, more than ever, need our rights protected.

I'm speaking specifically on granting increased

funding for the City Commission on Human Rights. I

applaud the City Council for stepping up and passing

their Fair Chance for Housing Law last year, but

there is much work to be done. Implementation of this

law requires CCHR to put in a lot of work, and that

work requires funding. Fair Chance for Housing will

only be effective if CCHR can educate the public

about it, like you said earlier. CCHR is charged with

enforcing our Human Rights Laws, but also with

preventing discrimination, which means conducting

education and outreach to inform people of their

rights and responsibilities under our New York City

Human Rights Laws. Unfortunately, CCHR lacks

resources to conduct this type of education and

1 outreach. As a community organizer for the past six
2 years, I can honestly say that education about
3 anything is very important. In this world of
4 confusion and misguidance, we need to educate New
5 Yorkers on every aspect of Fair Chance for Housing. I
6 cannot stress the importance of stable housing in
7 this city. You all know this, and as the chant goes,
8 housing is a human right. Unfortunately, those who
9 are formerly incarcerated know that it is even harder
10 to get your life together when you are being
11 discriminated against. Thanks to CCHR, we can now
12 hold accountable those individuals who dare to
13 discriminate. However, CCHR is not conducting any
14 sort of public education campaign about the law
15 because they need to have more resources to do so.
16 The effectiveness in this law doesn't work unless
17 everyone knows about it, and that includes awareness
18 for sellers and renters. Housing providers will
19 ultimately violate this law and risk fines simply
20 because (TIMER CHIME) they do not know about it. CCHR
21 is underfunded compared to similar agencies in
22 smaller cities. This is true for years. Budgets, as
23 we know, are value statements. We truly value civil
24 rights and human rights, then the CCHR must have a
25

budget of at least 21 million dollars as well as to be exempt from PEGs because it provides essential services that are now completely lacking at the federal level. By removing barriers to housing, people are better able to support themselves and their family, lowering recidivism and making our communities safer. Research shows that finding housing is a key to stabilizing lives and reducing recidivism. Let's do the right thing here and give the CCHR the funding they crucially need to protect the rights of all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for being here. I know Cristobal is still here. I don't know if you're like in the coalition. You should definitely touch bases. I think the more organizations that are part of a coalition like pushing to support CCHR, the better, so you should definitely connect with him after to connect, and there are some upcoming actions that they want to do. Thank you for being here and for your testimony.

SHARON BROWN: Hello. My name is Sharon Brown. Before I start, remember Israel, defend Israel, release the hostages, let Yahweh's people go.

Okay, first and foremost, the homeless, military veterans and regular homeless, they need to get street-to-housing, or wherever they are unhoused, they need to get into housing. There should be funding for housing. All the programs that they're speaking about, it does not get people directly off the streets into housing. We need that now. They need full transportation. They need dignity, housing for all, dignity for all. We are killing our tourist industry if we don't have bathrooms for everyone, bathrooms for all. People have to go inside of somewhere to purchase something if they want to use a bathroom. That's going to scare away the tourists. We're losing dollars because we're being inhumane. If we don't give the person on the street a bathroom that's homeless, why would a tourist want to buy from us when they have to step over someone and then they also have to pay in order to use the bathroom? It's inhumane. Bathrooms for all. We need to fund Jewish organizations to help fight anti-Semitism. We need to make sure that they are safe in the city, and when we are safe here in the city, then it will reverberate around the world because this is the capital of the world. We can handle issues that will be a beacon

light to everyone around the world. We need to rent enough housing for the number of homeless people that we have. If people go out on the street or they go to shelters or wherever and they have an overall count of how many people they see are homeless, they need to (TIMER CHIME) rent apartments for them, give them keys, put them in there, and then let them come and go as they please instead of funding shelters that keep them there for years on end and never fix anything. Street to housing, please.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much for your testimony, and I hope you all enjoy the rest of your day.

SHARON BROWN: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Oh, Rebekah is here. Hey, Rebecca, you can go if you're still on Zoom.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

REBEKAH COOK-MACK: Hello. Wait. Let me see if I can get my video to work. Hi.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Hey.

