

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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March 12, 2024
Start: 11:46 a.m.
Recess: 2:18 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - COMMITTEE ROOM, 16TH
FLOOR

B E F O R E: Oswald Feliz, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Shekar Krishnan
Vickie Paladino
Sandra Ung
Susan Zhuang

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Pierina Ana Sanchez
Kamillah Hanks

A P P E A R A N C E S

Kevin D. Kim, Commissioner of the Department of Small Business Services

Dynishal Gross, Executive Deputy Commissioner for Program of the Department of Small Business Services

Michael Forte, Executive Deputy Commissioner for Administration at the Department of Small Business Services

Randy Peers, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

Tshering Gurung, Senior Manager of Business Development and Training at Accompany Capital

Meredith Phillips Almeida, Small Business Resource Network

Carina Kaufman-Gutiérrez, Deputy Director at the Street Vendor Project

Nick Aquino, staff attorney with the Microenterprise Project of Volunteers of Legal Service

Kayt Tiskus, Collective Public Affairs

Ana Salgado, Mental Health Coordinator at Mixteca Organization

Elsa Samaniego, community leader, activist, and participant of the STELAR group in Mixteca

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

Gregory Morris, Chief Executive Officer of the
New York City Workforce Development Association

Michael Haber, Director of the Community and
Economic Development Program at Brooklyn Legal
Services Corporation A

Jessica Walker, President of the Manhattan
Chamber of Commerce

Pilar DeJesus, advocacy coordinator at TakeRoot
Justice

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sound check for the
3 Committee on Small Businesses. Today's date is March
4 12, 2024, being recorded by Danny Huang on the 16th
5 Floor Hearing Room.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
7 welcome to the New York City Preliminary Budget
8 hearing on the Committee on Small Business.

9 Please silence all electronic devices.

10 At no time, please do not approach the
11 dais. If you have any question, please raise your
12 hand and the Sergeant-at-Arms will kindly assist you.

13 Thank you very much for your kind
14 cooperation.

15 Chair, we're ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: [GAVEL] Good morning,
17 everyone, and welcome to today's budget hearing. I am
18 Council Member Oswald Feliz, and I am the Chair of
19 the Council's Committee on Small Business. Today,
20 we'll be hearing from the Department of Small
21 Business Services on their Fiscal 2025 Preliminary
22 Budget.

23 Commissioner Kim, it is great to see you.
24 Great meeting you a few weeks ago in my District
25 office. Thank you for coming all the way to the Bronx

2 and Fordham Road. A very productive meeting and
3 conversation, and we look forward to continuing those
4 discussions that we had.

5 Small businesses are the backbone of our
6 economy, and small businesses, in New York City in
7 particular, are what give our neighborhoods their
8 unique flavor and feel. The contributions of our
9 small businesses are endless. They create local jobs,
10 they keep neighborhoods vibrant, and they generate so
11 much economic activity. As the Council Member of
12 District 15, I know this very well. My District
13 covers Fordham Road the busiest commercial corridor
14 in the entire Bronx, also Arthur Avenue, another
15 vibrant commercial corridor. It is crucial that New
16 York City continue to support our small businesses,
17 not only as they continue to recover from the long-
18 lasting effects of the coronavirus pandemic but also
19 particularly in this era of consolidation and
20 monopolism of large multinational corporations. I'm
21 excited to hear from the agency on how this
22 Preliminary Plan is responding to the needs of our
23 small businesses, our small business community, and
24 also how resources will be utilized. For a little
25 context, the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget for SBS

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2 totals 173.9 million with 34.4 million or nearly 20
3 percent proposed for personal services to support 302
4 current full-time employees. Of the total budget for
5 the agency, 103.8 million or nearly 60 percent
6 supports the Department's operations. The remaining
7 70.1 million of SBS' budget is pass-through funding
8 for the New York City Economic Development
9 Corporation and NYC and Company. The Department's
10 Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget is 109.6 million or
11 38.7 percent less than the Fiscal 2024 adopted budget
12 of 283.5 million. The agency, while improving,
13 continues to have double digit vacancy rates. It'll
14 be important for the Committee to understand what
15 steps the Agency is taking to reduce these vacancies
16 so that it can appropriately carry out the important
17 mission of supporting our small businesses.

18 It is the Council's responsibility to
19 ensure that the City's budget is fair, transparent,
20 and accountable to all New Yorkers. This includes
21 equity in funding and equity in assistance. As the
22 new Chair of the Committee on Small Business, I will
23 push for accountability and accuracy and ensure that
24 the budget reflects the wants, the needs, and the
25 interests of the City. This hearing is a vital part

2 of this process, and I expect that SBS will be
3 responsive to the questions and concerns of Council
4 Members. I look forward to an active engagement with
5 the Administration over the next few months to ensure
6 that the Fiscal 2025 adopted budget meets the goal
7 that this Council has set out.

8 I would like to thank Commissioner Kim,
9 thank you for joining and for testifying today. I
10 also want to thank the staff of the Small Business
11 Department who have been very responsive to our many
12 requests. We would not be able to analyze the City's
13 budget so thoroughly and at such a detailed level
14 without your cooperation, so thank you.

15 I would also like to thank my Staff and
16 the Staff of the Finance and the Legislative
17 Divisions for their help in preparing for this
18 hearing. I also want to thank Committee Counsels
19 Rebecca Barilla and Jessica Boulet for helping
20 organize today's hearing. Thank you.

21 I would also like to recognize Council
22 Members Zhuang and Ung who have joined us today.

23 Thank you, and I'll pass it back to our
24 Committee Counsel, Jessica Boulet, so that she can
25 administer the oath.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you,
3 Chair. Good morning, everyone. Welcome. I'm Jessica
4 Boulet, Committee Counsel for the Committee on Small
5 Business.

6 Before we begin testimony, I want to
7 remind everyone on Zoom that you will be on mute
8 until you are called on to testify.

9 I will be calling on public witnesses to
10 testify after the conclusion of the Administration's
11 testimony and after Council Member questions so
12 please listen carefully at that point for your name
13 to be called.

14 Council Members, you will be called on
15 for questions after the full panel has completed
16 their testimony.

17 We will now call representatives of the
18 Administration to testify. We will hear testimony
19 from the Department of Small Business Services, and I
20 will administer the affirmation to our panelists.
21 Today, I believe we have Kevin Kim, Commissioner for
22 the Department of Small Business Services, Dynishal
23 Gross, and Michael Forte. Thank you all for being
24 with us today. Please raise your right hands.

2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
3 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
4 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
5 questions?

6 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: I
7 do.

8 COMMISSIONER KIM: I do.

9 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE: I
10 do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Great. Thank
12 you very much. I'll start by inviting Commissioner
13 Kim to testify.

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you very much.
15 Good morning, Chair Feliz and Members of the
16 Committee on Small Business. My name is Kevin D. Kim,
17 and I serve as the Commissioner of the New York City
18 Department of Small Business Services, or SBS.
19 Joining me today are SBS' Executive Deputy
20 Commissioner for Programs, Dynishal Gross, to my
21 right and Executive Deputy Commissioner for
22 Administration, Michael Forte, to my left. We are
23 pleased to offer our testimony on SBS' Fiscal Year
24 2025 budget.

