

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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February 25, 2015
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room
14th Floor

B E F O R E: COREY D. JOHNSON
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Rosie Mendez
Mathieu Eugene
Peter A. Koo
James G. Van Bramer
Inez D. Barron
Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.

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

Daniel Kass
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Environmental Health (DOHMH)

Mario Merlino
Assistant Commissioner
Division of Environmental Health
Veterinary Services
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)

Risa Weinstock
Executive Director and General Counsel
Animal Care and Control of New York City (AC&C)

Thomas Lucania
Director
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Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr.

Matthew Bershadker
President and CEO
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
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Gail Buchwald
Senior Vice President
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Jane Hoffman
Mayor's Alliance for New York City Animals

Allie Feldman
Director
NYCLASS

Garó Alexanian

Esther Koslow
Reform Action Committee

Natalie Reeves
Founder
Big Apple Bunnies

2 [sound check]

3 [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Good morning,
5 everyone. I am Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair
6 of the Council's Committee on Health. I want to
7 thank my good friend and colleague, Council Member
8 Paul Vallone for his leadership on this issue, and in
9 sponsoring the legislation that we are hearing today
10 requiring that full-service shelter be maintained in
11 each borough New York City. And I'm a proud co-
12 sponsor of this legislation. In New York City the
13 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, DOHMH,
14 provides animal care services through a contract with
15 the non-profit organization Animal Care and Control,
16 AC&C.

17 In 2000, the City Council passed Local
18 Law 26, the Animal Shelters and Sterilization Act,
19 which required that a full-service animal shelter
20 exists in each of our five boroughs. [coughs]
21 Excuse me. After a decade of non-compliance and
22 litigation with a non-profit vol--with a non-profit
23 volunteer organization, the Bloomberg Administration,
24 and the New York City Council came to an agreement in
25 2011 to repeal the requirement that there be full-

2 service animal shelters in every borough. And
3 instead, focused on improving the existing shelter
4 system. As part of this agreement, the Bloomberg
5 Administration committed to increase its investment
6 in animal shelters by near \$10 million over three
7 years to greatly improve the quality of care for
8 animals at our city shelters.

9 This increased funding has served to
10 drastically increase staff, improve adoptions,
11 provide much needed veterinary service, and expand
12 rescue response and transport services. [clears
13 throat] As part of these recent reforms, AC&C has
14 grown and strengthens its executive staff under the
15 leadership of its Executive Director Lisa Weinstock.
16 I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge Risa, and
17 the amazing work that she's done to breathe new life
18 into the AC&C and bring a real vision to the
19 organization. AC&C's Board of Directors has expanded
20 as part of its 2011 agreement, and just last month,
21 DOHMH and AC&C announced that two members will be
22 added who will be selected by the board bringing the
23 total number to 11. However, a large majority of the
24 board members are either part of the Administration

2 or appointed by the Mayor. And I would encourage
3 continued strides towards independence at AC&C.

4 A brand new Staten Island shelter is
5 scheduled to open this year, which is great news.
6 There was also an announcement last month that the
7 City will provide more than \$8 million in capital
8 funding to build a new adoption center at the
9 Manhattan facility at 110th Street; modernize the
10 Brooklyn facility; double the organization's current
11 fleet of mobile adoption vans; and expand AC&C's
12 fundraising capacity. Building on the garage space
13 adjacent to the Manhattan shelter is common sense
14 solution that advocates and I have been campaigning
15 for, and I'm excited to see this move forward.

16 [clears throat] While the mobile adoption centers
17 dedicated to the Bronx and Queens is welcome news,
18 they obviously do not come close to the services
19 provided at a full-service shelter.

20 In 2011, the Administration committed to
21 pursuing a new animal receiving facility in Queens.
22 Unfortunately, almost four years later, a new Queens
23 site has still not been acquired. Overall, AC&C has
24 transformed over the last few years, and while I
25 applaud the drastic improvements to services and

2 facilities, we must ask ourselves if we have come far
3 enough. How can we ensure that the Bronx and Queens
4 residents are receiving the animal care services they
5 need, and promises for a new Queens facility are
6 fulfilled? We at the Council must remain vigilant,
7 and ensure that the full-service shelters have
8 adequate capacity, that their receiving centers are
9 efficient and functional, and most importantly, that
10 our animals are receiving the quality care that they
11 deserve.

12 Today, we want to hear from DOHMH and
13 AC&C as well as the advocacy community about recent
14 progress, and what we can do moving forward to ensure
15 that our four-legged friends, pets, and animals are
16 getting the care that they deserve. Before I
17 acknowledge the important folks that helped make
18 today's hearing possible, I want to say that I do
19 think the \$8 million is a really big deal. And I am
20 incredibly grateful that the Department of Health and
21 Mental Hygiene and the Administration have taken this
22 incredibly important step. I am very proud at the
23 work we've done in 14 months in this committee and
24 the work that the Administration has done in moving
25 the ball forward to make our city more humane, and to

2 treat animals better. But, I still believe that that
3 \$8 million is just a first step, and it's mind-
4 boggling to me that in 2015 there is not a full-
5 service shelter in every borough. It's like hard to-
6 -it's hard to believe that, and that is why we are
7 having this hearing today. It is my core belief that
8 we need full-service, fully functioning, state-of-
9 the-art facilities in all five boroughs.

10 I want to acknowledge my colleagues in
11 the Health Committee, who have joined us, Council
12 Member Arroyo, Council Member Mendez. I also want to
13 thank my Legislative Director, Louis Cholden Brown;
14 Health Committee Counsel Dan Hafetz; Policy Analyst
15 for the Health Committee, Crystal Pond; Crilhien
16 Francisco the Finance Analyst for the Health
17 Committee; and Jeff Campagna, who is here somewhere
18 behind the wall I think. The Legislative Counsel
19 working on animal issues and Jeff has been amazing
20 and the team has been amazing on all of these issues
21 for their work in preparing for today's hearing. And
22 now, I want to turn it over to my friend and
23 colleague who I said it earlier today, but it's
24 important to say again [coughs]. For the past 14
25 months every time I see Paul Vallone he has said,

2 When are we hearing this bill, and when are we
3 getting this done? And his family has a long, deep
4 and rich tradition for championing the cause of
5 animals in New York City. So I'm very grateful to
6 work alongside him, and to join with him in having
7 this hearing today. Council Member Paul Vallone.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
9 Johnson, and I'm going to take you home so you can
10 say all those same statements to my family at home,
11 if you could. This is something that we're all very
12 passionate about. The people that are in this room,
13 the folks who have been fighting this battle long
14 before we've been here. And Jane, I see smiling, as
15 is all the different groups that are out there. So
16 it is really our duty to see this through, and I
17 think having the greatest city in the world deserves
18 the greatest shelters in the world. So that we can
19 be the leading example for everyone else, as we are
20 in everything. So to look at 2015 and say we don't
21 have a shelter in Queens and Bronx. I mean I don't
22 even have a receiving center, if you want to call it
23 that. It's just not right. And you look at the
24 children in the schools, and they say what can we do
25 to help? And you don't have that place to show, to

2 be an anchor. I mean the kids in Queens are not
3 going to go into Manhattan, and they're not going to
4 do that. So it's our responsibility to take that
5 step forward and the \$8 million and the
6 Administration and the leadership under Corey Johnson
7 and he's chairing this great committee. Thank you
8 for allowing me to sit in today on this great
9 committee. Sometimes the council members don't get a
10 chance to get out of their committees and join in on
11 other committees. So it's exciting to be here today
12 with this committee.

13 We are going to fight for this, and we're
14 going to stand united, and we're going to--it's not
15 going to be something where it's a--it's a radical
16 movement. It's not that. It's the core and central
17 to what we should be doing, and every borough should
18 be treated the same, have the same services, and our
19 animals should be treated with respect. And give
20 everyone the opportunity to find a home to get there.
21 So this hearing is going to at that. And we looking
22 forward to looking at all of the advances that AC&C
23 has done. And Risa, I thank you for my tour
24 yesterday and I'm very-- We're going to have that
25 fight for Santiago to get a home. If not, he will

2 probably wind up at my door. My daughter is already
3 saying, Dad, go grab Santiago. So we may have another
4 animal--

5 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] And
6 Santiago is a--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --joining my
8 house.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Santiago is a cat,
10 right.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, Santiago
12 is a cat. [laughs] That's another hearing.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: We want to make
14 sure it's on the record for your wife.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's--yes, she
16 would--I would thank you for recording that on.
17 [laughs] But we are definitely a family of
18 advocates. So I thank you. I look forward to
19 today's hearing, and I guess we start our first
20 panel, right? thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Council
22 Member Vallone. I also want to acknowledge the
23 advocacy community and the volunteer rescue and
24 adoption organizations. You all have been critical,
25 and a necessary partner in our city shelter system.

2 And without your dedicated and incredible work, many
3 of the improvements that we're talking about would
4 simply not be possible. So your partnership and
5 collaboration is really just a cornerstone of the
6 work that we do, and that we're talking about today.
7 So with that, I'm going to call up our first panel
8 and it's going to be two folks from the Department of
9 Health and Mental Hygiene, Daniel Kass, the Deputy
10 Commissioner for the Division of Environmental Health
11 at DOHMH and Mario Merlino, the Assistant
12 Commissioner of the Division of Environmental Health
13 at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.
14 [clears throat] I'm going to turn it over to you
15 guys. Thank you for being here today. I look
16 forward to hearing your testimony.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Thank you for
18 having us. I look forward to it as well. I'm--I'm
19 Dan Kass. I'm--as you said, I'm the Deputy
20 Commissioner for Environmental Health and--

21 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] Oh, I
22 forgot to swear you in.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Oh.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: I know you're
25 honest, Dan, but I still have to swear you in.

2 [laughter] Both of you. Do you affirm to tell the
3 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
4 your testimony before this committee, and to respond
5 honestly to council member questions?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Yes.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: Yes.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: So, once
9 again, I'm Dan Kass. I'm the Deputy Commissioner for
10 the Division of Environmental Health and I'm joined
11 to my left by Mario Merlino, who's the Department's
12 Assistant Commission overseeing Veterinary Health.
13 Thank you, Chairman Johnson, and members of the
14 Health Committee. On behalf of Commissioner Bassett,
15 I'm happy to testify today. As you know, the
16 Department has testified before the Council on a
17 number of animal welfare issues. We testified in
18 support of Local Law 5, which requires pet shops that
19 sell dogs and cats to obtain a permit from the
20 Department. That law also directs our agency to
21 enforce provisions related to animal welfare, the
22 sourcing of animals and the conditions for their
23 sale. We're currently in the process of developing
24 rules related to the permitting and enforcement
25 provisions of that legislation.

2 In addition, we testified before the
3 committee on state and federal legislation on a bill
4 that would empower New York City to set it's own dog
5 licensing fees. I want to thank the Council for he
6 Home Rule message that was delivered to Albany in
7 support of that effort. And I'm pleased to report
8 that the State legislation was signed into law in
9 December. We now look forward to partnering with the
10 Council on a legislation that will enhance dog
11 licensing efforts. Recent collaborations between the
12 Department and the Council include establishing the
13 Animal Population Control Fund, which disburses
14 monies collected from the licensing of unsterilized
15 dogs to support free spay and neuter services for
16 dogs and cats for low-income New Yorkers.

17 Thank you, Chairman Johnson and thank you
18 to all the members of this committee for the work on
19 these initiatives. The Health Department oversees
20 the Animal Sheltering system, which is administered
21 by our contractor Animal Care & Control of New York
22 City or AC&C. AC&C provides Field Rescue Services,
23 and accepts care for--cares for and temporarily
24 shelters abandoned and unwanted animals before
25 finding them permanent homes. AC&C runs the only

2 open admission shelter in New York City, which means
3 that it never turns away any animal that is abandoned
4 or stray. AC&C receives more than 30,000 cats, dogs,
5 rabbits, small animals, reptiles, birds, farm and
6 wild animals each year. It is the only organization
7 in New York City trusted with this responsibility.

8 The City is making significant progress
9 in meeting the commitments that are required by Local
10 Law 59, which as you mentioned, was passed in 2011.
11 Over the last five years, the Council, the Health
12 Department, and AC&C work together to transform the
13 city's approach to animal care. These efforts have
14 resulted in a shelter system that is better funded,
15 better performing, and better served at any time in
16 its history. AC&C operates three full service
17 shelters, two receiving centers, a mobile adoption
18 center and robust field response unit. At full
19 service, animals are housed, fed, treated, and cared
20 for. At these shelters, animals can be placed in
21 homes in a number of ways. Adoption directly from
22 the shelter, transferred to one of AC&C's partner
23 organizations, which in turn places the animals. Or,
24 adoption at outside events through AC&C's mobile
25 adoption center.

2 Before AC&C accepts an animal, it
3 interviews people to determine the cause for the
4 surrender, and may provide veterinary care and
5 guidance on strategies that enable the person to keep
6 that pet. Some animals are sick or suffering and
7 humanely euthanized at the owner's request often
8 because they do not have, or cannot afford a
9 veterinarian to humanely euthanize the animal. Some
10 animals are euthanized because an animal has
11 behavioral issues or illnesses that make it difficult
12 to place the animal in a home. AC&C operates centers
13 in the Bronx and Queens where animals may be dropped
14 off. Animals are transferred from these facilities
15 multiple times a day to the full service shelters.
16 All animals adopted by New Yorkers from AC&C are
17 spayed and neutered, vaccinated, microchipped, and
18 all dogs are licensed. AC&C also maintains
19 partnerships with 289 rescue organizations, which are
20 required to sterilize these animals and license the
21 dogs before placing the animals in an adoptive home.

22 AC&C provides other services that support
23 the humane treatment of animals, promotes responsible
24 pet ownership, and helps reduce the number of
25 unwanted animals. The funding AC&C receives is a

2 critical measure of support for its work. But how
3 that money is used and what it achieves is also
4 important to assess. Since 2011, AC&C has nearly
5 doubled its staff with significant increases in the
6 number of veterinarians and licensed veterinary
7 technicians, and the hiring of a chief veterinarian
8 and medical director. Funding is also provided for a
9 well staffed behavioral assessment unit at its
10 shelters, which enables AC&C to better assess dogs
11 and ensure that they are placed in a proper home. By
12 physically segregating the surrender of animals from
13 their adoption, AC&C is now able to interview people
14 surrendering the animals and better understand each
15 pet's unique qualities and needs and provide better
16 customer service to the thousands of people who adopt
17 animals.

18 AC&C with the City's support now opens
19 its shelters and receiving centers to the public
20 seven days a week, 12 hours a day. In addition, the
21 Manhattan shelter is open for emergencies 24 hours a
22 day. Staff members are present at the shelters all
23 day and night everyday of the year. The contract at
24 AC&C requires that it conduct field rescue, and pick
25 up operations 12 hours per day and overnight for

2 emergencies. I'm please to report that the City has
3 exceeded its commitment to increase AC&C's budget.
4 In 2011, AC&C was funded at about \$7.1 million.
5 Since that time, AC&C's budget now exceeded \$13
6 million reflecting--that's the City's share of its
7 budget, I should say, reflecting an 82% increase in
8 funding. Despite repeated budget cuts to the
9 department, the funding to AC&C increased in each of
10 the last four years. And I would be remiss if I did
11 not also mention the exceptional leadership of Risa
12 Weinstock, the Executive Director of AC&C who has
13 managed this significant expansion so well.

14 Earlier this year, the Administration
15 announced several additional enhancements to support
16 continued improvements in the shelter system. The
17 City will spend \$8.5 million on a variety of upgrades
18 to the shelter system. Funding is being provided to
19 re-engineer the heating and ventilation system at the
20 Brooklyn shelter, create more isolated fresh air
21 zones, and improve overall climate control. In
22 Manhattan, the Health Department in conjunction with
23 AC&C and its partners will design and construct a
24 dedicated adoption center. It will improve customer
25 service, enable more interaction between animals and

2 their prospective adopters, and free up more space
3 for the care and sheltering of animals. The
4 Administration is also providing funding to increase
5 the fleet of mobile adoption units used by AC&C
6 dedicating them to the Bronx and Queens to improve
7 local adoption options. Funds have also been
8 provided to enhance AC&C's ability to fundraise from
9 private sources.

10 New York City's shelter system was
11 originally built and managed by the American Society
12 for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals. When the
13 shelters were turned to the City, the live release
14 rate was about 30%. Today, the live release is
15 around 80.7%, making our shelter system among the
16 most successful in any big city in the United States.
17 Many challenges remain in managing the city's
18 unwanted animal population. Cats continue to produce
19 litters that exceed the number of people who want to
20 own or adopt them. Dogs are abandoned in far higher
21 rates in some neighborhoods than others. Together,
22 the Health Department and AC&C are working to better
23 understand these issues, and to direct staff and
24 funding resources to address them.