REBEKAH COOK-MACK: Thank you so much for the opportunity to present this testimony. I'm Rebekah Cook-Mack. I'm a Staff Attorney in the

Employment Law Unit of Legal Aid Society, and a member of the Human Rights Law Working Group. Last year, advocates, including Legal Aid, testified that disinvestment in the Commission on Human Rights had created a crisis. We explained that due to understaffing and lengthy delays in processing times, it no longer served the needs of New Yorkers. Unfortunately, City Hall did not heed our warnings. Council prioritized the Commission in its budget response, but it has remained underfunded, even as its obligations have grown and its importance has increased. So, thank you very much for the work that goes into today's marathon hearing. We agree with Commissioner Palma. CCHR is much more important now than ever before, and we share your position that more proactive work is critical. We need to prevent problems and proactively improve the lives of all New Yorkers, and funding is necessary to achieving these goals. Unfortunately, today, CCHR remains catastrophically underfunded. The lack of funding is particularly harmful given the federal government's withdrawal from the field, as you've heard. For transgender and undocumented New Yorkers, federal partners are no longer viable avenues for protecting

their rights. And for these New Yorkers, the City Commission, which enforces a broad array of laws, more protective than state and federal counterparts, has become an indispensable partner. Source of income discrimination remains rampant in our city, and complainants wait years with long delays at the Commission. So, we're asking the City, we're asking the Mayor to fund CCHR at 21 million to ensure its Office of Mediation and Conflict Resolution can provide fast and meaningful relief to New Yorkers, and to provide CCHR with the resources necessary to work through its caseload, decide cases on the merits, and prepare for the (TIMER CHIME) possibility of an influx of cases due to changes at the federal level.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Time's expired.

REBEKAH COOK-MACK: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you have anything else to add, Rebekah, or are you good?

REBEKAH COOK-MACK: I mean, I would just want to just finish with this. You know, we are behind, right? We should not be where we are. We should have funded CCHR last year, but it is not yet

too late for New York City to take decisive steps to protect vulnerable populations that have already been targeted by the federal administration. And so, you know, the City should fund the Commission at the level commensurate with its heightened import immediately, and we look forward to working with you and other Council Members to make sure that it's, you know, the sort of key juncture that CCHR sits at is clear to everyone, right? Not funding it is really a disservice to all New Yorkers, and we look forward to working together on this. Thank you so much for today. A lot of work. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Amy.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

AMY BLUMSACK: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify. Neighbors Together has worked with voucher holders for many years now. We have done years' worth of Know-Your-Rights trainings for voucher holders on the source of income discrimination and how to report it, on how to find housing with your voucher, and we also run an entire campaign creative for and by voucher holders to improve vouchers and end source of income

discrimination. CCHR has played a critical role in our work over the years. As you know, source of income discrimination is rampant, and CCHR is the only government entity that enforces against discrimination on behalf of the individual who is discriminated against. CCHR has key tools for helping voucher holders. Their pre-complaint intervention is critical. It is the primary way that our members get housed, our members with vouchers get housed, and being housed increases our members' ability to then engage in formal litigation. The set-aside program that CCHR runs is also one of the top ways that we get our members housed, and in addition to being housed, which is a top priority for our members, obviously, our members feel that it's really critical that civil penalties be enforced for bad actors, right? For corporate landlords, those small civil penalties are not enough. It's just the cost of doing business, so we really want to see the amount of civil fines be commensurate with the size of the landlord, similar to the really wonderful and large Parkchester settlement that CCHR mentioned. While we have seen improvements in CCHR's responsiveness since they were able to staff up a little bit more since

last year's budget hearing, we are still seeing that the wait times for formal complaint resolutions is very, very long, and we know that their agency is deeply underfunded and understaffed. They do really important work, and now, more than ever, their work is needed given the current federal climate and the attack on people's rights. So, our ask, the same as many others in the Human Rights Law Working Group, we want to see the FY26 budget increased to 21 million. We need pre-pandemic staffing levels at least. We need an array of staff attorneys supporting staff, increased mediation team, we need increased OTPS funding, and we also need CCHR to be exempt from PEGs, hiring freezes, the two-to-one allotment process, and they also should be allowed to hire at the top of the salary range. Their salaries are not on par with going rates, and so they're really being put at an unfair disadvantage when trying to bring in and retain talented people. Yeah, I mean, I think this is a very, as we know, dangerous and critical time, and now, more than ever, the people of New York need CCHR's protection, and so the City should fund them in a way that respects and honors the critical role that they play in protecting New Yorkers. Thank

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2 you for your time. Thank you for your attention, and
3 thank you for leading this very long and thorough
4 budget hearing.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much.

6 And with that, this hearing is done. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 24, 2025