2 New York City has experienced a
3 remarkable resurgence. Mayor Adams's prudent fiscal
4 management coming out of the pandemic has led to
5 record-breaking job levels and improved bond ratings.
6 These indicators showcase the success of the Mayor
7 and Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer's vision
8 outlined in the Blueprint for NYC's Economic
9 Recovery, through which small businesses play a
10 central role in shaping the City of Yes. Today, I am
11 proud to highlight SBS' significant contributions to
12 the recovery through pioneering initiatives such as
13 the NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund and the
14 creation of the first-ever AI Chatbot designed to
15 assist small businesses. I also want to recognize the
16 vital partnership between City Council Members and
17 SBS. Many of our achievements stem directly from our
18 work together. In coordination with your offices, I
19 have personally visited small businesses in all 51
20 Council Districts with virtually every Council
21 Member. Thank you for your warm hospitality during
22 these visits and your collaboration throughout the
23 year.

24 SBS' Fiscal Year '25 Preliminary Budget
25 stands at 173.9 million dollars, of which 34.3

2 million, or 19 percent, is allocated to personal
3 services. Of the total budget of 173.9 million,
4 approximately 70.1 million, or 40 percent, represents
5 pass-through funding for other City entities,
6 including the NYC Economic Development Corporation at
7 36.7 million, NYC Tourism + Conventions at 17.4
8 million, and the Trust for Governors Island at 16
9 million. As a conduit to these entities, SBS does not
10 manage or spend any of these funds. The budget
11 allocates 103.8 million to SBS programs, personnel,
12 and services, but excludes the extensive
13 discretionary contract portfolio typically added by
14 Council at the Adopted Budget in June. Currently,
15 SBS' budgeted headcount stands at 346, with 167
16 filled since the start of the Adams' Administration.
17 Our dedicated team at SBS carefully manages these
18 resources to deliver programs that connect New
19 Yorkers to good jobs, create stronger businesses, and
20 build vibrant neighborhoods. This work is conducted
21 through SBS' four major program divisions: the
22 Division of Business Services or DBS, the Division of
23 Economic and Financial Opportunity or DEFO, the
24 Workforce Development Division or WDD, and the
25 Neighborhood Development Division, NDD. Additionally,

2 we oversee specialized experts and teams, including
3 Cannabis NYC, New York City Office of Nightlife, New
4 York City Food and Beverage Industry Partnership,
5 Waterfront Permits, Women Entrepreneurs NYC or WE
6 NYC, and Black Entrepreneurs NYC or BE NYC.

7 Our DBS division, the Business Services
8 Division, offers an array of free business services,
9 connecting entrepreneurs with financing
10 opportunities, business courses, mentorship, legal
11 assistance, and more. Notably, we launched last year
12 the New York City Small Business Opportunity Fund in
13 partnership with Goldman Sachs and the Mastercard
14 Center for Inclusive Growth. This initiative, the
15 largest public-private effort in City history to
16 support small businesses, has facilitated over 85
17 million dollars in low-interest loans to more than
18 1,000 small businesses through collaboration with
19 eight Community Development Financial Institutions or
20 CDFIs. Recognizing the systemic challenges faced by
21 businesses owned by people of color and immigrants in
22 accessing financing, we intentionally designed the
23 Opportunity Fund to mitigate these barriers by
24 eliminating traditional obstacles such as application
25 fees and minimum credit score requirements. We also

2 employed targeted outreach strategies, in language,
3 in communities throughout the five boroughs. We
4 reached over 500 businesses in historically
5 underserved neighborhoods with door-to-door outreach,
6 including more than 120 Bronx-based businesses on
7 launch day. As a result, approximately 80 percent of
8 the Fund's loans were awarded to minority- or women-
9 owned businesses with 69 percent going to businesses
10 owned by self-identified BIPOC New Yorkers. That 69
11 percent represents more than double the rate at which
12 BIPOC businesses access capital through the federal
13 Small Business Administration. Moreover, 59 percent
14 of the awards went to businesses in Low- to Moderate-
15 Income neighborhoods. Finally, another data point
16 that demonstrates the success of our outreach effort
17 is that while the Bronx businesses represents 8
18 percent of small businesses in NYC, Bronx businesses
19 received 14 percent of Opportunity Fund loans and
20 businesses in every City Council District received
21 funds as well. This underscores SBS' unwavering
22 commitment to overcoming historical inequities and
23 fostering inclusive economic growth. One notable
24 beneficiary of the Opportunity Fund is the husband-
25 and-wife team behind Buunni Coffee, Sarina and Elias

2 Prabasi, who received over 100,000 dollars to expand
3 their Washington Heights and Inwood-based business
4 operations. They will use these funds to open a
5 coffee roastery in the Bronx, expanding from serving
6 coffee at their four cafes to supplying now coffee
7 beans throughout New York City and giving more
8 businesses the opportunity to cut costs and roast
9 their own brew. Their story exemplifies the
10 transformative impact of strategic financing on local
11 economies and the powerful role small businesses
12 have, not just to create wealth, but provide
13 something special for our neighbors.

14 SBS' DEFO division facilitates
15 opportunities for Minority and Women Business
16 Enterprises (M/WBEs) by providing certification,
17 technical assistance, and capacity-building training.
18 We collaborate with City agencies to connect M/WBEs
19 with contracting opportunities, supporting their
20 participation in the city's procurement processes.
21 Our year-round efforts culminated at the 15th Annual
22 Citywide Procurement Fair at Barclay Center, where
23 the Administration announced a record 6 billion
24 dollars awarded to M/WBE firms in Fiscal Year '23.
25 Nearly three-quarters of all M/WBEs awarded City

2 contracts utilized SBS services, reflecting our
3 commitment to facilitating their success. One such
4 success story is that of Ibrahima Badji, a first-
5 generation Senegalese-American entrepreneur, whose
6 company Good Vibes supports high-school students in
7 pursuing debt-free higher education. Through SBS'
8 direct assistance, Mr. Badji secured five government
9 contracts totaling 50,000 dollars, enabling him to
10 expand his impactful initiatives and contribute to
11 his community's well-being and our City's greatest
12 mission, serving our children. In alignment with
13 Mayor Adams's vision and legislative efforts led by
14 Chief Business Diversity Officer Michael Garner, the
15 Administration increased the dollar value of M/WBE
16 non-competitive contracts initially from 500,000 to 1
17 million and then again this year from 1 million to
18 1.5 million. Using this method in Fiscal Year '23,
19 the City unleashed a record-setting 175 million
20 dollars in contracts awarded to M/WBEs, a 60 percent
21 increase over the prior year. Moreover, at SBS, we
22 expanded the Contract Financing Loan Fund program to
23 provide an additional 50 million dollars in low-
24 interest funding, which will support 350 vendors to

2 fulfill 600 million dollars in City contracts over
3 the next two fiscal years.