2 The year, the department will provide
3 \$505,000 to organizations to perform free spay and
4 neuter services in neighborhoods with the greatest
5 rates of abandonment. Other organizations around the
6 city provide targeted spay and neuter services as
7 well, and with them, we're certain that the problem
8 with abandonment would be far works.

9 New York City has a comparatively low
10 rate of intake at its municipal shelter, owing in
11 part to lower pet ownership rates, but also to the
12 exceptional and coordinated work of hundreds of
13 organizations dedicated to rescuing and finding homes
14 for abandoned animals. The City working alongside the
15 Council has made significant improvements to the
16 animal shelter system across New York City, and we
17 look forward to building on those successes. Thank
18 you for the opportunity to testify, and for your
19 continued partnership on the issue, and we'll be
20 happy to answer questions.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Dan,
22 [coughs] for being here, and for your testimony. We
23 do have some questions. I want to start off, and
24 then I'm happy to turn it over to my colleagues, who
25 I know may want to weigh in. Is it your judgment has

2 AC&C and DOHMH's support of AC&C met the goals
3 anticipated by the 2011 deal that was struck in
4 coordination with the passage of Local Law 59?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Yeah, as you
6 recall, and as you indicated in your opening
7 statement, the deal struck was that in lieu of the
8 requirement for building those new shelters, which
9 the Department, you know, had invested significant
10 effort in trying to do with other city agencies, we
11 would invest in the current system in a much more
12 substantial way. And what that meant for the
13 Department was that we would invest financial
14 resources. We would work with AC&C to figure out how
15 best to spend them by looking at where the resources
16 are most needed, and what services could be improved
17 most readily. We worked in tandem with AC&C to
18 figure out how best to bring staff on board, and how
19 to retain them. The bill also required, and we
20 agreed to a very significant expansion in services
21 both reflected in the number of hours and days that
22 the facilities were open. But also an expansion of
23 rescue operations.

24 And I, you know, am really proud to say
25 that all of those things have been achieved, some

2 earlier than the timetable that we had pledged that
3 they would be. And lastly, I would say that the
4 financial resources that the City promised to it have
5 also been exceeded. So, yes, I think we have
6 achieved what we hoped to in terms of operations.
7 And I think importantly those investments have been--
8 have realized significant gains by--in other measures
9 about how the shelter system operates. From an
10 operational perspective, we find that the shelters
11 are really operating very well. There is much more
12 investment in maintenance and in upkeep of shelter,
13 and care of animals, and walking dogs. They've done
14 a great job building an assessment unit, as I alluded
15 to in my testimony, where animals are better assessed
16 with their behavioral issues and needs for properly
17 placing them in permanent homes. And so the
18 resources were used to bring those staff on.

19 In addition, I would say that the
20 resources have achieved very significant gains in
21 terms of the outcomes that are important. AC&C has
22 been building its own capacity for direct adoption,
23 and we've seen an increase in those as well. And
24 we've seen an increase in the live release rate over
25 this period of time. So, I think it is fair to say

2 that the City made good on its commitments, exceeded
3 some of them. And we're really seeing significant
4 improvements, you know, in the day-to-day management
5 of the shelter, the outcomes for animals in New York
6 City. And the ability of AC&C to do its job as well
7 as it is doing. It's fundraising is up. Its
8 recognition for the quality of its work is up. And
9 again, I think, you know, by so many measures it is
10 the envy of the shelter systems around the country.
11 It's the most transparent of shelter systems in the
12 country in terms of sharing what it does, the animals
13 it takes in, what happens to them. It is remarkable
14 for its--for its live release rate in big cities. So
15 I think we're really pleased with the progress that's
16 been made.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Do you see any
18 unfinished business, or what else could be done?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, you
20 know, we--of course we see unfinished business.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: What?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, a lot of
23 things. One is, you know, that we alluded to. You
24 know, I referenced the investment that the City is
25 making this year. You know, we have a garage that's

2 lying fallow on a property in Manhattan. We want to
3 turn that into a real center for adoption. That will
4 achieve a lot. It will achieve freeing up space in
5 the Manhattan shelter. But it will also become a
6 kind of destination location for adoption directly
7 from the shelter system. That's important. The
8 earlier that animals leave the shelter, the healthier
9 they are. They more likely they are to do well. So,
10 we want to do everything we can to move animals as
11 quickly out. There continues to be work that we can
12 do to bring animals to other areas. They've had
13 incredible success this year with their first mobile
14 adoption unit, which was privately funded. They have
15 another one that's publicly funded and then we'll add
16 two more. Those offer opportunities to both move
17 animals quickly out of the shelters, but also bring
18 them to people rather than ask people to come to
19 them.

20 In addition, there's no--there's no
21 reason to be satisfied with the current live release
22 rate. There's more than can be done. There are real
23 challenges. Once shelters, you know, reach this kind
24 of percentage of live release rate, it becomes more
25 and more difficult to place the animals that do

2 remain. And I'm confident that AC&C is working to do
3 more in that regard, and I think the new resources
4 will support that as well as their ability to
5 privately fund raise to support that effort. And I
6 guess finally I would say that there's more than we
7 can do on the facilities themselves that we haven't
8 in the city. So the Brooklyn shelter will be
9 significantly improved in terms of its upgrades. And
10 once the Manhattan shelter adopting center is
11 designed and constructed, we'll be able also to make
12 improvements in the space that will then be vacated
13 within the main shelter itself to do more in terms of
14 animal care and shelter.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: What is your
16 assessment of the receiving centers in the Bronx and
17 Queens? To what extent are they meeting their goals,
18 guiding Local Law 59, and in what areas do they fall
19 short?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, the
21 purpose of the receiving centers is to provide an
22 opportunity for people to bring animals to the
23 shelter system within their own boroughs. And in
24 that respect, they do serve their function. And
25 before the increase in funding that was given to

2 AC&C, the shelter--those receiving centers were open
3 a couple of days a week. They're now open seven days
4 a week, 12 hours a day. So in that respect, they
5 serve an important function for the community as a
6 place where people can bring their animals when they
7 need to abandon them. Or, when strays are found,
8 they can be brought to them to those locations. They
9 are small facilities. They are not designed as
10 shelter, and they're not designed for overnight stay
11 for animals. And that is a limitation of those
12 facilities. As you mentioned, we did look very hard
13 in Queens for an alternate facility, but that deal
14 did not materialize, and we continue to look. So
15 these are rented facilities. We are looking for
16 alternate receiving centers that provide-- They're
17 laid out a little bit better. They provide better
18 opportunities for the sheltering and for the-- You
19 know, for the counseling with the people who are
20 bringing the animals in. But they are serving their
21 function of being--basically, being an opportunity
22 for people to bring their animals. We have seen an
23 increase with the increased hours and the number of
24 animals that are surrendered at those locations. But
25 they're largely offset by reductions in the numbers

2 of animals that originated in the Bronx and Queens at
3 the Brooklyn and Manhattan shelter.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Do you think that
5 the model of three shelters and two receiving sites
6 for the AC&C system is adequate for the City?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: You know, I
8 think that the-- For the last several years, we've
9 really invested in a very significant set of
10 improvements. And I think there's more to be done in
11 that regard. I think that the--any shelter system
12 will always want and need more resources that it has.
13 So, I do think that the improvements that we've made
14 and the significant advances--the near doubling of
15 the staff, the quality of care--has had a significant
16 impact on being beneficial to animals.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Do you think that
18 it's adequate?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: You know, I
20 think it's hard to say what adequate is. I do think
21 when you compare across the country we have a shelter
22 density that's higher than most cities in terms of
23 its--sort of the number of shelters that sort of the
24 number of shelters per--

2 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] But
3 we have a larger population.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: That's also
5 true, and we also have a lower intake rate for
6 animals, very significantly lower for the population
7 than other cities. So I think more resources are
8 always better, and I think that there's work to be
9 done with what we're trying now.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So I--I'm going to
11 turn it over to my colleagues in a moment, and then
12 I'm going to come back for some budget number
13 questions related to some of the facilities. But if,
14 you know--I know we operate, of course, as a
15 government in a city where the allocation of
16 resources both capital and expense resources really
17 determine what we're able to do in many regards. But
18 if we could just put aside what those resources are,
19 whether it's between \$10 and \$40 million to build
20 full-service shelters in the Bronx and Queens
21 optimally. If we wanted the best system possible,
22 and I agree with you Dan in all the improvements that
23 have been made and in lauding AC&C and DOHMH for the
24 drastic improvements. If we wanted the most optimal
25 system possible that was going to do the best amount

2 of work, do you think that that would include two
3 full-service shelters in the Bronx and Queens if
4 money were not an object.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: You know, in
6 all honesty, I don't know. There are so--

7 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
8 Really?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: There are so
10 many ways to improve--

11 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
12 That's hard to believe.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, let me--
14 let me explain. There are so many ways-- I'm not
15 saying it's not. Again, I said more resources, and
16 more facilities are often--are always better than
17 fewer. It's very important to also focus resources
18 on the--trying to prevent the surrender of animals.
19 It's never good when an animal ends up in a shelter
20 system. And so, there are also efforts that we want
21 to make, and that we're looking for resources to
22 invest in to try to reduce the intake into the
23 shelter. Now, the City is incredibly grateful and
24 dependent on the work of many organizations across
25 the city that have a huge impact on that. And so,

2 there are--there are partnerships that can be
3 supported, and that are. There are--there are
4 opportunities for moving animals quickly out of the
5 shelter. There are--there's education and outreach
6 to better--to allow the public to better understand
7 what AC&C's role is. I think there is still a lot of
8 confusion in the public about what AC&C is relative
9 to other organizations that adopt the animals. And
10 so--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

12 And so, are you saying that without--it's better to
13 not have five operational full shelters in this city?
14 Is that what you're telling me?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: No, I didn't
16 say it's better not to.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Because it's
18 certainly sound like that's what you're saying.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: But I didn't
20 say that it's better not to.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

22 You're saying there are other options that we can
23 explore. No, the only option we need to explore is
24 get five shelters in this city. Until we get to that

2 point, all you're saying is you're relying on the--
3 Sorry, for jumping in, Corey--

4 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
5 That's okay.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --but I'm
7 listening for an half hour now, and I'm getting more
8 and more upset. You're saying you're relying on the
9 successes of Risa and AC&C and the amazing staff to
10 do what they can do as the ability, as the
11 groundbreaking efforts over the last two years of the
12 Department of Health to make changes. Giving money
13 to AC&C is a great start, but the facilities that
14 they have are not adequate. There are animals in the
15 hallways. They are completely overwhelmed. There is
16 no way to handle 30,000 animals with three shelters
17 and Queens doesn't even have a receiving center. So
18 don't even pretend to make--

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: [interposing]
20 I'm sorry, it does--it does have a receiving center.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, if you
22 call that a receiving center, then we have a whole
23 other hearing coming in, because that's not a
24 receiving center. It's insane is what that is. And
25 it's the programs that I saw yesterday, the human

2 approach of-- Like you just said, there are other
3 ways to reduce the number. And I one of the first
4 ways that I was shown in part yesterday was
5 counseling of people. When they come in with the
6 animals, they sit down in a room say what is the
7 situation at home. What can we do to have you keep
8 this pet? What are the other options? What are
9 financial relief? What can we do to help you, and
10 if, come back again, and then we'll help you. How
11 can we do that at a receiving center? You can't.
12 So, therefore, all of the families and the people in
13 Bronx and Queens cannot participate. Two-thirds of
14 the city cannot participate in these wonderful new
15 inventive ideas because there isn't something in
16 Bronx and Queens for them to do that to. If all I'm
17 going to do is drive-- You're actually facilitating
18 getting rid of animals. Here, take it. I don't want
19 it any more, and I don't have any guilt about it. I
20 just drop it off. Good. I'm done. Whereas, now I
21 can have someone from the wonderful staff sit and
22 talk and say there's an alternative way here. Now,
23 let's look at Santiago and some of these other pets
24 and say what can we do. So I'm not happy with the
25 testimony that you're giving to rely on the roles of

2 what we've succeeded before without saying that if--
3 Council Member Johnson's question was if finances was
4 not an issue, which would be great in my house, too.
5 If finances was not an issue, wouldn't we want that?
6 The answer should clearly be yes. I mean that--
7 that's it. It should be one word, yes. But you
8 didn't say that. So, help me to understand why
9 you're not saying that.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, first of
11 all, it's a hypothetical. And so, resources are
12 always an issue, and it's important to remember that
13 resources are not just about the construction of a
14 facility. It's also about its staffing and
15 maintenance and it's--and it's managing well. You
16 know, AC&C voted before the increase in funding
17 really was on a shoestring budget, and we acknowledge
18 that. That meant that within its own facilities that
19 the operations were not as good as they could be.
20 And I think what we've learned over the last several
21 years that--the past several years is that there's
22 much that can be done with the infusion of resources,
23 and passion and dedicated staff and highly trained
24 staff to improve what happens at those shelters. You
25 know, it would be--it would be tragic to build and

2 operate shelters that were not sufficiently
3 resourced. So that's, you know-- That's where we're
4 at.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
6 No, we agree with you on that, and I think we agree
7 with every one of the support groups that are here
8 saying the last thing we want to do is take a step
9 backwards. And Jane was mentioning that earlier. So
10 we don't want to create an unfunded mandate again
11 where we have this beautiful facility, and staff and
12 operational expenses. So part of what this committee
13 is doing is asking for the finance requirements of
14 what it would cost to maintain the facility, not just
15 build the facility. And I know Council Member
16 Johnson said we'll talk about some of the finance
17 questions. Because there are allocations in here for
18 over half a million dollars--\$5 million in Queens.
19 I'm curious to what that's for, and what plan you
20 have in mind. I mean, I see in the preliminary
21 budget there's over \$5.8 million for Queens. Is that
22 in the hope of building a shelter? Are we finding--
23 What are we with the receiving center? What is that
24 money going to be used for?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: In all
3 honesty, I'm going to have to get back to you on
4 that. I'm not--I'm not familiar with the capital
5 budget to that extent. I think the money originally
6 originated with the intent to acquire a property that
7 would function as a receiving center, and so that may
8 be its origin.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Where are we
10 with that? I mean does--do we have any update?
11 There's got to be? Is there a top ten list of sites
12 that we're looking at? Are we negotiating? I mean I
13 have agencies going around all day and looking for
14 different things. I don't have any response on this
15 one.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, yeah--
17 [background comment]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I mean this is
19 for now because we have to deal with the present. I
20 mean obviously we're looking for a full shelter, but
21 in the meantime we have to assist the folks in Queens
22 and Bronx, and we don't know what the plan is right
23 now. Okay.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Okay.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: Hi,
3 Mario Merlino, Assistant Commissioner at the Health
4 Department. So, it still is the plan to run a new
5 facility in Queens. We actually agree that the
6 facility that's there now is too small. I think it's
7 only like--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
9 Thank you. See that wasn't that difficult. See
10 that. [laughs]

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: It's
12 around 800 square feet. It was always--it was always
13 the plan, but it's been the plan since the--since
14 Local Law 59 to lease a new facility. We've looked
15 at I would say two to three sites per year. Some of
16 the challenges have been the placement of that
17 facility--I don't-- So we want a facility that will
18 serve Queens that's--that's not so close to the
19 existing shelter, you know, in East New York, or on
20 the West Side of Manhattan. So I think we've seen a
21 couple sites. For instance in Long Island City that
22 wouldn't help frankly Queens that much, right. We
23 want something that's placed more centrally or so
24 that people can get to. We've seen sites that quite
25 frankly were the wrong size. So it's--there's been

2 those types of issues with the sites that we've seen,
3 but we have seen two or three sites per year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, could I
5 suggest while you're looking for the sites, and while
6 we're still in this hypothetical scenario of what
7 we're going to do, that we add to what it is the site
8 could be. I mean there are places between the full-
9 service animal shelter and a receiving center. There
10 can be an educational component to the site. There
11 could be a small adoption center to the site. There
12 could be ways to immediately impact and alleviate
13 these boroughs emergency concerns. Because they might
14 have some emergency concern that we can take the step
15 of maybe getting to the point of a full animal
16 shelter. But that's not going to happen tomorrow.
17 But this is something with the budget that could
18 happen literally tomorrow if we're lucky enough to
19 find the site that we could build these components
20 into it. So that now we are looking at the programs
21 that have been put into effect, and maybe have some
22 type of impact as opposed to just a drop-off and run
23 mentality.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: I can't
25 agree more, and Risa Weinstock should speak to a

2 little bit more about what the services are at the
3 receiving centers. I think currently there is some
4 sort of counseling for folks that drop off animals.
5 And I cant agree more how--with you how important
6 that is that people hear the options that they have
7 opposed to, you know, dropping off the animal at the
8 receiving center. And I think that would be a bit--
9 When we say a better layout, the current--the current
10 space in Queens is a room around the size we're in
11 now. So if we have--if we have a layout where
12 there's a place where there could be counseling along
13 the lines of what the Health Department and AC&C
14 collaborated to build in the Bronx. The Bronx space
15 we have the same-- We didn't go out and lease a new
16 space in the Bronx, but we reconfigured it after
17 Local Law 59 with some of the funding that we got.
18 And they built a separate area for cats so the cats
19 and the dogs can be separate. We built an area where
20 there could be photography of the animals, where
21 there could be counseling for folks that are adopting
22 animals. So, Risa can speak more, and I can't agree
23 with you more that that's important to do that at
24 the--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

3 Well, I see other council members here, and I want to
4 give them a chance to speak. So that's just my
5 comments to you. Thank you for the first start. I
6 think the way Council Member Johnson has talked about
7 this, I mean this Administration and this Council is
8 clearly committed. We've done more in 14 months. We
9 did a lot. And there's a lot to be said for that,
10 and I think it's just taking advantage of that
11 momentum. So maybe this is the time that we can
12 finally get this done. So I think that's where this
13 committee, and where we're together on this is we
14 want to help. I meant it's a partnership of the
15 Council and Mayor together to get this done, to
16 realize the dream that people have been fighting for
17 for decades. To finally get this done, and then put
18 something in place that's sustainable and get it
19 done. I turn it back over to the chair. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Council
21 Member Vallone. I just want to-- If you can answer
22 the questions, you're free to answer. If you can't
23 it's okay. We'll provide you the written questions
24 as well. Before I go to Council Member Arroyo, I
25 just wanted to read them for the record because

2 they're important in the context of the conversation
3 we're having.