4 New York City's greatest asset is our
5 talent. SBS' WDD division plays a pivotal role in
6 connecting jobseekers with employment opportunities
7 and assisting businesses in fulfilling their
8 workforce needs. Through our network of 18 SBS
9 Workforce1 Career Centers across the five boroughs,
10 we provide free job placement services, career
11 coaching, and training programs. In Fiscal Year '23,
12 we helped 23,599 New Yorkers get a job or advance
13 their career. SBS' efforts contributed to the
14 recovery of nearly 1 million jobs lost during the
15 pandemic, exemplifying the resilience of New York
16 City's workforce and the dedication of our incredible
17 SBS team. One success story I'd like to share is that
18 of military veteran Rudy Cazares, who partnered with
19 SBS to expand his logistics company in the Bronx,
20 hiring 49 local residents through Workforce1. Our
21 collaborative efforts with community partners have
22 further enhanced our ability to connect jobseekers
23 with diverse employment opportunities, again
24 fostering inclusive economic growth.

2 Our Neighborhood Development Division,
3 NDD, oversees our neighborhood development
4 initiatives and supports New York City's network of
5 75 Business Improvement Districts, or BIDs, which
6 serve nearly 300 miles of commercial corridors and
7 invest more than 187 million into local economies. In
8 the Adams' Administration, we have allocated
9 approximately 27 million dollars in grants to over
10 100 community-based organizations, spurring
11 commercial corridor revitalization efforts. Examples
12 of the impact of these grants include the
13 installation of seasonal Ramadan lighting by
14 Brooklyn's Bay Ridge 5th Avenue BID, neighborhood
15 beautification efforts by Morris Park BID in the
16 Bronx, and enhanced district marketing by East
17 Brooklyn BID. Brooklyn's Bay Ridge 5th Avenue BID,
18 for example, used their BID grants to install
19 seasonal Ramadan lighting along 20 blocks and over
20 400 storefront businesses, while Morris Park BID in
21 the Bronx doubled down on neighborhood beautification
22 by planting 47 guarded tree pits, cleaning up over
23 100 tree pits, and installing 10 planters along their
24 commercial corridor. East Brooklyn BID leveraged
25 their funding to boost business-to-business marketing

2 and reached over 7,000 people on Facebook. These
3 initiatives not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of
4 commercial districts but also stimulate economic
5 activity and create safer neighborhoods.

6 Our partnership with the City Council has
7 been instrumental in advancing initiatives to support
8 small businesses and reduce regulatory burdens. This
9 year, the Council passed Intro. 845-2023, a critical
10 component of the Mayor's Small Business Forward
11 initiative to cut red tape. With this legislation
12 signed by the Mayor, the Administration has
13 implemented over 90 reforms to lower fines, create
14 cure periods, or institute first-time warnings,
15 putting dollars back into the hands of business
16 owners to reinvest in their businesses and
17 communities. Building on the City Council's One Stop
18 Shop portal enacted into law in October 2022, we
19 launched the SBS Business site on the MyCity portal
20 with a first-in-the-nation AI chatbot to help
21 business-owners navigate City government. The new AI
22 chatbot serves as a 24-hour executive assistant,
23 saving business owners and entrepreneurs time and
24 money by instantly sharing actionable and trusted
25 information from more than 2,000 NYC Business web

2 pages and articles, and it's in the top 10 languages
3 spoken in New York City. Additionally, this committee
4 helped to bring the Office of Nightlife to SBS from
5 the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment through
6 legislation. The ONL team is right at home at SBS,
7 working across our divisions to support the 35-
8 billion-dollar industry. As we work together to
9 modernize government services and support local
10 communities, I am proud to also have great
11 relationships with the Community Boards, BIDs,
12 Chambers of Commerce, merchant's associations,
13 community-based development organizations, immigrant-
14 focused advocacy groups, consular corps, and non-
15 profits in each of your Districts. The City Council
16 provides a bridge for our agency to so many local
17 organizations, and I am eager to continue this
18 partnership.

19 In conclusion, SBS remains steadfast in
20 its commitment to Mayor Adams' economic agenda,
21 centered on equity and inclusivity with small
22 businesses continuing to lead our recovery efforts.
23 We look forward to working with the Council to
24 advance our shared goals. Thank you for the

2 opportunity to testify, and we welcome any questions
3 you may have for me or my team. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you,
5 Commissioner, for the testimony and for all the
6 information. We have many questions about the overall
7 budget, questions about state funding, federal
8 funding, PEGs, and more, but I'll start with the very
9 basic questions regarding the overall budget just to
10 give context for future questions. What is the total
11 FY 2024 SBS budget, and how does the new proposed
12 budget, the FY 2025 budget, compare to the 2024?

13 COMMISSIONER KIM: As I mentioned in my
14 testimony, the budget stands at 173.9 million, 40
15 percent are pass-throughs that we don't manage or
16 spend, that's 70.3 million dollars, and then 60
17 percent remains for SBS, which also includes the
18 Office of Talent, that's in our budget and, of that,
19 34.3 million is personal services. The 109 million
20 drop that you might see in the overall budget comes
21 from primarily the pass-throughs, so there's 45
22 million of that, and also the Council discretionary
23 that gets added in usually at the adopted budget,
24 approximately 30 million dollars, so out of the 109
25 million drop you may see on the paper, about 75

2 million of it is either through pass-throughs or the
3 Council discretionary, and then the remaining are
4 either one-time investments that we made coming out
5 of the worst pandemic ever that we needed to make the
6 investments into businesses, into commercial
7 quarters, and so that accounts for the remaining
8 difference that you'll see on paper from this year
9 and next year.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: What are the sources
11 of this funding? City funds obviously, State, what
12 else?

13 COMMISSIONER KIM: Our budget includes
14 CTL, city tax levy funding. We have some state
15 support, obviously, and then we have WIOA federal
16 funding for workforce programs.

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, A few questions
18 about headcount and hiring. The Fiscal 2025
19 Preliminary Plan includes budgeted headcount of two
20 new positions since the Fiscal 2024 Adopted Plan,
21 bringing the total adopted headcount to 346 in Fiscal
22 2025 so what's going to be the role of these two new
23 positions and staffers?

24 COMMISSIONER KIM: At SBS, because we also
25 help pass-through our budget through a number of the

2 other agencies including Office of Faith and some
3 positions through the Mayor's Office of People with
4 Disabilities and whatnot, the exact number of the
5 headcount, if you look at it from SBS' Fiscal Year
6 '25, the planned headcount of 346, to put it into
7 context, when the Administration first came into
8 office, we had 304 people at SBS so we've had
9 actually an increase of 42 headcount since the start
10 of the Administration. Therefore, we've also hired
11 over 167 people when you include people who might
12 have left in between but, at the end of the day, I
13 think you had mentioned at one point, in your
14 opening, that SBS' vacancy rate was double digits.
15 That's a little misleading because SBS only is only
16 about 3.6 percent, well below the City average of
17 about 5.5 percent. What that means is we only have at
18 SBS alone, 10 positions that are available, again,
19 3.6 percent. The other numbers that you see are
20 related to all the other entities that come through
21 us on the budget side, but they control the hiring
22 and their PS budget side so we're actually doing
23 remarkably well. I think one of the big factors was
24 when Mayor Adams and DCAS Commissioner Dawn Pinnock
25 put on the hiring hauls and we did a hiring sprint,

2 our agency on paper went from one of the highest at
3 30 percent all the way down to at this point, maybe
4 it's 10, 11 percent on the budget side, but SBS alone
5 is only 3.6 percent.

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: 3.6 percent. Okay, and
7 do you believe that the headcount included in the
8 Preliminary Plan is sufficient to meet the needs of
9 the agency in Fiscal Year 2025?

10 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, absolutely. We did
11 so much in the past two years and, in particular, the
12 first year I was here with a lot fewer people, but I
13 think this past year we went and took advantage of
14 the hiring sprints, and all the great hiring halls
15 that DCAS Commissioner Dawn Pennock organized, and we
16 were able to put in an incredible team, and I think
17 you're seeing the results of all the accomplishments
18 we did last year in terms of historic investments and
19 programs and initiatives, and we are well-poised to
20 go into Fiscal Year '25 to do some more record-
21 breaking activities.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. A few questions
23 related to the Program to Eliminate the Gap, PEGs.
24 The Preliminary Plan includes 5.3 million in PEGs for
25 Fiscal 2025. The Department took approximately 2.5

2 million in savings from various business programs.

3 What programs were reduced from the program savings?

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: For the PEGs

5 themselves, we expect very minimal, if no impact, to
6 all of our programming, and I think it really shows
7 in the work that we did this past year. In terms of
8 the actual programming, the bulk of it comes from
9 workforce development side, but we're lucky because,
10 as I explained originally, we also have the WIOA
11 funds from the federal dollars so, wherever possible,
12 we're able to swap out CTL money for the federal WIOA
13 funds, and so I think almost 4 million, or over 4
14 million, of that what you speak of comes from the
15 workforce end where we're able to wherever possible
16 swap out into the federal dollars. In terms of some
17 of the other programs, Cannabis NYC, for example, we
18 cut almost 400,000 dollars, but we did that only
19 because Of the fact that the State encountered a lot
20 of lawsuits, and so there was a delay in the rollout
21 of the legal licensing, and so, because of that,
22 there was less money anticipated to help new
23 applicants, so we took it from actual savings but,
24 other than that, there are a couple of other programs
25 where we were able to bring in, for example,

2 marketing in-house, where one of our contract
3 partners might have been looking to use some money to
4 do outreach and marketing but, because at SBS in the
5 first year I was here, we were able to reorganize our
6 agency to create a separate outreach team. We knew
7 that we could handle the marketing in-house, so we
8 found cost efficiencies there as well.

9 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you
10 for the information. I would like to recognize
11 Council Member Paladino, who has joined us also,
12 Council Member Bottcher and Krishnan.

13 A few questions related to PEGs related
14 to M/WBEs. The Preliminary Plan includes a PEG for
15 almost 1 million related to savings in the M/WBE
16 program in Fiscal 2024. What programs within SBS'
17 M/WBE division are these savings derived from?

18 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yeah, will be zero
19 impact on our M/WBE program because that 1 million
20 reflects the original budget of 1.5 million this year
21 that was put in to have the disparity study done.
22 Every two years, is it, by law, we're supposed to
23 have a disparity study, and so that money was
24 designed for that, but my team, we were able to

2 partner up with CUNY and get this study done, and so
3 we wouldn't need this money going into next year.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Is it safe to say that
5 these programs will not be affected not one bit due
6 to the PEGs?

7 COMMISSIONER KIM: I believe so. We have
8 and we'll continue to have such a robust support
9 system for M/WBEs. We've got M/WBE mentoring. We've
10 got our OATH contract mediation partnership. We've
11 got M/WBE free contract legal services. We've got our
12 construction ramp up program, the bond readiness
13 program and, as I mentioned in my testimony, we
14 actually have a much larger pool of money available
15 for the contract financing loan fund. That fund
16 oftentimes is what has helped a lot of smaller M/WBEs
17 who worried about capacity to perform on City
18 contracts. People who would be shy to even apply for
19 the contract, once they knew that this program would
20 allow up to 1 million at 3 percent fixed rate
21 guaranteed by the City contract, we found many more
22 M/WBEs entering into this process and getting awards,
23 and so that program, because of the increased amount
24 of money has now been able to support, as I said, an

2 additional 350 vendors up to 600 million dollars of
3 City contracting.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, thank you for
5 that information. A few more questions and then I'll
6 pass it on to Colleagues who have questions.

7 A few questions related to our BIDs, our
8 Business Improvement Districts. We know our small
9 businesses work hard to generate economic activity,
10 keep neighborhoods vibrant, and our local Business
11 Improvement Districts help our businesses support our
12 community by making sure that our commercial
13 corridors are corridors that people want to come to
14 to shop, to eat, and to support our small businesses,
15 so a few questions about funding related for our
16 BIDs. How much of the Department's Preliminary Budget
17 is dedicated to supporting our Business Improvement
18 Districts?

19 COMMISSIONER KIM: As you know, the
20 Neighborhood Development Division, NDD division, does
21 a tremendous job working with the 75 BIDs throughout
22 the city. Over the past two years since the
23 Administration began, we had allocated over 27
24 million dollars to over 100 organizations, and that
25 includes a lot of the smallest of the BIDs. We knew

2 that coming out of the pandemic, how effective BIDs
3 were and what an important role they played in
4 helping the commercial corridor survive, and even
5 some of them thrive through the pandemic, so the one-
6 time investments that the Blueprint for Economic
7 Recovery laid out was an important piece in getting
8 them through the most challenging times, and so that
9 one-time investment, you're seeing many of the
10 payoffs now in the programmings that they're doing.
11 One of the things we did last year as a pilot program
12 was the Lighting Grant at 1.5 million and, if you go
13 up to Harlem on 125th Street, I was up there with
14 Barbara Askins, the BID director, and there's a
15 singing tree there that has lights coordinated with
16 the song, and she was telling me how people have
17 started to come in front of it just to take photos
18 and there's been, not quite full blown viral videos
19 but many videos and how people are starting to come
20 out there and do proposals and having fun and it's
21 drawing people into the District so we know all the
22 creative things and all the important public safety
23 and sanitation services that BIDs provide so we
24 continue to support them. We have our Avenue NYC and
25 Neighborhood 360 program that will be there next year

2 as well. The Neighborhood 360 has 2.5 million
3 dollars, the Avenue NYC has 1.5 million dollars, and
4 so we look forward to our continued partnership with
5 our BIDs that way.

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: By the way, it was
7 great joining you in Harlem to see that tree lighting
8 program in action.

9 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Very nice. Do you
11 believe that the budget includes sufficient resources
12 to support BID formation and also our smaller BIDs?
13 If yes, what type of resources are included for these
14 smaller BIDs?