4 So Council Member Vallone said the most
5 recent capital commitment shows the moving and
6 allocation of \$5.9 million in funding for Queens
7 facility. What was that \$5.9 million? What was
8 that? Was it budgeted funding for a full-service
9 shelter in Queens, or was it upgrades to a receiving
10 center?

11 Out of the \$5.9 million that was re-
12 allocated from the Queens shelter in the Capital
13 Budget Plan, only \$4 million was allocated to upgrade
14 Brooklyn and Manhattan in \$8.5 million you talked
15 about. Where did DOHMH reallocate the remaining \$1.9
16 million in funding?

17 The funding added to the Brooklyn HVAC
18 upgrade totals \$3.5 million in the capital plan with
19 \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2016, and \$3 million in the
20 out years specifically Fiscal Year 2018. So is it
21 going to take that long to get the upgrades done in
22 Brooklyn for the HVAC system? What is the timeline
23 and why \$3 million in Fiscal Year 2018?

24 The Commitment Plan of \$500,000 added in
25 Fiscal Year 2018 for the Manhattan Animal Shelter for

2 upgrades. What's the timeline for the upgrades for
3 the garage, for the adoption center, and why was this
4 funding added for Fiscal Year 2018 and not sooner?

5 Out of the \$8 million in new funding
6 added for upgrades to the current shelters, there is
7 only \$3.5 million added for the next three fiscal
8 years. The difference is further in the out years.
9 Why is the remaining \$4 million allocated in Fiscal
10 Year 2021 and \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023? Why is
11 there such a lag in these time frames. So if you
12 have the answers now that's great. If you don't, we
13 want the answers.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: Thank
15 you.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: I think we'll
17 get you the answers as soon as we can.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: We have budget
19 hearings coming up so we'll ask you about it then as
20 well.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Yeah, we'll
22 make sure you get responses before the budget
23 hearing.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Okay. Council
25 Member Arroyo.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you, Mr.
3 Chairman. Commissioner, welcome. Always nice to see
4 you.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: You, too.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You did not
7 reference the legislation that we're discussing here
8 today. We're talking about improvements in the
9 system, but also the law--the Local Law that Council
10 Member Vallone has introduced. Intro 485 is not
11 referenced in your testimony at all. I'm sure you
12 don't like avoiding issues, but you haven't said
13 whether you support or oppose this legislation.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: At the moment
15 I think it's--we would like to kind of keep at what
16 we're at--at what we're doing. There are
17 improvements to be made currently. You know, I think
18 as I sort of indicated to Council Member Vallone and
19 to Johnson that in the--more resources are always
20 better. There is no question about that, but for
21 now, we are really concentrated on continuing the
22 direction that we're in, the improvements that are
23 being made and continue to be implemented. And the
24 work that we have ahead of us in constructing an
25 adoption center, in acquiring mobile adoption units,

2 in expanding AC&C's independent fundraising capacity.
3 And in improving the Brooklyn facility, as well as
4 acquiring a different receiving center in Queens.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I've had an
6 opportunity to work with you for about ten years now,
7 and I've always known you to be very direct. This is
8 not an answer. You either support or oppose, or a
9 third option is we can continue discussing this
10 legislation and see how we can bring something in
11 that's going to be--we can implement successfully.
12 We don't want a repeat of Local Law 26 or the
13 challenges that came up and the lawsuits. I'm sure
14 if we took everything we spent in court defending the
15 lawsuits, we can invest in the system significantly
16 enough to have full-service shelters in every
17 borough, you know. And at the end of the day, I
18 think we all want the same thing, but aren't we
19 concerned that not adhering to the mandates in Local
20 Law 59 is going to end us in court as well? Since
21 we're not fulfilling the mandates in that Local Law?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, first in
23 response to your first question, I think the answer,
24 of course, is yes we'll continue. We're happy to
25 continue discussing the--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing] So
3 it's not an outright opposition to the legislation?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Right, you
5 know we--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing]
7 Okay, that's important.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: This is the
9 beginning of the conversation and our discussion. As
10 for the non-compliance with Local Law 59, I--I'm not
11 sure what you're referring to. I beg to differ.
12 We've fulfilled or exceeded all of the mandates of
13 Local Law 59.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So in Queens, for
15 example, that I think seems to be the one hole in the
16 commitment in that Local Law.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: [interposing]
18 Well, so--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: If we're not
20 providing access 12 hours a day, we're not concerned?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, we are--
22 we are providing access 12 hours a day, but what
23 we're acknowledging is it's not a great facility.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. All right.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: So, the--but
3 in terms of compliance with the law, the hours of
4 operation--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing]
6 Okay.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: --the extent
8 of services, we are compliant.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That's good to
10 hear. Placement location was one of the reasons--was
11 the reason given for not being able to provide a good
12 space. I visited the Bronx center. It's not bigger
13 than this room unless you changed something since
14 I've been there.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: The--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing] You
17 can't find the space this size in Queens?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: The question
19 in Queens that has been difficult is to identify a
20 space that will rent to us, that will--can be
21 configured for the purposes that Council Member
22 Vallone recommended and Assistant Commissioner
23 Merlino acknowledged that we'd like to do. And is
24 located in a way that adds value to its location in
25 Queens. You know we-- For example, we just looked at

2 a facility that may have--may work or may have
3 worked, but it is just a couple of miles from the
4 East New York Shelter in Brooklyn. And this not an
5 optimal location for it because it doesn't provide an
6 extra level of service for the vast majority of
7 Queens residents. So, it is tricky. We want
8 locations that are accessible by public
9 transportation. We want locations that want us. We
10 want locations where we can find a stable lease. The
11 zoning has to allow for this kind of activity. So,
12 it's-- You know, I can tell you directly and
13 honestly that we have been looking. And our partner
14 at Department of Citywide Administrative Services
15 that manages real estate for the city has been
16 looking. But we haven't found an optimal location
17 yet.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So what's the
19 ideal square footage for a receiving center that can
20 embed in it the components that we would like to see
21 happening at these centers.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MERLINO: What
23 we've told DCAS is somewhere between 1,600 and 2,400
24 square feet. That's what we--that's our sort of
25 instructions to DCAS. Properly zoned preferably with

2 parking so that folks can come in their cars because
3 that's important. And Queens prefer it. [sic] So
4 we have a list of things.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Have you thought
6 of collaborating with the council members that
7 represents our neighborhoods in Queens that can--
8 You know, we have some insight about the nuances in
9 our districts that the Administration may not have,
10 or that your staff or Administrative Services for the
11 City may not have an opportunity to locate. So I
12 would highly recommend, and you can start with
13 Council Member Vallone since he's being such an
14 insistent member on this issue. All kidding aside, I
15 think it's important that you engage the local
16 members to help advance this conversation. Granted,
17 a lot has been done. I think it's-- I was never
18 thrilled to move forward with Local Law 59 because
19 that meant we gave up something that we were
20 expecting to happen for over a decade in our
21 boroughs. But if we can get back there, that is
22 really important. And if the receiving centers
23 currently help us provide a vehicle for families to
24 deal with, or individuals who find pets lost, I think
25 the public information about microchipping and

2 registrations and licenses has to continue. Because,
3 you know, hopefully the shelter is only accommodating
4 animals that an irresponsible individual dealt with.
5 Because I think most families love their pets and
6 want to keep them, and sometimes lose them and can't
7 find the. Because they're not able to identify the
8 owner or match the pet with the owner again. And the
9 Council is very helpful, you know, with capital
10 funding for improvements at facilities. I have never
11 gotten a call from the Department of Health and
12 Mental Hygiene to say, Hey, council member, we need
13 to put together \$10 million to upgrade XYZ facility.
14 Would you consider allocating some of your Reso A
15 money to it? [laughter] It's a resource. We are a
16 resource on many different levels that if we
17 collaborate the energy correctly, we can advance
18 agendas a great deal more effectively and efficiently
19 than if you're sitting there doing your thing, and
20 I'm sitting doing mine. I think it's important for
21 us to understand the needs of the system, and be
22 partners to help you improve it. Rather than
23 criticize you all the time for you not doing what we
24 all expect you to do.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, I agree,
3 and I do want to say that I think this has been a
4 partnership, and as I explained--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing]
6 Well, I know.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: As I mentioned
8 in my testimony, we've been really working I think
9 hand-in-glove around a variety of animal issues and
10 we're really grateful, and we're excited about that.
11 And truthfully--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing]
13 Well, how much Reso A money has the Council put into
14 improving the facilities?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: So that--so I
16 did want to say that we will take you up on your
17 offer. We will reach out to the Queens Delegation.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: [interposing]
19 You can call the Speaker. [laughter]

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Ah, that's a
21 tough one.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: No, it's--you
23 know, individually and the speaker we can organize an
24 effort. We've done it for the Health and Hospitals
25 Corporation. We've done it for the Office of the

2 Medical Examiner. You name it. When we've had those
3 conversations, we've been very successful in getting
4 things done.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: And I did want
6 to acknowledge that the Council has supported AC&C
7 this year at a higher level than it has previously.
8 And so, we're really grateful for that, and I'm sure
9 AC&C is as well. So we will reach out to the Queens
10 Delegation to talk about, you know, if there are any
11 hints as to property that may be--meet the
12 qualifications or the criteria that Mario mentioned.
13 And we'll certainly be in touch, and thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And I don't want
15 it to be lost on the fact that we truly appreciate
16 the work that you do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Council
18 Member Arroyo. Before I go to Council Member Miller,
19 I want to just understand what was the deal breaker
20 when you were negotiating for the Queens facility
21 that had been approved by the Local Community Board,
22 and been approved by the Department of City Planning?
23 What caused it to fall through?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: My
25 understanding is that the asking price exceeded what

2 DCAS felt the value of the property was. So it was
3 just not a deal that the City was prepared to make.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Okay. We were
5 joined earlier by Council Members Espinal and Koo.
6 We are now joined by Council Members Eugene and
7 Miller, and I want to turn it over to Council Member
8 Miller.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Thank you, Mr.
10 Chair, and thank you for this very important hearing
11 that we're having this morning. So being a Queens
12 resident who often takes his pets to East New York
13 and my constituents do the same, and they travel
14 throughout the city. And myself like Council Member
15 Vallone have been asking to have a shelter in the
16 borough for quite some time. And I do agree very
17 much so with my colleagues from the Bronx that there
18 is a partnership here that is available if, in fact,
19 one is willing to take advantage of that partnership.
20 But my statement is that it appears that there's been
21 certain impediments place before attaining this
22 property or this facility that just-- It appears
23 that the standards are unattainable.

24 As you said when you read--when you
25 articulated some of these standards that some of the

2 things that you were looking for. Some of the areas,
3 the costs, and some of the things that-- And how
4 would it advance communities? How would it have
5 access to public transportation, and all that. I
6 think that at some point we're trying to put a square
7 peg in a round hole that we have to just figure out
8 what it is that we have, and what our needs are and
9 work around that. There is no perfect situation, but
10 there is absolutely a need that we need to kind of
11 put-- We're not lowering the bar, but certainly we
12 want it that we can create--provide the services that
13 we're looking for.

14 And when you have council members and
15 community boards that are willing to work with you, I
16 think that that's a partnership well worth really
17 taking us up on. So, I would hope that we could
18 modify our standards so that next year we're not
19 having the same conversation. But there certainly is
20 a need. In lieu of that then we have pets on the
21 street, and no one wants to see that. And certainly
22 people want to be able to address their pet needs in
23 the most humane way possible. But short of having
24 facilities, they're left with no options. So, you
25 know, we're working hard. There has been a lot of

2 conversation. Far more conversation than one would
3 believe around animal shelters in the Council here,
4 and we would hope that-- And it's just crossing all
5 lines in all communities, and we don't want to be
6 left out any longer. So we're willing to work with
7 you in anyway we can. So thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So thank you,
9 Council Member Miller. So, we have to be out of this
10 room by 1:00 p.m. and we still have AC&C and many
11 advocates that have to testify. So, I'm going to
12 just read a couple of questions, and you don't have
13 to answer them today. But I would appreciate a
14 written response from DOHMH.

15 So, what is DOHMH's position on TNR, a
16 Trap-Neuter-Return?

17 What is your assessment of the current
18 board governance at AC&C?

19 What changes need to be made at a
20 corporate level to improve governance operations, and
21 the mission of the organization?

22 Are there other models for other than
23 receiving centers to provide facilities that are not
24 quite full animal shelters that do more than just
25 receive animals picked up in the field? I think

2 Council Member Vallone was alluding to that before.

3 You know, we talk about drop-off, the sheltering of
4 animals, counseling at drop-off space, adoptions, and
5 veterinary services. Is there an in-between model
6 between a receiving site and a full-service shelter
7 that you think would work in certain places?

8 So, I just want to wrap up with this. I
9 really appreciate your testimony. I really
10 appreciate the \$8.5 million, though, I'm really
11 confused by the budget numbers, and the out years
12 when it's being phased in, and how long it will take
13 to achieve these commitments. It looks like it's
14 going to take way too long if the numbers go by what
15 the document says in the Capital Plan. So I think we
16 have to talk about that to figure that out together.
17 And then I think you've heard resoundingly not just
18 from the 33 members that have signed onto Council
19 Member Vallone's piece of legislation, but also from
20 the members here today there is pretty wide and deep
21 support for this legislation. And we are willing as
22 a Council to fight on our side for the resources
23 necessary to both fill the capital commitments to
24 achieve full-service shelters in all five boroughs.
25 While simultaneously ensuring that we move forward so

2 that operationally the money exists to actually run
3 those facilities in the best way possible for those
4 animals.

5 And then lastly, I mean I should have
6 said this in the opening, and it's sort of a longer
7 conversation. But one I think is important to have,
8 is AC&C is amazing, and we've acknowledged the
9 incredible work Risa and her staff have done. But I
10 also think that with the increased funding that DOHMH
11 has shown that you outlined, Dan, this is a basic
12 service that city must provide. Like sanitation,
13 like fire, like police. Taking care of our animals
14 is a basic thing that a municipality must do. And
15 so, my fear is that when we get some increased
16 funding on dog licenses, whether it's \$1 million, \$2
17 million, \$3 million that that money goes to the
18 things we're talking about. And that DOH's
19 commitment hasn't come down, and the \$3 million
20 doesn't come up. We should be providing even more
21 money, and I'm happy with the increase. But I
22 believe that this is a basic service, and that we
23 should not because we gave close to \$300,000 to AC&C
24 to do fundraising, which is great, and I'm glad
25 they're going to do it.