15 COMMISSIONER KIM: That's where I do want
16 to emphasize the Neighborhood 360 and Avenue NYC
17 program that's been ongoing. One of the examples is
18 Cypress Hill, for example. Up there, they're looking
19 to create their own BID, and we were able to use
20 their Avenue NYC grant to get them help to be able to
21 do a CDNA, a Community District Needs Assessment, so
22 once they created that report with the money we were
23 able to grant them, then they're now in the BID
24 formation process and, with our Neighborhood 360
25 grants, they're able to try to further along and get

2 that across the finish line, but those are the exact
3 types of programs that we continue to provide at NDD
4 along with all the capacity building and, as you as
5 City Council Members and as SBS and other electeds,
6 we sit on the Class D of all these BIDs where they're
7 on site, on the ground, working with them to make
8 sure that they can support the businesses that they
9 were intended to do.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. I have many
11 more questions about BIDs and other topics, but I'll
12 take a break now.

13 I'll pass it on to Council Member Zhuang,
14 who has a few questions.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you,
16 Commissioner. I also want to thank you come to my
17 District, and it's a great tour in my District. You
18 have been seeing in (INAUDIBLE), it's a lot of new
19 immigrants there, and you have been talking about
20 BIDs. I want to ask, do you think you have funding
21 for the BID and also merchant association and, if you
22 do, can you bring more resources to my District?
23 Currently in my District, we don't have any BID or
24 merchant association.

2 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, our NDD team that
3 you've met, I think, we will work with you very
4 closely because our belief is that the more BIDs, the
5 better in the city, and merchant associations as
6 well. They're very important in providing work that
7 in areas where it might be very difficult and
8 challenging to actually form a BID so we'll be there
9 with you to coordinate and discuss and how to
10 support.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: I also want to
12 know, do you have enough funding for that?

13 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, our team has the
14 support through the Neighborhood 360 and Avenue NYC
15 of dollars that I had mentioned, the 2.5 and 1.5
16 million respectively. BID formation takes a long
17 time. I think the key critical factor that a lot of
18 people underestimate is you need to get the
19 landlords, the 51 percent of the landlords in the
20 District to sign on, and so what we try to do with
21 all of our partnership with the community-based
22 organizations and the Community Boards and everybody
23 else, and the electeds with your partnership, if
24 we're all on board that a BID can be formed there,
25 then we'll work together to contact the landlords and

2 to show them why and how valuable it is to actually
3 have a BID in their District and, at the end of the
4 day when you talk landlord language, I think it's
5 about increasing their property value and, if you
6 show that you can create a safer commercial corridor,
7 a commercial corridor that attracts more people and
8 that their businesses can thrive then their property
9 values go up, I think you can persuade a lot of
10 people to do that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Currently in my
12 District, do you have any partner already you can
13 help us moving forward?

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: I will have our NDD
15 team contact you right after this meeting to
16 specifically talk about your District but, again, we
17 can provide, and this is where we add a lot of value
18 where it doesn't cost additional dollars is we have
19 the technical assistance and the experience of BID
20 formation in-house and they can work with you so
21 they'll come and talk to you right after this.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Okay. Thank you.

23 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much,
25 Council Member. I'll pass it on to Council Member

2 Bottcher but, briefly before that, I just wanted to
3 ask some additional questions related to BID
4 formation and our general questions about BIDs. How
5 many BIDs have we created in the last two, three
6 years, let's say? Also, how many would you say are in
7 the pipeline? More or less, if you don't have the
8 specific number.

9 COMMISSIONER KIM: While I buy time on
10 that exact number, I do want to go back to Council
11 Member Zhuang. We are funding the Brooklyn Chinese
12 American Association and the Asian Americans for
13 Equality, and they both conducted a CDNA there, but
14 we can talk more further on that.

15 To the exact numbers, I know we have two
16 that are getting close. Cypress Hill, as I mentioned
17 earlier, and then Long Island City is expanding, so
18 while it's not a new BID, they're significantly
19 expanding their footprint so you can consider it in
20 that way. We've had, in Jamaica, three BIDs come
21 together and form one, and I think from most people,
22 yes, as Council Member Paladino just mentioned, it
23 was a very efficient use and smart move on the part
24 of the organizations to be cost-efficient and to be
25 more impactful, and so we believe that at times it

2 does make sense for BIDs to get together and form one
3 joint BID like they did in Jamaica but, other times,
4 it makes sense for BIDs just to expand their
5 footprint instead of creating a brand new BID so
6 that's the case of Long Island City. Then in Cypress
7 Hill, they're working on and very close to forming
8 their own BID. West Village and Castle Hill have been
9 formed during the Administration, so those are two
10 new BIDs that have come online since the
11 Administration began.

12 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, so more or less
13 two BIDs in the last two-ish years.

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. As someone who
16 represents a very diverse District, we have Fordham
17 Road and Arthur Avenue established BIDs, but also
18 East Tremont, which has been trying to form a BID for
19 a long time, very aware of the many challenges that
20 our BIDs face when trying to form, including and
21 especially communities that don't have a lot of
22 resources, communities that have high vacancy rates,
23 very aware of the challenges they face, but we've
24 only formed two BIDs in two years, I think, all of us
25 need to give that issue some additional attention.

2 COMMISSIONER KIM: I do want to update
3 you, there's nine total BIDs in the pipeline as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Nine total BIDs in the
5 pipeline.

6 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And how long have they
8 been in the pipeline for, more or less?

9 COMMISSIONER KIM: Each one's different. I
10 think there's so much we can do as a city and as an
11 agency to get a BID formed. Like I said, I think the
12 biggest challenge is getting the landlords to get,
13 you could do everything right, but if the 51 percent
14 of the landlords don't sign on, you can't get a BID
15 formed. That's the way the law is working so I think
16 this is where we continue to try to partner up, and
17 we have been partnering up with the local elected
18 officials there, the Community Boards, the community-
19 based organizations to really try to push this, but I
20 think there are some BID formations that have been
21 there for many years because the landlords just
22 refuse to sign on.

23 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. All right, so
24 now let's hear from Council Member Bottcher from
25 Manhattan.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you,
3 Chair. Hi, Commissioner. How are you?

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: Good. Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: In August of
6 2022, Cannabis NYC was launched, which is housed
7 under your agency, an initiative to support
8 entrepreneurs and employees as the industry develops
9 and to make New York City a global leader in that
10 industry. What is the total funding for that unit,
11 Cannabis NYC, within SBS? What's the headcount and is
12 that unit being affected by any spending reductions?

13 COMMISSIONER KIM: So the total budget,
14 I'll get you in a second. The headcount is five at
15 the agency but, Cannabis NYC, the reason why it made
16 sense to put it at SBS is because we obviously don't
17 do the licensing. That's a state function. From the
18 City's function, we are focused on education and
19 outreach, and so we have done tremendous amount of
20 Liftoff Tours. These are kickoffs where our Founding
21 Director, Dasheeda Dawson who, by the way, brings
22 expertise on a level that's rare in the country. She
23 had run Portland's Program before coming here, and
24 her idea to do the Liftoff campaigns going into
25 communities most impacted by the war on drugs

2 previously. We had reached over 5,000 New Yorkers,
3 explaining to them the economic opportunity here but,
4 at the same time, we partnered up with ACS,
5 Administration Children's Services, to make sure that
6 lock boxes were handed out to families so that when
7 there is more cannabis potentially in the house, you
8 have lock boxes here to protect the children so we
9 are focused on the education and outreach efforts. At
10 the same time, we are also advising the Sheriff's
11 Office and the Sheriff has a Joint Compliance Task
12 Force team that is focused on making sure that
13 enforcement happens to the extent that it can at the
14 city level right now. There are some limitations from
15 the State law side of things, but we have about a
16 3.6-million-dollar OTPS budget for Fiscal Year '25
17 and we're able to use some of the money to create a
18 fast track. We have fast track programs for all
19 different business programs, but we made one
20 especially for the cannabis industry where anybody
21 who wants to into the industry can now go sign up for
22 a cohort to get educated for free on everything
23 related to cannabis and the business of cannabis, and
24 we've had over 300 people sign up just in the past
25 year.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: The FY25 budget
3 is 3.6 million and your headcount is going to stay
4 steady in that unit?

5 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, so currently we
6 have four staff members plus an urban fellow, and we
7 expect to keep an urban fellow in this role.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: How would you
9 say it's going writ large with respect to making New
10 York City a global leader in the cannabis industry?

11 COMMISSIONER KIM: The cannabis industry,
12 we know, is a tremendous economic opportunity for a
13 lot of New Yorkers. At the same time, I think we know
14 that for the legal businesses to survive, to thrive,
15 that the unlicensed shops need to really be handled
16 and to be dealt with in the proper ways, and we know
17 that the cannabis industry is something that all eyes
18 in the world are on us because we will become the
19 global leader and, with Dasheeda Dawson's expertise,
20 we've been navigating through some of the challenges
21 that some of these lawsuits that were filed on the
22 state level have created, but we've helped over 1,000
23 people understand how to apply what the opportunities
24 will be and just understand the nature of the various
25 licenses because it's not just a retail license like

2 you might have, they have nine different licenses,
3 and people don't realize that you don't always have
4 to even touch the plant to be in the business. You
5 can be part of the delivery business or the security
6 business, right, so businesses that don't require to
7 either grow or sell directly these plants so these
8 are the education outreach efforts that we've been
9 working on.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: So it's fair to
11 say that fulfilling the promise of addressing the
12 harms that cannabis prohibition had, that's being
13 really held back by the unlicensed shops and the
14 unlicensed industry.

15 COMMISSIONER KIM: I think it's difficult
16 for me here, sitting as SBS Commissioner, I might
17 have my own personal thoughts, but as SBS
18 Commissioner, I would say that we've been working
19 very closely with the Office of Cannabis Management
20 to really try to support our legal businesses. Not
21 only is the license important, but they also have to
22 understand they're actually running a business and
23 so, from that end, we've been able to provide them
24 with so many of our free resources, compliance
25 advisory and all the things that we do and, towards

2 that end as more and more licensed cannabis
3 businesses come online, we've been already in touch
4 with many of them, helping them get to that point,
5 but even once they're there, we'll continue to
6 support them with all of our free business services.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: I'm very happy
8 to hear that the funding is sufficient, that the
9 headcount is constant because, to me, this unit and
10 your efforts are so important to ensuring that we do
11 fulfill the promise that is there by cannabis
12 legalization and that we do ensure that legalization
13 of cannabis benefits the communities that were so
14 disproportionately harmed for so many years so thank
15 you for your efforts.

16 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, Council
18 Member Bottcher, for raising a very important topic
19 that. We need to have a lot of conversations about.

20 I'll pass it on to our Majority Whip,
21 Selvena Brooks-Powers, but briefly just wanted to
22 throw out an idea before we fully move on from the
23 issue related to BIDs. Very aware of the challenges
24 that our community is facing when trying to form a a
25 BID, including the challenges that you mentioned

2 getting in touch with the landlord, but also having
3 someone not only landlord, but landlords, right, you
4 have a lot of landlords that you need to get to the
5 table. It'll be really interesting, and this is an
6 idea that I haven't fully thought through, but just
7 an idea, it'll be interesting if we can create
8 temporary, part-time SBS positions and specifically
9 give them the role of helping organize that specific
10 community and temporary only because the hope is that
11 in the future the idea would be turned into a
12 reality, you'll perform a BID, and eventually it'll
13 be permanent. That'll be very interesting. Again,
14 considering that some communities don't have
15 resources some of them have other challenges,
16 language barrier, and etc. so it would be interesting
17 if we could create part-time positions specifically
18 in certain regions to help complete all the processes
19 that are needed to form it.

20 COMMISSIONER KIM: The only thing I would
21 say to that is that also is part of why the Avenue
22 NYC and Neighbor 360 grants are important because
23 when we do give the money, we do expect sometimes in
24 many cases, it depends on the proposal, but in many
25 cases, they will use part of that money to hire

2 someone to help organize the community, and we feel
3 that if you're from the community, that it might be
4 more effective than if somebody over at One Liberty
5 Plaza was trying to do it, but we'll definitely
6 explore that option with you. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.
8 Now, Majority Whip, Selvena Brooks-Powers.

9 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,
10 Chair, and hello, Commissioner and Deputy
11 Commissioners. It's always good to see you and, as
12 always, I thank you for the work that you do, in
13 particular in my District, and the responsiveness
14 that I get from you.

15 Just a couple of questions. First, in the
16 PMR, in the SBS section, the report lists as a goal
17 "increase the number of M/WBES that obtain city
18 contracts." Can you get more specific about what that
19 goal looks like in Fiscal Year '25, what metrics is
20 SBS using to measure this goal, and how does SBS
21 intend to accomplish this goal?

22 COMMISSIONER KIM: I'll turn it over to
23 Executive Deputy Commissioner Dynesha Gross, who has
24 worked in the M/WBE space for many years, and please.

2 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS:

3 Thank you, Commissioner and thank you, Council
4 Member, for the question. Turning on the mic. Thank
5 you and good afternoon to everyone. We report on a
6 quarterly basis on all of our work in the M/WBE
7 program and the number of firms winning contracts and
8 the dollar value of those contracts and the
9 percentage of procurement and particular industry
10 classifications that represents, but the unique
11 number of M/WBE winners, I think, is a very important
12 metric. We know that firms enter this program with
13 the hope of growing their businesses through
14 government procurement, and we have nearly 11,000
15 certified firms in the program right now. We want to
16 be sure that as many M/WBEs as possible have an
17 opportunity to present themselves as strong partners
18 for the City for the contracting needs that are
19 covered by the program's goals and other programs.
20 That unique number of M/WBE winners is a metric that
21 helps us focus on the effectiveness of the program
22 for the broad number of M/WBEs in the program, and we
23 want to see M/WBEs competing effectively and more
24 M/WBEs having a chance at the opportunities that the
25 program creates. Last year, we had, I think, 1,900

2 unique winners that we tracked in the program, and so
3 we want to increase that number year over year.