2 That should not take the City off the
3 hook to show up and provide the money, and services
4 that are necessary and required. So I don't want that
5 \$300,000 to then-- For us to now say, Okay, they're
6 doing \$300,000 in development to pay for that type of
7 work, and now the City is going to cut back on our
8 commitment because we gave them the money to do
9 fundraising. I don't want that to happen. So, I
10 want us to continue to have a conversation how do we
11 ideally meet the needs of all the animals, and to
12 have the most humane city possible? By the City
13 continuing to step up more and more and more to
14 provide facilities, to provide services, to do the
15 panoply of things to have the most humane city
16 possible. Because the goal is to eventually have a
17 no-kill system. That's the goal. And so, we can't
18 get there unless we have fully functioning shelters
19 in all five boroughs. So, I just want to try to
20 shift the mentality away from it has to be contracted
21 out to a non-profit provider. They're great and I
22 don't want the City to step back from it's--in my
23 mind--requirement to provide these services. And I
24 think it was important to say that.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: Well, thank
3 you. I mean I will get you answers to your questions
4 in writing. But I just want to acknowledge your
5 closing remarks because we agree. This is a basic
6 service. It's an obligation that the City has to its
7 citizens and to the animals. It's--I will tell you
8 with certainty that the intent of providing some
9 start-up money for fundraising in no way is to reduce
10 the City's obligation for funding.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] I'm
12 really happy to hear that.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KASS: So it is not
14 intended to be a kind of cost shift in any way.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: That's great.
16 Thank you both for your testimony. We are next going
17 to have the many times aforementioned Risa Weinstock
18 from Animal Care and Control, the Executive Director
19 of AC&C.

20 [pause]

21 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: You may start,
22 Risa.

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: Do you want to swear me
24 in?

2 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Nope, you're not
3 part of the Administration.

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: Okay. I promise to tell
5 the whole truth anyway. [laughs]

6 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: You're independent.

7 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yes, we are. Okay.

8 Good morning, Chairman Johnson and members of the
9 Health Committee. My name is Risa Weinstock. I'm
10 the Executive Director and General Counsel of Animal
11 Care and Control of New York City. Thank you for the
12 opportunity to testify at today's oversight hearing
13 concerning our recent progress, and opportunities for
14 improvement in the New York City Animal Shelter
15 System. AC&C has made marked progress over the last
16 several years, as a result of City Council's passage
17 of Local Law 59 in 2011. I want to thank the Council
18 for its support of AC&C, and the significant increase
19 in our funding that was made possible by that law.

20 In Fiscal 2011, AC&C's budget was \$7.1
21 million, and over the course of the last four years,
22 it's increased to more than \$13 million in
23 contracting funding from the Department of Health and
24 Mental Hygiene. The additional funding enabled AC&C
25 to make necessary improvements to its operations;

2 restore and expand services; increase staff; add new
3 positions; and new departments; replace equipment and
4 supplies with better products; and devote more
5 resources and staff to the animals in our care. All
6 of these enhancements have helped AC&C increase live
7 outcomes of New York City's shelter animals; attract
8 quality candidates for employment; attract more
9 charitable contributions and funding for capital
10 improvements; and overall become a better
11 organization.

12 So by way of background for the Council
13 members who are not that familiar with AC&C, we are
14 the largest animal sheltering system in the
15 Northeastern United States. Our mission is to
16 protect and promote the health, safety, and welfare
17 of pets and people in the New York City. We are
18 unique among all other animal welfare organizations
19 in the city in that we are the only organization that
20 accepts every animal brought to it. Whether the
21 animal has been abandoned, surrendered, found as a
22 stray, brought in by the public or NYPD or our field
23 rescue team. And regardless of age, health status,
24 breed, species or condition. As the only open
25 admission animal sheltering organization in New York

2 City, our annual intake exceeds that of any limited
3 admission facility or other shelter in all five
4 boroughs.

5 In calendar year 2014, we took in over
6 35,000 animals, including more than 30,000 cats and
7 dogs or roughly 95 animals per day. Established in
8 1995, and incorporated in New York State as a
9 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, AC&C has been
10 dedicated to rescuing, caring for, and finding loving
11 homes for these homeless and abandoned animals for 20
12 years. Under a contract with the City of New York
13 and DOH, we operate five facilities, one in each
14 borough. Of these five locations, three are full-
15 service animal care centers located in Manhattan,
16 Brooklyn, and Staten Island, and two are receiving
17 centers located in the Bronx and in Queens.

18 Again, we are the only organization that
19 receives and accepts animals of all kinds at each of
20 these locations. Not just dogs, cats or rabbits, but
21 also snakes, birds, reptiles, and various farm
22 animals. In addition to sheltering animals, AC&C
23 providers a multitude of services to people and
24 animals in New York City including counseling
25 individuals upon intake with the hope of offering

2 safe, viable alternatives to surrendering a pet to
3 the shelter. Providing medical services upon in
4 take, and when an animal leaves the shelter including
5 examination, treatment, vaccination, spay/neuter,
6 licensing and microchipping. Providing daily
7 behavior enrichment; and seeking placement for
8 animals with the support of foster volunteers; New
9 Hope partners; returning animals to their owners
10 through lost and found efforts; and adoptions
11 directly to the public.

12 With the assistance of our Call Center,
13 AC&C Field Services pick up stray dogs; respond to
14 emergencies; transport animals from the receiving
15 centers to the full-service care centers several times
16 per day; transport animals that have placement or
17 require special medical attention beyond AC&C's
18 resources; and respond to calls from the public
19 needing assistance with an animal or concerning
20 animals in need or distress. AC&C receives
21 tremendous support from the private sector as well.
22 We are truly grateful everyday for the exceptional
23 generosity of our dedicated volunteers, donors and
24 partners. As a 501(c)(3) organization, we're able to
25 establish partnerships, and solicit private donations

2 and grants to provide animal enrichment, medical care
3 and placement beyond the service articulated under
4 the contract with the City.

5 In 2014, financial contributions exceeded
6 \$1.5 million. This figure is in addition to the
7 tremendous support received in in-kind donations of
8 goods and services. AC&C could not achieve the
9 results we have seen today without the breadth and
10 public and private support. We are committed to
11 continue on this trajectory of progress, which is
12 essential to grow further public and private support.
13 So that we can enhance our efforts and ability to
14 drive up the live release rate of the animals in our
15 care.

16 So let me just get to some progress since
17 Local Law 59. Since the passage of the bill, AC&C
18 has added almost 100 new staff. We've grown from 139
19 full-time employees in January 2011 to over 235
20 currently. This increase in staffing remains
21 essential in order to provide a higher level of care
22 for the animals, and services throughout the city.
23 Staff has been added throughout the organization
24 across all departments and locations. Additionally,
25 new departments were created such as the Admissions

2 Department to focus on surrender prevention, and
3 enhance the information we receive about an animal at
4 intake. An Adoption Department with staff
5 exclusively dedicated to work on placing animals
6 through public adoptions; a robust and Behavior and
7 Enrichment Department that has tripled in size;
8 dedicated client services staff and management; and
9 seasoned development and communications
10 professionals.

11 Prior to these improvements, every
12 transaction began at a front counter regardless of
13 why a member of the public was coming to AC&C. We
14 plan to continue our growth in staff through Fiscal
15 2018 to increase the human-to-animal ratio especially
16 during the spring and summer months when our intakes
17 can swell to 2,000 animals per month. We will also
18 add full-time adoption counselors to the Bronx and
19 Queens receiving centers. Adoption staff dedicated
20 to off-site mobile adoption events to reflect the
21 addition of four mobile adoption centers over the
22 next years. And an additional development and
23 communications staff to focus on support from
24 foundations, corporations, major donors, and brand
25 marketing to drive adoptions.

2 With respect to our hours of operation
3 and the requirements of Local Law 59, AC&C met or
4 exceeded those requirements on or before the
5 deadlines. I summarized real quickly, but just
6 briefly. Our full-service care centers in Manhattan,
7 Brooklyn and Staten Island are open seven days a week
8 from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Embedded in those hours
9 are adoption services, which as of March 1, we will
10 have added one hour additional adoption times so that
11 adoptions will take place Monday through Friday from
12 12:00 to 8:00 and Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 a.m.
13 to 6:00 p.m. Intakes we are open 8:00 a.m. to 8:00
14 p.m. seven days a week, and plus the Manhattan Care
15 Center is open to the public and NYPD for intakes
16 24/7. Our Admissions Department currently is open
17 from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. seven days a week in
18 Manhattan and Brooklyn, and 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
19 Saturday through Wednesday in Staten Island. Our
20 goal for Fiscal Year 2016 is to have those hours
21 extended from 8:00 to 8:00 p.m. seven days a week at
22 all care centers and the receiving centers.

23 Our Field Services also available 8:00 to
24 8:00 seven days a week and 24/7 for emergencies. Our
25 Call Center is 8:00 to 8:00 seven days a week, and

2 the Bronx and Queens receiving centers are 8:00 to
3 8:00 seven days a week.

4 In calendar year 2014, AC&C took in over
5 35,000 animals, like I said before. Of this number,
6 30,118 were cats and dogs compared to 28,907 in the
7 previous year. In response to the upward trend of
8 pet surrender, we created an Admissions Department in
9 June 2014. We now offer surrender prevention
10 counseling; strategies and resources to help an
11 individual keep their pet. In just six months, we
12 were able to prevent 367 dogs and cats from entering
13 the shelter system. We will build on the success by
14 adding more staff, and growing a network of resources
15 we can offer with a goal of preventing at least
16 another 700 animals from being surrendered this year.

17 With respect to animal outcomes, AC&C is
18 very often asked how many days do you keep an animal
19 before euthanasia? There is absolutely no pre-
20 specified time period that we keep animals prior to
21 euthanasia. There is, however, a legal mandate
22 regarding the length of time an animal must remain
23 unavailable for placement to the public or the rescue
24 community. AC&C will hold animals as long as
25 possible based on a multitude of factors including

2 placement options; the animal's health and behavior;
3 observations from staff and volunteers; and vital
4 information obtained from the previous caregiver; as
5 well as the resources from the care center at the
6 given time. Throughout the time animals are with us,
7 we are working on placement plans and options.
8 Indeed, we currently have several cats and dogs just
9 waiting for someone to adopt them, Santiago being one
10 of them. [laughs] And have been in our care more
11 than a month or even longer. It is our goal to find
12 placement for every animal that is healthy, or may
13 have a treatable condition through continual
14 improvement and assessment of programmatic results.

15 Like many shelters across the United
16 States, AC&C has started tracking its progress in
17 saving the lives of all healthy and treatable animals
18 by measuring its live release rate. In 2014, AC&C
19 achieved a live release rate of 80.7% for cats and
20 dogs. And I'm very pleased to report that in January
21 2015, our live release rate for cats and dogs was
22 88.8%. The 2014, monthly live release rate data
23 shows clearly that AC&C has achieved great success in
24 managing its dog population. With a live release
25 rate at 80% or higher throughout the year. The

2 greater challenge is managing the staggering number
3 of cats and their litters that enter the shelter
4 through the summer through fall. Working in consort
5 with other shelters, the ASPCA, our New Hope
6 partners, foster volunteers, DOH and other animal
7 welfare organizations and direction additional
8 resources and programs targeting the cat
9 overpopulation in New York City, we are hopeful that
10 at a subsequent oversight hearing we will report
11 marked improvement in our live release rate for cats
12 during these critical months. But please note AC&C
13 will not fall back on our efforts to place more dogs
14 as well. As I said, our goal in the coming years is
15 to find placement for every healthy and treatable
16 animal in our care.

17 The strong partnerships AC&C has
18 cultivated and maintained with our New Hope partners
19 and the excellent animal rescue work these groups do
20 to find new homes for animals are essential
21 components for finding placement for the animals AC&C
22 takes in. Over the last four years, we have grown
23 the number in our New Hope Department and
24 substantially increased the resources dedicated to
25 make this program successful. We have more than 10

2 staff who have cultivated a pool of 289 New Hope
3 partners, which resulted in over 15,000 animals
4 leaving AC&C. AC&C also adopted out more than 6,000
5 cats and dogs directly to the public, and is
6 optimistic that adoptions directly to the public will
7 increase moving forward as we add three additional
8 mobile adoption centers for use in the Bronx and
9 Queens in particular.

10 We are grateful to State Senator Jeff
11 Klein for the funding to purchase staff and operate
12 one of these vehicles exclusively in the Bronx, and
13 to the City and DOH for additional capital funding to
14 purchase another two mobile adoption centers.
15 Progress and growth has been steady and constant
16 since Local Law 59. Essential programs and staff
17 have been added to help keep the animals in our care
18 as happy and healthy as possible, and to improve live
19 outcomes. Some of the milestones that we've
20 achieved: We've added a medical director and senior
21 veterinary manager, who ensure that as soon as
22 animals arrive they're vaccinated against common
23 diseases of concern in the shelter environment. And
24 are given a screening medical exam to identify
25 additional health concerns that require further

2 attention or treatment through a generous grant from
3 the ASPCA. All dogs are also vaccinated against
4 canine influenza upon intake.

5 Our Foster Department staff cultivated
6 over 278 foster volunteers who graciously opened
7 their homes to 999--998 animals in need of individual
8 attention in 2014. Over 25,000 volunteer hours were
9 amassed by 636 volunteers walking dogs; socializing
10 cats; tending to rabbits; participating in off-site
11 adoption and awareness events; allowing AC&C to
12 expand our capacity to provide routine enrichment for
13 animals; increase adoptions; recruit more fosters and
14 being AC&C ambassadors in the community. State-of-
15 the art cat condos, dog kennels and rabbit cases have
16 replaced older housing, and our Behavior Enrichment
17 Department grew to 24 full-time staff to focus on
18 behavior and training; daily dog play groups; and
19 more detailed evaluation of dog behavior. Through
20 additional capital funding from DOH, we added 12 new
21 vehicles for rescue transport to fosters and New Hope
22 partners. Most recently, the City has committed an
23 additional \$8.5 million in capital funding to build
24 an adoption center where the garage is now located at
25 the Manhattan Care Center. Undertake HVAC and other

2 facility improvements at our Brooklyn Center; the
3 addition of two mobile adoption centers; and funding
4 to expand and support a Professional Experience
5 Development Department.

6 With respect to Intro 485, AC&C is
7 thankful for the support of the Council and is
8 committed to continued improvement of the entire
9 organization. We would welcome the opportunity to
10 improve our services to New York City with an
11 additional two shelters in the Bronx and Queens,
12 especially state-of-the-art facilities that address
13 some of the inherent constraints of our current
14 buildings. However, it is essential to also have
15 adequate funding to support the many departments and
16 staff that I just laid out, which are required to
17 care for and find homes for 30,000 plus animals.
18 Finding or building new facilities without adequate
19 funding to sustain a level of performance that is at
20 a minimum equate to where AC&C is now, would simply
21 set up AC&C or any other vendor to fail. We urge the
22 Council to consider the costs associated with making
23 New York City's Animal Sheltering System premier.
24 Not just the buildings. Before voting on a mandate
25 that has no funding to sustain, and more importantly

2 improve the live release rate in Animal Welfare
3 Services in New York City. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to take
5 any questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Well, that was
7 impressive. [laughter] That was impressive. I mean
8 you have been doing incredible work, and all of the
9 laudatorial remarks that you and your staff has
10 received I think are worthy. Because the amount of
11 animals that you all take in [clears throat] is
12 overwhelming to think of on a piece of paper. But in
13 real life I'm sure it's even more overwhelming and
14 challenging. So I want to, you know, thank you for
15 the incredible improvements that you've been able to
16 instituted in your time as Executive Director. I
17 know part of the reason you've been able to do that
18 is because of an increase in resources and increase
19 in funding.

20 RISA WEINSTOCK: And I have to say the
21 increase in funding really allowed us to grow the
22 level of professional qualified individuals who come
23 to work at AC&C. And we actually are in a position
24 now where we have more than three qualified
25 candidates for positions that we seek to fill. And

2 so this doesn't happen alone, and while I'm grateful
3 for the acknowledgement, we have an unbelievable
4 team, many of whom are here today. And they all work
5 tirelessly. We are always available just like our
6 shelters are always available 24/7. So is our staff,
7 and they have done a tremendous job, and have really
8 stepped up performance in the last several years.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Well, thank you,
10 and thank you to anyone who's here that works at AC&C
11 for your service and dedication and work. I have a
12 few questions. So at the end of your testimony,
13 Risa, you talked about that you'd welcome the
14 opportunity to have two facilities, but that it is
15 important that you not be set up for failure by not
16 having the adequate resources to actually maintain
17 services at those potential sites. Could you talk a
18 little bit more about what the benefits are to having
19 a full-service shelter in every borough? And what
20 the challenges would be in having a full-service
21 shelter in every borough.

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: Sure. I want to go back
23 to something that you mentioned when talking to Dan
24 Kass and Mario Merlino about is there something in
25 between that should be considered? And I think

2 that's an excellent idea because as you--as I laid
3 out, we have a tremendous number of services. And
4 having two additional facilities we may not need to
5 have every single service in every single borough.
6 But as long as we provide it as an organization that
7 would be helpful. So yesterday when Council Member
8 Vallone came to the shelter, what he saw were cages
9 in the hallways. Manhattan has wider hallways than
10 Brooklyn and then Staten Island. So while the
11 capacity for the number of cages in Brooklyn is
12 larger, Manhattan actually houses more animals
13 because we are able to put them in the hallways. And
14 so, another facility enables us to provide more room,
15 more housing. We have--recently, we responded to
16 various calls from the community to help out with a
17 truck that turned over in Staten Island. There were
18 75 chickens. We just had several roosters come into
19 the shelter. I mean animals that you don't
20 anticipate on a regular basis. Which then challenges
21 our space issues. And so, we have a tremendous
22 number of rabbits right now that we're holding for
23 legal reasons. And so, what we did is we moved cats
24 into the hallway to accommodate the rabbits. So that
25 they're a less stressful environment than a hallway.

2 So there is constant movement of animals, and you can
3 never predict how many are going to come in at what
4 time. So I feel having another facility where we can
5 spread that space would be very helpful. With
6 respect to adoptions, we anticipate doing more robust
7 adoptions in both the Bronx and Queens with mobile
8 adoption centers. And I think we have to see how
9 those numbers play out, but the clearly the garage--
10 the new garage is really--we want to focus on being a
11 premier adoption center in New York City.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] And
13 we need it done as soon as possible not in 2018 or
14 2021, right.

15 RISA WEINSTOCK: [laughs] I agree.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Yes.

17 [background comment]

18 RISA WEINSTOCK: And then with respect
19 to--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
21 Overruled on the applause. [laughter]

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: --the adoption--the
23 adoption--the adoption center in Manhattan, that's
24 going to free up space. So, you know, I think like
25 we really need to analyze what--where are all our

2 animals going? So we're--we are creating an
3 opportunity through the garage to free up space in
4 the Manhattan shelter to sort of expand our medical
5 services. To have better isolation for animals. But
6 having two new facilities also opens up the
7 possibility of starting fresh with state-of-the-art
8 isolation facilities, and housing that might be
9 better equipped to address about the volume of
10 animals that we have and how to keep disease from
11 spreading throughout the shelters.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: I'm going to turn
13 it over to Council Member Vallone in a moment. I
14 just want to understand what your assessment is of
15 the receiving sites in the Bronx and Queens. To what
16 extend to you feel like they're meeting the goals
17 from Local Law 59? And in what areas do they fall
18 short, and what is the condition of both receiving
19 sites. How can they be improved?

20 RISA WEINSTOCK: So the goals of Local
21 Law 59 with respect to the entire organization were
22 met. Local Law 59 required the receiving centers to
23 be open 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. And as you
24 recall, before Local Law 59 and because of a budget
25 reduction, we had the Queens receiving center open

2 for two days a week, and the Bronx Receiving Center
3 open only three days per week. As a result, we're
4 seeing more animals surrendered to both of those
5 locations. More so in the Bronx than in Queens. The
6 receiving centers themselves as far as the condition,
7 the Bronx Receiving Center is actually a nice piece
8 of property. It has sufficient amount of room for
9 client intake. And the goal for us is to do the
10 admission counseling in the receiving centers.
11 Ideally, that's where you want it. That's where we
12 want to talk to people about the opportunity to
13 prevent the surrender. We do have staff there now
14 who do intakes and who have basic--some basic
15 knowledge about how to talk about surrendering
16 prevention options. But we want a robust department
17 in both of those facilities. And in the Bronx
18 there's room for that. It's a little bit larger. In
19 Queens, it's a very limited space. It's very small,
20 and we met--we've been working with the City to
21 identify other spaces that's certainly larger where
22 we can just spread out a little bit. It's going to
23 be difficult to do adoption counseling in Queens, but
24 we're going to do it. Because that is an area where
25 we've seen it yields results. So our goal is to

2 prevent 150 surrenders in the first year that we
3 created this department and less than six months it
4 was over 300 that were prevented. So there's
5 definitely that service that's--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
7 That's amazing.

8 RISA WEINSTOCK: --that needs to be--
9 Yeah, so you can see the community needs that
10 service. Surrender does not have to be your only
11 option, and it's incumbent on us to just get that
12 program into the receiving centers regardless of what
13 size they are. We will make it happen. And as you
14 saw, Council Member Vallone, yesterday in every nook
15 and cranny we make things happen. So, you know, if
16 you fund us, we will spend it wisely. We are not
17 going to waste a nickel, and we will find a place for
18 everything. It's our goal to get out as many animals
19 as possible. Every healthy animal, every treatable
20 animal. And so, more space, more money. Whatever
21 you want to give us, we will use it, and we will use
22 it to the best advantage possible. The goal is to
23 save more animals.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So, I look forward
25 to working with Council Member Vallone and Council

2 Member Arroyo--who just left--in pushing for Reso A
3 money from individual members to try to actually come
4 up with a good amount of money to fund some of the
5 things you need besides this \$8.5 million, until
6 we're able to achieve what this legislation seeks to
7 do. We've been joined by Majority Leader Van Bramer,
8 and I want to turn it over to Council Member Vallone.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I'm going
10 to give--I'm going to let Jimmy Van Bramer take some
11 time, because I know you've been waiting. But before
12 I turn it over, I'm also reminded of the 12 days of
13 Christmas when you're going through all the animals
14 that you have: Four calling birds, three French
15 hens; two turtle doves, and a partridge. You left
16 out the 170 rabbits that came in the other night.

17 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And it's pretty
19 amazing, and I think one of the many lessons my
20 mother taught me, not only for animal advocacy is to
21 observe and to listen. Especially for those who are
22 doing such wonderful things, everyone in this room.
23 And I think for every council member if you can get
24 to one of these shelters and to these sites, just one
25 hour really does change what you are doing, and what

2 we can do to help. And like we had said to the
3 Department of Health and the folks up here. You know,
4 we want to partner to make this happen. We don't
5 want to create another unfunded mandate. We don't
6 want to set you backwards. But I am passionate to
7 make this happen because sometimes the timing is
8 right, and I feel with your vision and with the
9 programs and the team that's in place, it just feels
10 like it's right for this to happen. So that being
11 said, I will address some of the questions that I
12 have after the Majority Leader has some time.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Well, I just
14 want to say thank you to Council Member Vallone whose
15 family has long been passionate about this issue.
16 And, thank him for his work, and obviously our Chair
17 Council Member Johnson for his work on this issue.
18 I just want to say you're wonderful. I have had a
19 privilege to be on this committee for a number of
20 years, and have you testify a number of times. And I
21 think you're doing a great job, and I'm signing onto
22 the legislation. We need the full-service shelters.
23 I do want to seriously encourage you to look at Long
24 Island City if you're looking for additional space.
25 We do have a lot of space, and there are a lot of

2 opportunities in Long Island City. So I hope your
3 team--should everything fall into place will look
4 west, and go west in Queens, and find an opportunity
5 there. But really, I just want to thank Council
6 Member Vallone who is continuing a very proud and
7 distinguished tradition. And is so passionate about
8 the thing she believes in, and I have great respect
9 and admiration for him. So I just want to say thank
10 you, and I fully support you.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Well, Majority
12 Leader, your signing on brings us up to 34 sponsors.
13 So, thank you. That's great and thank you for being
14 here today, and for your support. We really, really
15 appreciate it. Risa, I have some more questions. So,
16 you testified that just now that you really want to
17 add admissions counselors to the Bronx and Queens
18 receiving centers. Do these facilities have the
19 capacity for those services?

20 RISA WEINSTOCK: They do. The capacity
21 in terms of space--

22 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
23 Space.

24 RISA WEINSTOCK: --for people? They do.
25 Bronx certainly has room to make that counseling

2 private. What we did is we reconfigured the front
3 areas of the Brooklyn and Manhattan shelters so that
4 there are private counseling rooms. So it's a one-
5 on-one. There's no shame. There's no judgment. You
6 come in and you can tell your story, and most times
7 people-- You know, and they have boxes in Kleenex in
8 there because it's a very emotional conversation.
9 The Bronx I think we can make that. We can add.
10 There's some space to play with where we can make it
11 a private area. In Queens again it's a very, very
12 limited space, but if we can fix something, we will
13 do it. It will be very small, but it's not--we don't
14 need you to stay there for an hour. It's not an
15 interrogation. It's just like here are some
16 services. How can we help you? And get people out
17 on their way. So it will be a challenge, but we'll
18 make it happen.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And can AC&C add
20 adoption services to the receiving centers without
21 needing all the services that would make them full-
22 service shelters?

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: That becomes a little
24 tough, but we would be really open-minded about that.
25 The reason why it's tough is that you will need a

2 medical department and medical suite if we're doing
3 options in these other facilities. Because someone
4 will come in, and the animals that are available for
5 adoption the shelter many of them are not already
6 spayed or neutered because we don't think it's fair
7 to put an animal through that if they're not going to
8 get placed. So, someone comes in. They select a
9 pet. They do the adoption, and then we set up an
10 appointment for the animal to be altered that day at
11 the shelter, and then you come back and you pick them
12 up. It adds a little bit of stress to then have to
13 take an animal that's available for adoption from
14 Queens and take them back to a full-service shelter
15 to have to bring them back. Also, that driving back
16 and forth increases cross-contamination--

17 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]

18 Right.

19 RISA WEINSTOCK: -- of animals. So it's
20 probably better to have it all in one place. But
21 that being said, with the additional vehicles that we
22 have, some of the things that we are thinking about
23 with the mobile adoption center is possibly not all--
24 We usually have--the animals that are on the mobile
25 adoption vehicle are altered. So that you come on

2 the vehicle. You pick out your animal and you go
3 home with them. But if we could promote more
4 adoptions and not have to pre-alter these animals, we
5 are considering we'll take them back to the shelter
6 or origin and have them altered. And then, we will
7 deliver them to the person who came to the mobile
8 event. So that if there's not a full-service shelter
9 in your community, we will somehow make sure that we
10 make it easier for those individuals to adopt a pet.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And are there any
12 current requirements whether by law or by contract
13 from the city that you see as being unnecessary? Any
14 of the current obligations that you have to meet that
15 you think that don't make sense for what you do
16 operationally that we could improve.

17 RISA WEINSTOCK: I feel like this is a
18 leading question.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: No it's not.
20 [laughter] It's not a leading question.

21 RISA WEINSTOCK: That we could-- Well,
22 listen, we would love not to hold stray cats for
23 three days. You know, a kitten that comes in who
24 loses a kitten? In my opinion. That's me. That's a
25 challenge. The law immediately it's at least three

2 days that we have to figure out did someone claim
3 you? Do you belong to somebody? The longer--as
4 someone mentioned earlier--the longer an animal stays
5 in the shelter--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] It
7 gets sick.

8 RISA WEINSTOCK: --the greater the risk
9 of getting sick. The greater the risk that they
10 become at risk of euthanasia. Getting back to how
11 long do you wait until they're euthanized? We can't
12 even talk about placement until those three days are
13 over. And then if an animal has some identifying tag
14 or a license or a microchip, it's by law our job to
15 search for seven days to find that person. So we'll
16 send a certified letter. Many times people don't
17 register their microchips. So we're sending a letter
18 or we're calling a phone number that's no longer in
19 service. But we're still using those seven to ten
20 days. You know, our goal is to get--we want to
21 reunited people with their pets, but that's a
22 challenge. So I would love not to have to hold
23 animals for the full three days if it's clearly a
24 stray animal. But that's a legislative--a legislative
25 issue. You know, I need to think a little bit more--

2 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]

3 Okay.

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: -- about that. I'm
5 sorry. I wasn't really prepared to--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing] It
7 was not a leading question.

8 RISA WEINSTOCK: I wasn't really prepared
9 to --

10 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
11 That's okay.

12 RISA WEINSTOCK: --to address that.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So, just to make
14 sure there's nothing else to-- So, Risa, you know
15 last year when we had an oversight hearing, you
16 talked about that retention had been an issue
17 throughout certain levels of the organization. But
18 you just said that for some of the positions you have
19 open you have two or three good candidates for those
20 positions. So do key vacancies still exist? And
21 positions are difficult to fill?

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: The turnover that we
23 see, and I think it's pretty common in animal welfare
24 is that the line level staff of animal care workers.
25 And we also have turnover in the Medical Department.

2 There's a real shortage of licensed vet techs. And
3 there is a burnout rate. There are a lot of animals
4 coming into medical to deal with, and we often see
5 medical staff both licensed vet techs and vets leave
6 for private practice or for another animal welfare
7 organization that is not taking in 30,000 a year.
8 That has a much more manageable and limited
9 admission. And so that's the real struggle. And,
10 you know, we've looked at this issue for three or
11 four years now, and we realize this is the nature of
12 the beast. So we are always recruiting. Our goal
13 actually is to always over-recruit. So certainly in
14 medical and with animal care workers we don't have a
15 number. It's okay to have a few more because we know
16 in the summer, for example, it gets really intense.
17 It gets very, very busy, and we know people are going
18 to start to burn out. And we don't want our staff to
19 burn out. So what helps is to have additional staff
20 available. So we're always trying to find the right
21 number, but truthfully, there's not a right number.
22 We'll always have a very busy HR and recruitment
23 process

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: What has AC&C done
3 to make the people of the Bronx and Queens aware that
4 field services are available in their communities?

5 RISA WEINSTOCK: Well, we have--you can
6 call 311, if you have any question. The receiving
7 centers have all of the hours posted. You can go on
8 our website. If anybody really required services, I
9 don't think they need to know it's AC&C. They just
10 pick up the phone and call 311 or 911, if it's an
11 emergency, and our field is dispatched.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: The reason why I
13 ask is, you know, each council member sends out
14 weekly emails, newsletters. We go to Community Board
15 events. We hand out literature. If you all wanted
16 to provide a flyer for us, maybe specifically in the
17 Bronx and Queens where it's more challenging, where
18 members could send it out to community boards. Give
19 it out to tenant associations and specific
20 associations. That could maybe help increase the
21 awareness to the public of the services that are
22 provided.

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: Oh, absolutely, and what
24 we've started to do is contact council members when
25 our mobile adoption vehicle is going to be in your

2 district. And I know that you have both posted it in
3 your newsletter. We're also going to work with
4 Council to post our job openings to make sure that
5 we're, you know, pulling from all five boroughs, and
6 getting our needs out there.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And similarly, I
8 know that the receiving centers, as you mentioned in
9 your testimony, have expanded their hours, as
10 mandated by Local Law 59. I would similarly ask that
11 you try to get that information out there through
12 local organizations, community groups, community
13 board, elected officials' offices so that people know
14 that hours actually have been expanded.

15 RISA WEINSTOCK: And I think that
16 partnered with that message would be that we have
17 admission or pet surrender counseling services.
18 Because it's sort of a tricky thing to do. We really
19 don't want to advertise here's a place where you can-
20 -there's more hours available for you to surrender
21 your pet. We also want to make lost and found more
22 available at those--at those areas, too. So there's
23 a bigger message than just our hours are longer, and
24 I agree with you. We'll take advantage of that
25 opportunity.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And lastly, what
3 are the benefits of having one facility open 24 hours
4 a day for intake? Should there be limitations to
5 intake during off hours?

6 RISA WEINSTOCK: Going back to the value
7 of the admissions process, it's really good to have a
8 conversation with someone even if they are completely
9 intent on surrendering their pet. What happens in
10 the admissions process is we get really good vital
11 information about that animal at that time. So in
12 the middle of the night if someone is bringing an
13 animal in, we're losing that opportunity. So I'm
14 not--I don't think that that's the best use of our
15 resources.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: That's why I asked.