4 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,
5 and SBS says that construction mentorship for M/WBE
6 is a new need in this year's budget and that the goal
7 of the program is to centralize the current M/WBE
8 construction mentorship programs that are offered at
9 various City agencies. Can you talk about why you
10 feel the program needs to be consolidated and why you
11 believe it will be more effective when housed within
12 SBS, so will this eliminate M/WBE construction
13 mentorship programs at other agencies? If so, which
14 agencies will no longer have these programs?

15 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS: I
16 believe you're referring to the money that is
17 budgeted for use of the Mayor's Office of M/WBE to
18 launch the Citywide Construction Mentorship Program.
19 Our ability to launch this program is one of the
20 legislative victories that we have won authorization
21 for in Albany during this Administration. Currently,
22 the City has operated only a single formal
23 construction mentorship program. That is like a
24 project-based construction mentoring program with
25 contracts of certain dollar values available to

2 M/WBEs that are benefiting from the education,
3 technical assistance, and that program was launched
4 by the Department of Design and Construction, I
5 believe, two Fiscal Years ago so this is an expansion
6 of that set of work to other agencies in the city
7 that are delivering construction projects. The
8 program is being developed and will be led through
9 our Office of M/WBE, led by Michael Garner, but
10 OMWBE's budget is one of the items in the 801 budget
11 code so funding for the program does appear in SBS'
12 budget but the work to develop and manage that
13 program will be led by OMWBE.

14 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

15 COMMISSIONER KIM: And I'll just add this
16 is a program that Chief Business Diversity Officer
17 Michael Garner really emphasized because he saw the
18 impact on the MTA and SCA level, School Construction
19 Authority, when he was there, and we believe that
20 this kind of organizing and centralizing this program
21 and expanding it to all the agencies will really
22 increase the number of M/WBEs and the dollar amounts
23 awarded to M/WBEs.

24 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you
25 for that. One last question, Chair, if I can. One PEG

2 identified in the Preliminary Plan is for the M/WBE
3 program savings. Can you talk about what these
4 savings are? Is it possible that this PEG could
5 negatively impact the services and support SBS
6 provides to M/WBEs?

7 COMMISSIONER KIM: I had just briefly
8 answered it previously because the 1.5 million
9 dollars that was allocated was for the disparity
10 study that's required, and this year we were able to
11 contract and we're just going through the final steps
12 so that partnership we found with CUNY actually had
13 cost savings and we don't need the 1 million dollars
14 to do the disparity study since it was taken care of
15 this year so there's no impact to our other M/WBE
16 programs. That savings primarily reflects the M/WBE
17 disparity study.

18 MAJORITY WHIP BROOKS-POWERS: That's good
19 to know because just a few weeks ago, my Committee,
20 the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
21 held a hearing. DDC was there. The Comptroller had
22 released a report that same day which showed very
23 poor performance in terms of M/WBE participation and,
24 with the M/WBE program being led by SBS, I'm just
25 wanting to make sure that sufficient resources exist

2 within the agency so that the City can do its part to
3 help private businesses to be able to build its
4 capacity through City contracts, and so I'm looking
5 forward to working with the agency to see those
6 numbers improve. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, Council
8 Member. Now Council Member Krishnan.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so
10 much, Chair Feliz. Good to see you, Commissioner, as
11 always and thank you for your dedication and
12 commitment to working with all our small businesses
13 from Jackson Heights and Elmhurst that we've done
14 together across the city, especially for our
15 immigrant-owned small businesses.

16 I just have a few questions. One is the
17 Small Business Resource Network is funded in FY24 via
18 the Council's Five Borough Chambers Alliance
19 Initiative, I think about 500,000, and a one-shot of
20 1.5 million SBS' budget. The network offers support
21 to businesses across the city with website,
22 financing, operations, and all crucial services that
23 small businesses depend on in terms of technical
24 assistance and support. Would you support a
25

2 restoration and baselining of the funding for the
3 Small Business Resource Network?

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: What I'll say is that
5 the Small Business Resource Network has been a great
6 program for small businesses. The Chambers that we
7 work with in particular, the Brooklyn Chamber of
8 Commerce, Randy Peers is here today. We know that
9 these programs are very important so we're looking at
10 it right now on terms of the budget process as it
11 continues and we're having discussions with OMB, and
12 so we will say that, again, it's a great program and
13 we've been very fortunate to partner with our
14 Chambers on that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I would hope to
16 see it continue and the funding to continue given how
17 vital the services are for small businesses.

18 On that note too, another program, and
19 we've talked about this before too, has been legal
20 services for small businesses. I think that's
21 crucial. I say it as a former legal services lawyer,
22 but on the housing context and knowing that for rent-
23 stabilized tenants, when it comes to leases and
24 things like that, there are a lot of protections
25 built in, though they're not enforced, but they are

2 there, but the commercial setting, there's so few
3 protections, so many leases are one-sided, and so
4 many businesses come to us because of landlords that
5 are harassing them, forcing them to leave, jacking up
6 their rents to an incredible rate that they're not
7 able to pay, and so really small businesses, their
8 survival depends on having access to legal services
9 that can help them, not just counsel them, but
10 represent them in navigating these situations because
11 it's fundamentally not a fair fight when commercial
12 landlords have lawyers and small businesses don't,
13 and it's one of the biggest reasons that small
14 businesses get priced out of this city and out of
15 their own places and stores is because of these
16 unequal bargaining dynamics, which legal services can
17 help to solve. I know the program exists. My
18 understanding is that the Commercial Assistance
19 Program, my understanding is that it's more brief
20 advice based, but I think, just like in the housing
21 context, we're moving to full representation, Right-
22 to-Counsel for tenants, I just wonder what
23 conversations are happening with SBS, the Mayor's
24 Office, the Mayor himself about how can we get to a
25 world where small businesses that need it can get

2 access to legal services to represent them in these
3 negotiations.

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: I'll start and then
5 I'll pass it over to my Executive Deputy Commissioner
6 Gross here.

7 The CLA has been, like you said, such a
8 lifeline for so many small business owners. I think
9 that when people enter into a lease agreement,
10 oftentimes, you're right, they're only thinking of
11 that immediate moment and then they don't think about
12 the impact of the rent increases or the continuing
13 maintenance obligations that get passed off to them,
14 and so understanding what's in that lease line by
15 line is incredibly important, but most small business
16 owners, as you know, half of all small business
17 owners are immigrant-owned and English necessarily
18 isn't their first language but, even people with
19 English as their first language, when you start
20 getting into the legalese of the contracts, you get
21 lost, and so this program has been valuable in
22 helping people take advantage before they enter into
23 the lease but, too often, we see people who've
24 already entered into the lease then come to the
25 program and so where we try to add value is in

2 renegotiating the terms during the course of the
3 lease and definitely before they renew a lease, and I
4 think that's been extremely helpful, the free
5 Workshops and the free consultations we've done and
6 the actual services I think, I'll turn it over to
7 Executive Deputy Commissioner who's a lot more
8 experienced in this area as well.