17 RISA WEINSTOCK: However always being
18 available for NYPD, and they come in 24/7, that is
19 certainly a much needed service for the city. But
20 surrendering a pet in the middle of the night. And I
21 actually--I don't think we've had really many of
22 those. But I would hate to lose the opportunity to
23 counsel somebody, or to get really important
24 information about who this pet is. Or, even if you--
25 if it was stray, where did you find him? Was he

2 friendly when you approached him? That kind of
3 information is really helpful for us to assess what
4 the placement possibility is for the animal.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Are there any
6 vacancies on your Board of Directors currently?

7 RISA WEINSTOCK: There are currently two.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And that's not
9 including the two new so--?

10 RISA WEINSTOCK: That is the two new
11 positions.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Oh, that is the two
13 new positions?

14 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So besides the two
16 new positions, there are no vacancies?

17 RISA WEINSTOCK: There are no vacancies
18 right now.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And what is the
20 timeline for adding those two new public members that
21 were announced in January?

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: Well, we have a
23 nominating committee who will meet to start to look
24 at some of the candidates who submitted CVs and
25 letters of interest. And also, the Board will reach

2 out if they want to, you know, identify certain
3 individuals who they think might be interested to be
4 on the board.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Find really good
6 people. [laughter] I think there has been a lot of
7 scrutiny, maybe sometimes fair. Maybe sometimes not
8 fair and agita among advocates that in the past--
9 I'm not talking about the current AC&C Board. But
10 there was a lot of I think anger directed at the
11 Board in the past. And I think this is a great step
12 in becoming more open, and maybe a little more
13 independent at least for perception purposes. And
14 so, I think that this is a great opportunity to put
15 individuals on the board that may not be allied with
16 the administration or with the department, or with
17 any stakeholders that have been deeply involved. But
18 caring and dedicated and thoughtful experts in animal
19 welfare and humane welfare. And so, I would
20 encourage you to encourage the board to encourage the
21 nominating committee to find two remarkable and
22 exceptional candidates.

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: Will do.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: thank you very much
25 for your testimony.

2 RISA WEINSTOCK: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Just a couple
4 quick things.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: [interposing]
6 Well, it's early yet.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, I know. I
8 gave it to Jimmy and he gave it up for me. [sic]
9 What I'd--what I'd like to ask is just - I see your
10 commitment to what we are--Bill 45, which was
11 supporting and what we want to get done, and we're
12 appreciative of that. And we will do everything we
13 can to get those shelters and the funding, but then
14 we're also dealt with today's reality of what we have
15 and we can do to make that better. And I'm very
16 appreciative for the additional millions that went
17 in. So we know we're all here to fight for the
18 shelters. But I think we also have to fight for
19 what's--dealing with today, and today is I don't
20 really have a functioning receiving shelter in
21 Queens. And I don't think I want to walk out of this
22 room without putting some type of emergency plan in
23 place to deal with that. And with the funding be
24 allocated especially a certain good percentage. I

2 know you're going to get back to us on that--on
3 what's happening in Queens.

4 We really have to focus on these two
5 giant boroughs that are--could really benefit from
6 your vision of what you've created already in the
7 existing. And showing by what additional funds can
8 do to create those benefits even from the
9 meditational music that was in with the cats and the
10 dogs to the more serious approach of the educational
11 component. And I think with all the advocates you
12 have in the room, if it's something we started was a
13 senior task force where we put the same groups
14 together fighting for seniors in the city. And we're
15 coming with new legislation and new ideas and new
16 funding. It's almost like we have our own little
17 task force for animal advocacy here. And there are
18 so many ideas and energy. We just want that to
19 continue on what we can do to help you because you're
20 leading the fight with 30,000 animals. And what we
21 can do going forward to help the administration, and
22 ideas and how to best use that money.

23 So I think that's something else I want
24 to come out of today. I mean we even talked about an
25 educational component. You know, we talked about how

2 to get the kids involved. And more interns to get
3 the students involved in receiving centers to have a
4 place where the future vets of the world where the
5 kids who are really interested like my daughter and
6 everyone else that want to help. That could spend
7 some time after school with your volunteers and your
8 staff to learn and help the parents. There are so
9 many good things that we can try to use. And I think
10 what I want to maybe hear from you now is what would
11 be your vision today to help-- I mean, let's assume
12 we find a facility, something that's more adequate.
13 Whether it's in Long Island City, the College Point
14 or wherever we're going to put it. What would be the
15 steps today that you would address to better the
16 receiving centers that are existing in Queens and the
17 Bronx?

18 RISA WEINSTOCK: Well, I think if we
19 found a facility--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
21 Uh-huh.

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: --strictly for the
23 services that we're doing now?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
25 Right.

2 RISA WEINSTOCK: Not a full-service
3 shelter?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No. I mean
5 that's what we want.

6 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] Right.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --but we're not
8 going to get that today.

9 RISA WEINSTOCK: Right, right.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, if we find a
11 facility tomorrow to finally help Queens--well, Bronx
12 has one. Queens really doesn't--in Queens to
13 actually have a receiving center, what can we do to
14 make that center better?

15 RISA WEINSTOCK: Well, by having more
16 space, you certainly have more opportunity for the
17 public to come in and to engage with us. We recently
18 reached out to a not-for-profit organization that
19 does humane education. We're really focusing in
20 these next few years our strategy. We have to focus
21 on the intake. The intake of surrendered pets is
22 going up. That's a--that's a challenge. And so
23 there's a lot of things that can be done about that,
24 and I had mentioned we're going to work with the
25 ASPCA. We're going to work with the City. We have

2 other partners. So, humane ed is a big piece. We
3 want to partner with the outside organizations who
4 have get that word out about spay and neuter. How
5 important it is for young adults to--who are-- Or
6 even kids who are looking to adopt pets that they
7 understand the importance of a pet overpopulation
8 problem. That they understand that the shelter is
9 the place where you really should go if you're going
10 to change what's going on in New York City. That
11 spay/neuter is so important to help reduce the pet
12 overpopulation. So I can see space for that as we
13 partner with other organizations. Certainly space
14 for the Admissions Department. And also right now
15 where the pet--where the pet receiving center is
16 located in Queens, the address is Queens Boulevard,
17 but it's really not on Queens Boulevard. You have to
18 go around the corner. And so, it just looks like
19 this is what--just bring your pets here. So visually
20 what I would love to see is it has our name, Animal
21 Care and Control New York City, Adoption, Volunteer,
22 Donate where we can provide service. All the
23 different services. Information about the services
24 that we provide. It just would be a better--a better
25 environment. It is a very, very tight space, and it

2 has very limited capability to do anything right now
3 but take in a few animals at a time. And it also
4 required more transport from Queens. But, you know,
5 our field officers because it is small--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] It
7 almost sounds like if we reduce or remove the medical
8 component of the full animal shelter. Because that's
9 somewhere, another type of compromise that we might
10 be able to get to where these facilities than then be
11 an adoption intake, educational, receiving
12 combination center where either-- I don't know if
13 it's possible. You could partner up with some of the
14 partners for the medical procedures. So they have to
15 be done there instead of going back to Manhattan or
16 Brooklyn. So if someone does want like the mobile
17 unit wants to adopt a pet, you have something similar
18 now. Because those animals in the mobile units also
19 are faced with a similar-- There is not a medical
20 facility there. Couldn't you do something similar
21 toward a mobile unit with those?

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yeah, we could. We
23 could also-- You know, the space right now we're not
24 allowed to keep--and correct me if I'm wrong Mario--
25 we're not allowed to keep animals there overnight.

2 So that's one of the challenges, and that's actually
3 been a challenge in finding the right space.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You're not
5 allowed or you just don't have the ability--you don't
6 have the facilities?

7 RISA WEINSTOCK: No, the lease doesn't--
8 the lease does not permit it.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: It's the lease.

10 RISA WEINSTOCK: So the zoning has been
11 an issue. And we talk about this every other week.
12 It's on our agenda how are we doing in finding space
13 for the Queens receiving center. Notwithstanding a
14 possible full-service shelter because it's really
15 important to have room to do more.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, we may
17 have to work with the Department of City Planning for
18 Special Permits then for these two centers.

19 RISA WEINSTOCK: And the other would
20 also--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
22 We don't want to lose the ability in this fight
23 because of what we can't do because of the zoning
24 requirement.

2 RISA WEINSTOCK: And parking. Parking is
3 essential because our vehicle--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
5 You've got to put a loading zone in front.

6 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yeah.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So these are
8 things we can handle. [laughs]

9 RISA WEINSTOCK: Because the Bronx has
10 that. The Bronx has a loading area behind. There's
11 a back entrance and our vehicles can bring animals in
12 and out through the back. Not through the front
13 where all the public are coming. So there's a lot of
14 other issues in finding space that would be helpful.
15 If we're looking, we sort of want the whole-- If
16 it's not a full-service shelter, we're really looking
17 for the whole package.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know what,
19 that's something maybe we can all talk about going
20 forward. I think those are great ideas, and I think
21 the last thing I want to know--because there are so
22 many things I want to hear from the group before 1
23 o'clock--is what are the numbers from Queens and
24 Bronx. Like of the 30,000 how many animals come from
25 Queens? How many come from Bronx?

2 RISA WEINSTOCK: So there's two ways to
3 look at it. You can look at it as the dogs and cats
4 borough by origin. So, an animal may have been found
5 Manhattan. That's the borough of origin, but where
6 somebody brings him to surrender him or to say I
7 found a stray animal, that's a different--that's a
8 different number. So, what we're seeing is in the
9 Bronx in 2014, 8,726 animals originated somewhere
10 from the Bronx. This is not where they--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
12 Has that risen, declined, remained steady?

13 RISA WEINSTOCK: It has increased by
14 about 500.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's a lot.

16 RISA WEINSTOCK: And this is not bringing
17 them into the Bronx Receiving Center. This is just
18 where they were found. so it's gone up by 500
19 animals. And in Queens--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
21 How many of those 8,700 went to the Bronx Receiving
22 Center?

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: So I don't know how many
24 of those particular ones, but what I can tell you is
25 the Bronx Receiving Center received 4,624 animals in

2 2014, which is up from 3,643. So it looks like it's
3 about a thousand more.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's--that's
5 quite a number.

6 RISA WEINSTOCK: And that I think is
7 reflective of being open 12 hours a day, 7 days a
8 week. Whereas we were open I think 8 hours 3 days a
9 week before Local Law 59. And in Queens we also saw
10 an increase. So in 2013, 1,873 animals were
11 surrendered to the Queens Pet Receiving Center, and
12 this year it was 2,786. So that's about an increase
13 of 800.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: About how many
15 total animals were started in Queens? Just like in
16 the Bronx, you said--

17 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] So in
18 Queens, we had an increase of the number of animals
19 that originated from Queens as well. In 2013, it was
20 5,900, and this year in 2014 there were about 6,400.
21 So there's a real--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] A
23 big number. [sic]

24 RISA WEINSTOCK: That's why I'm saying we
25 have to address--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] I
3 think those are the numbers--

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: --the intake.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --that we have
6 to remember why we're fighting for what we're
7 fighting for. I think those are--that's--that's--I'm
8 not very happy that eight and six [sic] it went up
9 about 14 or 15,000 of the 30,000 animals are coming
10 from two boroughs that don't have shelters. I mean
11 that pretty much ends what we need to say. I mean
12 that's the unacceptable reality of what we're dealing
13 with is that half of the animals that you are
14 mandated to care for are coming from boroughs that
15 don't have a shelter. So, and that's a very large--

16 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] I also--I
17 don't mean to interrupt.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But--but I mean
19 that's the reality of where we are, and I think
20 that's something we have to take from today is that
21 of all the achievements that you've accomplished from
22 what you've done it all goes back to the reason why
23 we're having this hearing.

24 RISA WEINSTOCK: And let me say two thing
25 about that. I think it also informs what we want to

2 do in the Bronx and in Queens. There's a real need
3 for education, right. So having an adoption center
4 when you have so many animals originating from the
5 Bronx or Queens, there's disconnect there. And the
6 other thing that I would say is Brooklyn is by far
7 the biggest borough of origin. And has the most
8 animals surrendered. So Brooklyn exceeds what's
9 going on in the Bronx and in Queens.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, wouldn't
11 Brooklyn benefit from the fact that it wouldn't--
12 doesn't have animals shifted from Queens to Brooklyn
13 if Queens had its own shelter?

14 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yeah, definitely.
15 Right--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
17 Okay.

18 RISA WEINSTOCK: --the intake in Brooklyn
19 would be smaller, but what I'm saying is the origin
20 where the animals--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
22 Right.

23 RISA WEINSTOCK: --are coming from,
24 Brooklyn is the number one place.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

3 Okay.

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: But I think it's really
5 an opportunity if we had a different facility to push
6 education programs, greater spay and neuter in the
7 community. I mean there's a reason why there's so
8 many--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] I
10 think that could be a topic for another joint
11 hearing--

12 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] Yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --with lots of
14 our friends in Transportation and Education in how we
15 can continue with all the 51 council members on their
16 websites in getting that information out. We want to
17 partner with you and with the City to address this.
18 So we thank you, and I turn it back to the Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Risa.
20 I'm sorry, we have to--

21 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] That's
22 fine. [sic]

23 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: --because there are
24 a lot of great advocates that we want to hear from.
25 So thank you again for your testimony. Before we go

2 to the first panel from the ASPCA, I want to call up
3 Thomas Lucania from the Bronx Borough President's
4 Office for the next testimony. I pronounced your
5 name correctly, sir?

6 THOMAS LUCANIA: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Great.

8 [pause]

9 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: I have to run to
10 another hearing just to check in to get my
11 attendance, and then I'm coming back here.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Corey and I are
13 going to be doing that dance together.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: And then Paul is
15 doing the same thing when I come back.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: To the Finance
17 [sic] Committee.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So I'm turning--I'm
19 turning the hearing over to Council Member Vallone to
20 chair, and I want to recognize we've been joined by
21 Council Member--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
23 Oh, now, we're really in trouble.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: -- Robert Cornegy.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [laughs] I'm
3 teasing you. All right. So please introduce
4 yourself and turn the mic on.

5 THOMAS LUCANIA: Good afternoon, Chairman
6 Johnson, Council Members Vallone and Cornegy. My
7 name is Thomas Lucania, and I'm the Director of
8 Community Boards and Legislative Affairs for Bronx
9 Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. And I'm here today
10 to testify on his behalf in support of Intro 485. I
11 am in favor of the creation of a new full-service
12 shelter of my home borough of the Bronx as well as
13 well as one in my neighboring borough of Queens. For
14 many years we have heard the concerns of animal
15 lovers and animal rights activists in my borough who
16 have decried the lack of a full-service animal
17 shelter in the Bronx. As has been noted numerous
18 times, the lack of a full-service animal shelter in
19 the Bronx has resulted in animals suffering in a
20 variety of ways. As receiving centers do not provide
21 shelter or medical care for homeless animals.
22 Current shelters are not providing a lost and found
23 for lost pets before they are euthanized. It has
24 been noted that animals brought to these receiving
25 centers in the Bronx and Queens are currently

2 transported to a full-service shelter in the other
3 boroughs, which places incredible pressure on
4 existing facilities. These facilities already
5 operate beyond maximum capacity. This needs to end.
6 We can no longer accept such unequal treatment. I
7 urge the Committee on Health to pass legislation as
8 soon as possible. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you so
10 much, and we love having the support of our dear
11 friend in the Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, and
12 I know Melinda Katz is also a good support. So it's
13 nice to have a united front. Thank you very much.

14 THOMAS LUCANIA: Thank you, sir.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay, our next
16 panel is going to be the folks we just heard from not
17 too long ago in the cold on the steps. [sic] Our
18 ASPCA President and CEO, Matthew Bershadker, Gail
19 Buchwald from the ASPCA and Jane Hoffman from the
20 Mayor's Alliance for New York City Animals. And
21 we'll kind of link it to three minutes, but we really
22 want to hear from you guys [laughs]. So I won't be
23 the one banging that gavel.

24 [pause]

25 MATTHEW BERSHADKER: Good morning.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: By the way,
3 we've been joined by Council Member Robert Cornegy.
4 Good morning, Councilman.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEGY: [interposing]
6 Good morning, sir.

7 MATTHEW BERSHADKER: My name is Matt
8 Bershadker. I'm the President and CEO of the ASPCA.
9 I'd like to thank Council Member Vallone for
10 introducing this very necessary and long overdue
11 legislation as well as Chairman Johnson and the other
12 members of the Health Committee for the opportunity
13 to testify in enthusiastic support for Intro 485.
14 Which will require that a full-service animal shelter
15 is established and maintained in every borough. As
16 you know, this is not a new conversation. It's one
17 that the City has struggled with for over a decade.
18 The lack of full-service animal shelters in the Bronx
19 and Queens has long been a source of frustration for
20 its residents, the ASPCA and our animal welfare
21 partners. Despite a law enacted in 2000 expressly
22 mandating five full-service shelters and an effective
23 date of 2006, these shelters were never built. Since
24 then, the ASPCA has spent upwards of \$300 million on
25 New York city-based services.

2 It's both remarkable and unconscionable
3 respectfully that we've been having this conversation
4 for 15 years. Indeed, lack of funding has been a
5 major obstacle to our joint efforts to save the
6 city's homeless animals. And with the passage of
7 Local Law 59 and much needed funding increases to
8 Animal Care and Control, we were able to mitigate
9 many of the problems AC&C was experiencing. The
10 restoration and expansion of New York City--of Animal
11 Care and Control services as the first crucial step
12 in a long-term rebuilding process for the New York
13 City shelter system. Now, under the careful guidance
14 and strong leadership of Risa Weinstock, AC&C has
15 consistently made improvements that continue to drive
16 higher live release rates. And we are confident that
17 if the City properly invests in quality Animal Care
18 and Control programming throughout all five boroughs,
19 we will see unprecedented progress for our city's
20 most vulnerable residents. However, the need for
21 full-service shelters in the Bronx and Queens remains
22 dire. Presently, these boroughs only have receiving
23 centers, which do not provide shelter, medical, or
24 adoption services for homeless animals.

2 Instead, animals brought to these centers
3 must be transported to already over-taxed shelters in
4 Brooklyn and Manhattan. Which creates the
5 unnecessary problem of moving lost animals far from
6 the neighborhoods where they were found. This in
7 turn makes it harder for owners to find their pets.
8 For decades, the situation has short-changed
9 taxpayers, depriving them of basic municipal services
10 in their own community. Putting the problem in
11 perspective, if the Bronx and Queens were a single
12 city, their combined population of nearly 3.6 million
13 people would make them the third largest city in the
14 United States. Given the size and population of
15 these boroughs, it's inconceivable that in 2015, they
16 still do not have a shelter. Nearly all the members
17 of the Bronx and Queens Delegation agree at this
18 point and support dedicating city funds to build and
19 operate shelters in these boroughs. We urge the City
20 Council to pass and appropriately fund Intro 485. We
21 need to ensure that New Yorkers no matter where they
22 reside can access these very important community
23 services. We stand ready to work with AC&C and the
24 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to support

2 the City through this substantial but needed change.
3 Thank you very much.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you. Go
5 ahead.

6 GAIL BUCHWALD: Good morning. I'm Gail
7 Buchwalk, Senior Vice President of the ASPCA's
8 Adoption Center. I've been with the ASPCA for nearly
9 14 years, and have been actively involved in our New
10 York City rescue and adoption work throughout. I'm
11 delivering testimony on behalf of my colleagues Julie
12 Morris, Senior Vice President of Community Outreach,
13 who could not be here today. The creation and
14 sustainability of an effective Animal Care and
15 Control program in New York City requires the
16 collaboration of many groups including the ASPCA, the
17 Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals and its
18 over 150 plus rescue groups working daily in
19 collaboration with AC&C. Our goal is to increase
20 adoptions and transfers, increase the number of spay
21 and neuter surgeries, reduce euthanasia, and reduce
22 intake through Trap-Neuter-Return.

23 For all these groups to work effectively,
24 and successfully, it requires Animal Care and Control
25 be funded at levels at which it will be able to do

2 its job of providing adequate sheltering and care;
3 adoption services; field services; and provision of
4 all necessary services in all five boroughs. The
5 hard work and collaboration of the partnership in
6 conjunction with the positive change made by Local
7 Law 59 has produced positive results for the City's
8 homeless animals. Local Law 59 restored and expanded
9 services provided by New York City Shelter System,
10 and it provided AC&C with a much needed 77% budget
11 increase. This allowed AC&C to improve the shelter
12 system by hiring more staff, as we've heard today;
13 expanding hours of operations for receiving centers
14 in the Bronx and Queens; the Call Center; and
15 emergency field rescue, all vital services.

16 This has resulted in increased adoptions
17 as well as a greater ability to respond in a timely
18 manner to animals whose lives are in jeopardy. We
19 measure progress by using Live Release Rate
20 statistics. Live Release Rate, as we heard from Risa
21 earlier, refers to the number of animals leaving the
22 shelter system alive. Whether through adoption,
23 return to owner, or transferred to an agency where
24 adoption is guaranteed. In 2003, AC&C had Live
25 Release Rate of 26%, and the euthanasia rate was 61%.

2 As we heard from Risa, in January of 2015, the Live
3 Release Rate was 88.8%. So what this illustrates is
4 that we know how an investment can help Animal Care
5 and Control change things for the better and save
6 more lives.

7 However, there is still much work to be
8 done. Establishing full-service shelters in each
9 borough is an essential step to getting us to a place
10 in which no adoptable animal dies. The funding
11 levels established by Local Law 59 were a good start
12 but, to take full advantage of the stakeholder
13 partnerships and realize the vision for the Animal
14 Care and Control System, New York City deserves
15 further investment. Building full-service animal
16 shelters in the Bronx and Queens would enable AC&C to
17 save more lives and prevent animal suffering. The
18 ASPCA will continue to work with the Council, AC&C,
19 the New York City Department [bell] of Health. Thank
20 you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think you said
22 something about the loss of adoptable animals.
23 That's the stuff that keeps you up at night. Every--
24 for every adoptable animal that we can save, that we
25

2 are not, that's what we are about. But, Jane, I'm
3 sorry. But Jane, I'm sorry.

4 JANE HOFFMAN: I think that actually
5 everyone who has testified before has really made all
6 the points I wanted to make. I would just love the
7 opportunity to just look back briefly and it's-- We
8 started this in 2001, or I started it in 2001 without
9 revealing how old I am. I was only 12 then.
10 [laughter] And, you know, we've made so much
11 progress, and I do feel like I said earlier we're at
12 a point where I think--and I think you expressed it
13 as well--we are perhaps ready to make this leap. I
14 just--to full-service shelters in all boroughs, which
15 is all that we all wanted from the very beginning.
16 We did what we needed to do with Local Law 59. I
17 think it allowed the AC&C to reach an operational
18 competency level that really put them in a place to
19 deliver better services and resources. I just want
20 to make sure we do this carefully, that we don't do
21 something in the law that takes away inadvertently.
22 Like if we remove the receiving center hours of
23 operation, and just put we have to have full service
24 shelters, I want to do this in a thoughtful way like
25 everyone has been saying. Let's look at the

2 legislation really hard to accomplish what we want,
3 and let us work with you and the Administration. And
4 I'm heartened by the--the breadth and depth of the
5 commitment of the council members to this. We need
6 to do this. We're ready to do this. You know, the
7 ASPCA has put enormous services and resources. The
8 Alliance has and all its members. We helped start
9 the new Health Department at ACC. We're ready for
10 this step, but let's do it thoughtfully. Let's make
11 sure we have state-of-the-art shelters or it's not
12 worth doing. We need to be state-of-the-art. We are
13 the center of the universe. We need to have shelters
14 that reflect that fact. Queens, the Bronx are
15 fabulous boroughs. They need the services, and
16 resources that the other boroughs have been
17 receiving. We need to do it, but let's think about
18 this. Let's make sure the Administration is
19 committed to doing it. That DOHMH is committed to do
20 it the right way, and I think we can do this. We
21 have--we are now at a place where the ASPCA, the 150
22 members of the Mayor's Alliance, the ACC, we can do
23 this.

24 And if I could just do a brief shout out
25 to Melissa Webber, the Director of Operations at ACC.

2 She's fabulous. Risa is very blessed to have her. I
3 think we are blessed to have her in the city--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
5 Melissa is good.

6 GAIL BUCHWALD: --and I think part of
7 this whole--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: They're all
9 great, though.

10 GAIL BUCHWALD: They're all great. I
11 mean you could actually--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
13 We're going to get there.

14 GAIL BUCHWALD: --go down the line of
15 Risa's whole staff. I think we're ready, but, you
16 know, let's do this thoughtfully. That's all I'd
17 like to say. Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Jane,
19 and thank you to the panel. Before you leave is
20 there anything comparable that you see throughout the
21 country or in another municipality or something
22 that's doing different than what we're doing now?

23 MATTHEW BERSHADKER: So one example that
24 readily comes to mind is Austin, Texas. It's a city
25 of a million people. The city invests about \$10

2 million into their municipal services, one shelter.
3 We're a city of 8-1/2 million people. The City
4 invests \$13 million. That proportion seems off to
5 me. It seems to me that we should be investing a
6 whole lot more into what's been describe I think very
7 appropriately as a basic municipal service. It is,
8 as was said earlier, I think by Chairman Johnson the
9 same as Fire, Police, Sanitation. We need to do this
10 for all New Yorkers.

11 JANE HOFFMAN: L.A. has six shelters.
12 L.A. We can do better. We need-- I mean we have--
13 and we have more challenges in some ways than I think
14 L.A. does, and I think we have to have these
15 services. We need the--you know, we did what we
16 could to provide the safety net for the animals and
17 the services for the people with the receiving
18 centers. But we're now at a point, and ACC is ready
19 to step up yet again. Especially with their board to
20 have full-service shelters, and to provide everything
21 to Bronx and Queens that's already provided in the
22 other boroughs.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: All right, thank
24 you very much. Matt.

2 MATTHEW BERSHADKER: I would just add I
3 think the City has been allowed not to meet its
4 fundamental obligations because of the incredible
5 support of the private animal welfare advocates, the
6 ASPCA, the Mayor's Alliance, and the 150 groups. And
7 we stand here ready to support the City, as we said,
8 in helping them to meet their obligations.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I think
10 that they're very important, and any good effort is
11 that team effort. And we can't just rely on our
12 partners to take that over. The City has a
13 responsibility, and it's--I think it's time. I think
14 you've got an Administration now and a Council-- Even
15 the influx of over \$8 million that went in, because
16 of we are raising these issues again it's a great
17 start. So if that hadn't happened, I would have been
18 even more worried. The fact that's already starting
19 is a great step in the right direction.

20 JANE HOFFMAN: Well, and, you know, just
21 to mention to echo what Matt said, the amount of
22 money that they poured into this, you know, the
23 private sector is doing their part. The Mayor's
24 Alliance attracted something called the Maddies Fund
25 Grant. That's equal to \$40 million over the last

2 several years. So we're doing our part, and we just
3 really want to meet you guys, and help us figure out
4 how to get to the next step.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I really think
6 the children are the untapped resource--

7 JANE HOFFMAN: [interposing] Oh, yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: -- that will
9 help us get to the next-- The energy in the schools
10 and the children will--

11 JANE HOFFMAN: [interposing] Right. You
12 know what the Jesuit said, Give me a child that's
13 seven and he's mine for life so--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [laughs] He had
15 me at seven and he still has me for life. [laughter]
16 All right. So thank you guys. Let's move to the
17 next panel. All right, Allie Feldman, Michael Hess,
18 and Garo Alexandra, Alex something. Alexandra
19 [laughs] from the Companion Animal Network.

20 [pause]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: She was great.
22 Ladies first.

23 [background comments, pause]

24 ALLIE FELDMAN: Hi. Good afternoon. My
25 name is Allie Feldman, the Director of NYCLASS We

2 thank Council Member Vallone, Council Member Johnson
3 and the Health Committee for the opportunity to
4 testify on Intro 45. We, you know, support the
5 comments of all of our partnership organizations,
6 such as the ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance for New
7 York City Animals. So I'm be very brief because I
8 think they covered the main points. We very much
9 support the building of full-service animals shelters
10 in the Bronx and Queens. As discussed, these
11 boroughs unlike Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island
12 only receiving centers, which do not provide the full
13 breadth of services that are truly needed to get us
14 to having a first rate full-service shelter system.
15 Maintaining full-service shelters in all five
16 boroughs is necessary to ensure that all New Yorkers
17 have access to important animal control services.
18 And alleviate the strain currently placed on the
19 shelters in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island.
20 However, we stress that the AC&C must be funded at a
21 level that enables it to do its job. And over the
22 long term investment in a quality animal care and
23 control program will result in getting there. And we
24 just want to be very clear that, you know, if the
25 City does indeed move forward with building new

2 shelters, we want to make sure that there's also a
3 commitment from the City to provide the annual
4 recurring operating funds to make sure that they can
5 run. Because, of course, trying to run five full-
6 service shelters at the current level would just
7 simply be impossible. Thank you for helping to
8 create a more humane NYC for all residents, two-
9 legged and four-legged.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [off mic] And
11 those in between. [laughs]

12 ALLIE FELDMAN: And those in between.

13 GARO ALEXANIAN: [off mic] Honorable
14 members of the Council, specifically-- [on mic]
15 specifically, Council Member Vallone and your family.
16 I've testified numerous times at Council hearings
17 over the past 30 years. In 1990 to create borough
18 wide animal control agencies rather than one
19 centralized agency for which I authored State
20 legislation, which forced the creation of the ACC--

21 SERGEANT-A-ARMS: [interposing] Sir,
22 please state your name?

23 GARO ALEXANIAN: Garo Alexanian.

24 SERGEANT-A-ARMS: Thank you, Mr.
25 Alexanian.

2 GARO ALEXANIAN: --a compromise I struck
3 at my meeting with then Mayor Giuliani. In 2000, I
4 testified seeing permission to permit our not-for-
5 profit organization to found the Surrender Prevention
6 Program at ACC, which then Health Commissioner Thomas
7 Frieden granted at my meeting with him. The program
8 is now funded and operating by a charitable
9 organization and receives all the 311 animal-related
10 calls at no expense to the City. And I'm glad that
11 the ACC has followed suit. In 2007, I testified
12 seeking permission to launch low-cost mobile
13 veterinary services at the ACC shelters in order to
14 prevent medical surrenders, which had been the reason
15 for the bulk of the surrenders since the beginning of
16 time. Which was again, granted by Commissioner
17 Frieden. The low cost vet mobile is now a legend
18 with newest media reports on its creative way of
19 reducing euthanasia, and expenses to the City, even
20 the half hour television special news report as far
21 away as Moscow.

22 A first and one of a kind in the world,
23 the vet mobiles, which we operate for the past five
24 years have resulted in the reduction of surrenders to
25 ACC by one third. Whereas for decades prior,

2 surrenders have basically stayed the same. Today, I
3 testify to inform you that our not-for-profit
4 organization is under contract to purchase a 6,300
5 square foot building in the heart of Queens with
6 exceedingly prominent exposure located on a major
7 thoroughfare. We intend to open a 24-hour low cost
8 veterinary adoption and animal community center
9 including living quarters for staff and volunteers.
10 The building is properly zoned for such an endeavor,
11 and will cost us approximately \$2 million after
12 remodeling. We offer and propose the City to
13 consider separating the Animal Control Contract for
14 Queens, the nation's seventh largest city, if it were
15 to be a city. And thereby lift the Queens burden
16 from the Brooklyn ACC shelter.

17 I urge the City think creatively as did
18 Mayor Giuliani and Commissioner Frieden both of whose
19 visionary planning resulted in historic improvements
20 in New York City Animal Control in the short 20
21 years. And try a pilot effort in the lowest-- excuse
22 me--at decentralizing Animal Control Services. As a
23 direct consequence, the City is now, and has been for
24 the past two years, the lowest per capita euthanasia
25 region in the nation at just .8 dogs and cats killed

2 for 1,000 residents, a historic low. The rest of the
3 nation's average is at 16, and the next lowest region
4 is at 1.9, twice that of New York. For decades the
5 city alone has been unable to obtain a building in
6 Queens in the proper location due to failure to
7 obtain the local [sic] approval from community
8 boards. We in the private humane community will soon
9 possess the building, and the location for a Queens
10 animal control shelter. Private entities do not need
11 your local approval.

12 By partnering with a different charitable
13 organization than the ACC to provide Queens animal
14 control services, the City would no longer be putting
15 all of its eggs in one basket, and would be creating
16 both a friendly competition for better [bell] and
17 more cost-effective services, and a mutually
18 supportive relationship. Queens Borough President
19 Melinda Katz, then an Assemblywoman, was the primary
20 sponsor of my state legislation, which sought to
21 create borough wide animal control agencies. Which
22 resulted in the formation of the ACC. I am virtually
23 certain that she would still enthusiastically support
24 our proposal to the Central Animal Control Services
25 at least as a pilot program in Queens. I ask the

2 Health Department to reach out to us in such a
3 partnership, as it is well settled that private and
4 public entities in collaboration can accomplish what
5 neither can without the other. Let's make New York
6 City's animal control services the most cost-
7 effective and humane in the world.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, you just
9 said a whole lot there because Garo Alexanian has
10 been in the Bronx--

11 GARO ALEXANIAN: Now years now, sir, I've
12 been saying a whole lot.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And I'm curious,
14 right, in saying that you're about to purchase 6,300
15 square foot in the heart of Queens.

16 GARO ALEXANIAN: Yes, sir.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: When is that
18 happening?

19 GARO ALEXANIAN: As soon as closing can
20 be completed. It's under contract.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And what is the
22 plan for that facility?

23 GARO ALEXANIAN: As I said, something
24 that doesn't exist anywhere in the country. Not only
25 an animal shelter, 24-hour animal facility,

2 veterinarian services, low cost boarding, and
3 basically an animal center community. The location
4 is--there could be no better location in all five
5 boroughs. I won't divulge to exactly, except to say
6 that it's right in the center of Queens in between
7 six major highways.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That could be
9 anywhere in Queens. [laughs]

10 GARO ALEXANIAN: Well, not really. Not
11 really look really--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] It
13 could be my house.

14 GARO ALEXANIAN: Not really. Literally
15 in the center of Queens and it would accomplish the
16 location that Mr. Merlino stated that it has be
17 centrally located so it can appeal to the outer parts
18 of the borough and not just isolated in one corner.
19 And if I may add one additional point on the
20 surrender issue that AC&C spoke about, I noted that
21 the statistics had gone down. We know that most of
22 the statistics were 40,000 surrenders a year steadily
23 for decades. And within our first year, it was a 14%
24 reduction because we park out vet mobile trucks in
25 front of AC&C.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: How many vet
3 mobile trucks do you have?

4 GARO ALEXANIAN: Two and we cover all
5 five boroughs. We do all five locations and the
6 three ACC locations including the Bronx and--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
8 And who do you partner with now. Is it any of the
9 local groups that support you?

10 GARO ALEXANIAN: We're not getting any
11 support form anybody. We are self--we have to be
12 self-supportive. In 2012 and 2013, we saw 6,000
13 animals per year. What happened was unfortunately in
14 2012 and '13 we were held up at gun point at the
15 Brooklyn ACC. Point blank. I had a loaded gun in my
16 face twice. I didn't know if I was going to live
17 through it, and as a result, we ended up stopping to
18 go to that particular shelter. And we now go two
19 miles down on Cross Bay Boulevard where it's safer.
20 At that time, we knew that it was going to take an
21 enormous hit, the Brooklyn ACC where the majority of
22 surrenders emanate from. And sure enough, the
23 statistics that Risa mentioned today corroborate what
24 my foretelling was at that time to Risa. And out of

2 the 8,000 new surrenders because the surrenders had
3 gone down to 28,000 as of 2013. However--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
5 Have you ever had any discussions with the City as a
6 location for this ongoing receiving center situation-
7 -

8 GARO ALEXANIAN: [interposing] No.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --or whether
10 your facility can do this? [sic]

11 GARO ALEXANIAN: No, there's nobody that
12 has reached out or anything. I have no contacts.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
14 Well, you have a lot of people in this room that you
15 can start with. So I think that would probably be a
16 good idea.

17 GARO ALEXANIAN: Right.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think the idea
19 is that we don't want you operating alone if you
20 don't have to. We're all on the same page trying to
21 do--

22 GARO ALEXANIAN: [interposing] Exactly,
23 sir. Exactly, which is why I'm here today.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We have a lot of
25 good friends today.

2 GARO ALEXANIAN: That's why I'm here
3 today. But the surrender concept is very important
4 because that-- We saw 1,500 fewer animals last year.
5 Specifically from the Brooklyn location because we
6 were not parked in front of the Brooklyn Shelter.
7 And at that time, all I asked Risa was an armed NYPD
8 officer to be with us one day a week, a \$40,000 a
9 year commitment, and I was turned down.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, wait.
11 Hold on, but just-- You started off with a very good
12 point. Let's not go to those points. I think what
13 we're trying to find out here--and that's not the
14 purpose of the hearing--is to find exactly what you
15 stated, which is the groups that are stepping up to
16 do their part. And what we're all trying to do,
17 which is provide a humane world for those who need
18 our care the most, and I think you for what you've
19 done. So, what I would like to do then I see Risa
20 and some of the folks still here. And maybe we can
21 talk about his facility, and how maybe we can
22 coordinate these efforts. I mean that 6,300 square
23 feet is what we were saying. And Chair, we just--Mr.
24 Alexanian came in. He's in the process of purchasing
25 a 6,300 square foot building in Queens doing many f

2 the things we were talking about. So I was just
3 supporting him for that, and I thank you. So what
4 I'm going to do actually-- Thank you to this panel.
5 Thank you Allie and Garo. Thank you. We're just
6 going to ask Risa to come back up. Because I
7 apologize. I had not--one of the things that's in
8 the budget that's exciting--so I just wanted to give
9 you a chance to talk about it--was these mobile
10 units. That are going to be one permanently in
11 Queens and the Bronx. Correct. So if you could just
12 restate your name so we can get that on the
13 testimony.

14 RISA WEINSTOCK: Risa Weinstock,
15 Executive Director, Animal Care and Control of New
16 York City.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay. So we just
18 touched briefly on this I guess exciting new
19 development I guess for those two boroughs. So if
20 you could talk a little more about this.

21 RISA WEINSTOCK: Okay. We currently have
22 through a generous donation from the ASPCA and a real
23 estate company, Fenwick Keats, one mobile adoption
24 center, which we launched in February of 2014. And
25 we have adoption--offsite adoption events with dogs

2 and cats almost every week, even in the cold weather.
3 As you know, we had one last Friday in your district.
4 So, measuring the success of that, and also really as
5 a way to reach other communities not just for
6 adoptions, but who AC&C is as a brand. And as a
7 place where you could actually come and adopt at
8 other locations in a brick and mortar facility. We
9 thought additional vehicles would be a good
10 alternative in the short-term to what we have
11 currently in the Bronx and Queens. Because we don't
12 do any adoptions at the receiving centers. We have
13 one vehicle that will be delivered shortly that has
14 been funded through State Senator Jeff Klein to be
15 dedicated exclusively to the Bronx. And we'll work
16 out with him where he would like us to take it. It's
17 really he's supporting it. So we really want to work
18 with him and his district. The City is giving us
19 funding to purchase two additional vehicles. And our
20 goal would be to use them more robustly in Queens and
21 Bronx--in the Bronx. So now the Bronx would have two
22 vehicles dedicated to events. Queens will certainly
23 have one, and we have this other vehicle that
24 currently exists. So we will just look at where
25 perhaps City Council members are having events. Are

2 having things in the summer that involve families,
3 and partner with City Council and with local stores
4 and parks.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
6 So the vehicle has already been acquired, or is that
7 something-- I know one is--

8 RISA WEINSTOCK: So we have--we have one
9 currently in operation. We have one that will be
10 delivered shortly. That's through Senator Klein and
11 then the other two that's with money that is part of
12 the \$8.5 million package.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Those other two--
14 -

15 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing] Those
16 other two.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --are ready to
18 go or--?

19 RISA WEINSTOCK: Pardon?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Are those ready
21 to go or is one-- Will we see those?

22 RISA WEINSTOCK: No, we have to order
23 them. And I think it takes--I would say from--and we
24 know we're at a good point because we know what we
25 wan them to look like. We know what the signage will

2 be on them, the colors, the configuration. So I
3 would say probably--correct me if I'm wrong--about
4 six months, Melissa? About six months from the time
5 we order it to the time it's delivered as long as
6 they're not back ordered. Sometimes it takes--there
7 might be a back order. And there is really only one
8 vendor who makes them.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That list again?
10 [sic] [laughs] Just put that on your list of things
11 to do.

12 RISA WEINSTOCK: But that's the goal. So
13 we will have four and we will use them primarily in
14 areas where it's hard to reach the full-service
15 shelters. And also what we've identified, you know,
16 what Garo said--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
18 You know, maybe an educational component can also be
19 added there. You know, so many times--

20 RISA WEINSTOCK: [interposing]
21 Absolutely.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --the Fire
23 Department has that, the Police Department has that
24 for different community events and for the schools.
25 I think that would be a great way when

2 adopting/educating at the same time if you're going
3 to put that component into it.

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: Absolutely. We even
5 thought of bring the vehicle when the hearing was
6 scheduled for City Hall. We thought maybe we could
7 park it right at the steps. So council members could
8 actually see it and members of the public can see
9 really what we're talking about and what it looks
10 like. And it is--we have volunteers who assist with
11 adoptions, but they also are outreach volunteers,
12 too, who talk to people who walk by. And they say,
13 Oh, who are you? We've never heard of you. Where
14 are you. So that's also very helpful. It's like a
15 really good way to brand AC&C.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, the
17 information aspect of handing out how-to. And maybe
18 the question in today's was how do we expand the
19 information to the rest of the city on these programs
20 and that will be great when you do that.

21 RISA WEINSTOCK: And then I will just
22 mention a really important factor about these mobile
23 adoption vehicles is even in Brooklyn and in Staten
24 Island and in Manhattan our locations are only in one
25 part. So the Brooklyn location, like Garo explained,

2 is not the safest of neighborhoods. And most people
3 who come there, either are local residents or you
4 drive there. So a lot of people may shy away from
5 coming to East New York for an adoption. So if we
6 can have our vehicle in all the other parts of
7 Brooklyn, that's going to help drive adoptions. And
8 the same thing with Queens. It's not just your
9 district, but we're reaching out because Queens is
10 such a huge borough. The same in Manhattan. East
11 110th Street is not always a convenient location for
12 people who live on the West Side or Downtown. So we
13 want to be able to make adoptions just an easier
14 process for everybody in all five boroughs.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, and I
16 think that as we said we have 51 council members to
17 really help with that because as you go then we
18 spread our network of information and our emails in
19 the schools and supermoms, and sports athletic
20 associations, and everyone else that's out there.
21 Say, hey, today is the day we're going to adopt some
22 pets, and that's how we get it done. And I thank you
23 for that. Chair, do you have anything else for Risa
24 before we move on?

25 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: No.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Now, you can
3 really move on this. [sic] [laughter]

4 RISA WEINSTOCK: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: So our last panel--
6 I thank you for being patient--Esther Koslow from
7 Shelter Form Action Committee; Natalie Reeves from
8 Big Apple Bunnies; and I apologize. I'm having a
9 hard time reading. William Sackie. [sic] You're
10 not testifying. Okay. So just--just Esther and
11 Natalie.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You know, I love
13 to hear you guys, but I have to vote on other bills.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Yes.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I'm going to
16 have to leave you with Corey.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: That's what I just
18 did. Thanks, Paul. It's good to see you guys again.

19 ESTHER KOSLOW: Lovely being here.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Would you--

21 ESTHER KOSLOW: Would you like me to go
22 first?

23 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Sure. Go ahead,
24 Esther.

2 ESTHER KOSLOW: Good afternoon. I'm
3 Esther Koslow from Reform Action Committee. For 20
4 years, Shelter Reform has sought to reform New York
5 City's animal care and control by freeing from the
6 Department of Health. But to this very day health
7 officials and AC&C executives persist in claiming
8 that the AC&C is and has always been independent. If
9 only that were true. Granted, thanks to Mayor de
10 Blasio, the Department of Health is being a bit
11 nicer to the AC&C. It has increased funding. It has
12 promised to build a small adoption center. When? We
13 don't know. And has allowed the AC&C to add more
14 independent directors. But the truth is that DOH is
15 still very much in control, and its recent gifts fall
16 far short of what's needed. Most important, the DOH
17 is looking to the AC&C to make up a shortfall of
18 monies needed to run a progressive shelter. The
19 Catch-22 is that as long as the AC&C is tied to the
20 Department of Health, it can't help but attract that
21 kind of money.

22 Saving the AC&C--saying the AC&C is
23 independent doesn't make it so. But, this can
24 change. Shelter Reform submits that his committee
25 should encourage AC&C's independent directors, as you

2 have, to actually assert their independence. For
3 starters, remove voting privileges for the three
4 government directors. And certainly remove from the
5 board all DOH loyalists and apologists. Then the
6 agency can truthfully say we are independent and
7 start attracting more vendors who are both committed
8 to animal welfare and have the skills ore connections
9 to make dramatic changes. And one dramatic change,
10 fundraising. Which ties directly to Council Member
11 Vallone's Shelters Bill. The cost of building and
12 running new shelters has increased dramatically since
13 the DOH was first ordered to do that 15 years ago.
14 Will the City Council pass a bill that only
15 guarantees those shelters will be built and by a
16 certain date. But also that they'll be well designed
17 and not located in God forsaken areas?

18 Like the Brooklyn shelter or the Staten
19 Island shelter. Should we really leave it up to the
20 DOH to make those decisions? We can help the DOH,
21 and independent AC&C could enter into a public-
22 private partnership with the City. If the City were
23 to offer tax exemptions, the shelters could serve as
24 anchors to attract animal-related businesses like a
25 PetCo, a Pet Smart, a dog grooming facility, a vet's

2 office, a public dog run or dog boarding and training
3 facility. The shelter would be in the center, in the
4 middle of a go-to destination for animal lovers.
5 Would a real estate mogul donate property to the DOH?
6 No, not likely. But to a well-run independent
7 charity, particularly [bell] if the deal were
8 sweetened with tax incentives. Now, that's a real
9 possibility and with private donations supplementing
10 DOH funding the AC&C could have state-of-the-art
11 facilities. These shelters wouldn't be viewed as a
12 blight on the neighborhood, but as welcomed
13 additions. So this can happen, but only if there's a
14 truly independent AC&C. Will the Committee join us
15 in that effort? Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you, Esther.

17 ESTHER KOSLOW: You're welcome.

18 NATALIE REEVES: [off mic] Hi, there.

19 I'm Natalie from Big Apple Bunnies.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: I don't think your
21 mic is on. There you go. Is the light on.

22 NATALIE REEVES: Yes, it is.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: There you go.

24 NATALIE REEVES: Hi, I'm Natalie from
25 Big Apple Bunnies, which is a rabbit advocacy group

2 that I founded. I'll keep this very brief. We
3 strongly support the proposal. We just ask that the
4 reference in paragraph--old paragraph C, new
5 paragraph B under the proposed change would be--the
6 language would be changed from "dog and cats" to
7 "dogs, cats and rabbits." This is important because
8 a majority of New Yorkers we believe have--still have
9 no idea that rabbits are available for adoption in
10 shelters. And we want people to get used to thinking
11 of rabbits as animals that you can go adopt from the
12 shelter. The last point that I wanted address was
13 that there was testimony earlier today that rabbits
14 in--have received state-of-the-art cages under the
15 new funding. We would disagree with that. There
16 were old cages that were difficult to clean. They
17 were replaced with substantially similar cages that
18 were much smaller and much worse for the rabbits. We
19 had asked--we being rabbit volunteers and advocates--
20 had asked for cages comparable to the cats. We were
21 told that there was not funding for that. So, that
22 was the last point I had to make. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOHNSON: Thank you both for
24 being here. Thank you all for coming today. I just
25 want to reiterate that it is my heartfelt belief that

2 we can do better. And that the way we do better is
3 to get five full-service shelters, or something close
4 to those, in our boroughs. As we talked about
5 earlier, I think it comes down to funding, both
6 capital funding and expense funding to ensure that
7 the money is there so that we're not set up for
8 failure. And that we can achieve even better numbers
9 in the city. So, you know, you can tell I think from
10 this hearing today that the Council is going to full
11 advocate for these things, but we can't do it alone.
12 You know, you all need to advocate with us to ensure
13 that all parts of municipal government is going to
14 come forward to help us achieve this goal. So I look
15 forward to working with all of you. I am grateful
16 again for the \$8.5 million, but I look at it as a
17 first step. Not the final end game, but a first
18 step. So let's continue the advocacy so that we can
19 get full-service shelters in New York City. I look
20 forward to partnering with all of you, and working
21 with all of you to make our city more humane. And I
22 want to say, a point of pride, I'm really proud that
23 in a year-- It's February. Yeah, in a year we have
24 done so much on animal welfare issues in New York
25 City, and there is still a lot to do. So, we're

2 going to continue to have more hearings the rest of
3 this year, and working on more issues that make our
4 city more humane. Thank you all very much, and with
5 that, the hearing is adjourned. [gavel] [applause]

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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 9, 2015