9 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GROSS:

10 Thanks, Commissioner. I want to assure you that the
11 engagement of our vendor on CLA is a deep engagement
12 with businesses. It's not just a clinical model with
13 brief consultations. There's actual representation of
14 businesses at various stages of negotiation of their
15 commercial leases. The limit is litigation. It's pre-
16 litigation representation, but it is a deep
17 engagement of those legal services and, in addition
18 to CLA, we are providing legal services to small
19 businesses through partnerships with VOLS, legal
20 consultations through our Business Solution Centers,
21 other services for M/WBEs and WeNYC.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you,
23 Deputy Commissioner, and I'm glad to hear that. I
24 hope that network and that investment not only
25 continues but expands because all of these groups,

2 legal services I know well, and the issue is always
3 the need so far outpaces the capacity you all have.

4 My final question if the Chair permits is
5 just an issue that I know is personal to me, to you
6 too Commissioner is when we, you touched upon it
7 already, our Asian American businesses in particular
8 whether it's in my District. in Council Member
9 Zhuang's District, or across the City too, one of the
10 biggest issues that we face in addition to the other
11 two I just mentioned is language access and the
12 importance of, we can have all these great programs,
13 but it's so hard for our businesses and especially
14 our AAPI-owned businesses to access these services
15 because of language barriers, because they're so
16 bureaucratically complex and that communication is so
17 inaccessibility. Both language and cultural
18 accessibility is so important. Have you given some
19 thought and what thought, if any, have you given to
20 what kinds of initiatives could we create or fund
21 within SBS to support API owned small businesses?
22 There's a subset of M/WBEs as well but the unique
23 challenges that AAPI businesses face too.

24 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you for that
25 question. I think language access begins with

2 outreach initially in language, and one of the things
3 that we've been actively doing is working with the
4 Mayor's Office of Ethnic Media, and we've been able
5 to hold community ethnic roundtables, and I make sure
6 that as many ethnic groups outlets are invited as
7 does Jose Bayona, he does a great job of that, and
8 then Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Manuel
9 Castro has also attended all of these meetings with
10 me. We just held with Commissioner Rodriguez, a whole
11 community ethnic media round table around the Dining
12 Out NYC rollout because like you said, AAPI community
13 in New York city, they own according to the Asian
14 American Federation, and 23 percent of all small
15 businesses so they have a disproportionate large
16 number of these businesses, and so whenever we do big
17 initiatives, we make sure to cover as many of the
18 languages. The New York City Small Business
19 Opportunity Fund, when we launched it last year, is a
20 prime example. Even though the law requires 10
21 languages, the top 10 most spoken languages, we made
22 sure to get the word out on day one in 22 languages.
23 The AI chatbot, the first ever in the country to have
24 this, to help small business owners, initially the
25 very first pilot was in English, but soon, a few

2 weeks later, we updated it to include the 10 other
3 languages as well. We know that with the Asian
4 American business owners, we formed the Asian
5 American Small Business Task Force during the
6 pandemic, and that has been ongoing. We also created
7 the first ever Latin American Small Business Task
8 Force, and so part of it is making sure we get the
9 organizations that are working with the small
10 businesses in the community to come in to understand
11 it so that we can provide as much information to
12 them, and part of it is that they help get the word
13 out in language as well. Our outreach teams' language
14 capacity in itself, we cover Korean, Mandarin,
15 Cantonese, several dialects in Chinese for the AAPI
16 community of course, as well as Russian and Spanish
17 and many of the other required languages. I think the
18 key here also is that when we did a big push on
19 outreach through social media, we created this
20 character for our recreational vehicle. It's the RV
21 called Mobie, and, in Mobie just cartoonizing, I
22 don't know if that's a word, but making it into a
23 caricature, cartoon style. We also have Mobie speak
24 over 10 languages when we do our social media
25 outlets, not just in English, so he speaks Urdu and

2 some of the languages that that most people may never
3 have heard of but is very important to the AAPI small
4 business community so we're proud of that. I think
5 the social media outreach using those kinds of
6 creative techniques has been one of the big
7 highlights for SBS last year. We increased our views
8 of all of our postings by 45 percent to over 1
9 million views now. We've increased our following by
10 20 percent, we have over 116,000 followers now, and I
11 think the video views has increased by 500 percent. I
12 think when we're doing it in different languages,
13 more people are actually engaging and they're
14 watching, and so the language access piece, I thank
15 you, you're a real champion of that because for SBS,
16 we know that we can have the most amazing programs,
17 but if people don't know about it, it's all for
18 naught, and so language access is a top priority for
19 us.

20 While we're on this outreach piece,
21 because it's very important, if you'll indulge us, we
22 wanted to share with you, and this has never been
23 public yet, because it's been a demo that we've been
24 working on and just as a background, at the agency
25 during the pandemic, almost 100,000 people called our

2 hotline because people couldn't always access
3 information just online in language, people called in
4 all various forms of language so we came up with this
5 little jingle that we wanted to just share with you
6 as just an example of how we're trying to be creative
7 in our outreach so if you'll indulge us for 20
8 seconds. [JINGLE PLAYS] "SBS-4NYC, for New York
9 business owners, building economic security, SBS-
10 4NYC, if you want economic security (INAUDIBLE) you
11 gotta dial 888-SBS-4NYC"

12 So that number 888-4..., you like it? SBS-
13 4NYC is actually the telephone number. You like it?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I like it.

15 COMMISSIONER KIM: We're trying try to be
16 less annoying than some of the, I don't want to name
17 them, but you will know which one I'm talking about,
18 but this also was partly inspired because we saw
19 Chair Feliz's Twitter over the weekend at SOMOS,
20 you're on stage with a guitar, and we thought you'd
21 all appreciate the musical talents at SBS too.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I approve the
23 beat. It was very good and, Chair Feliz, next time I
24 have to see you play guitar too.

2 I just wanted to say, Commissioner, thank
3 you for your thorough response and just thank you for
4 your leadership in this regard when it comes to
5 language access and particular attention to our AAPI
6 communities. I know we've done events together, too,
7 in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, and I hope to see
8 City Hall give you all, most importantly, more
9 resources to support that effort, more jingles, more
10 everything else. We're very appreciative, but thank
11 you for your leadership there.

12 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you, Council
13 Member.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you,
15 Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much,
17 Council Member Krishnan.

18 Yes, we absolutely had a great time in
19 Albany last weekend. Music is great.

20 A few questions and, actually before the
21 questioning, going back to my earlier point, I think
22 the language barrier challenge that we have brings us
23 to the earlier point that I made potentially hiring
24 temporary outreach people from the community and
25 having SBS maybe train them on the different

2 processes that need to be completed to form a BID so
3 that they could do outreach in the community that
4 they're from. I think that idea could definitely help
5 resolve some of those challenges.

6 A few questions about funding. Today, our
7 Governor is in Albany talking about many different
8 topics including small business funding. Our Governor
9 in her Executive Budget, she included several
10 proposals geared towards economic development and
11 small businesses around the state. Has SBS determined
12 how much funding the City and SBS could receive from
13 the many proposals that we've heard?

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: Not yet. We'll look
15 into it and get back to you on that.

16 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. When the
17 Governor provides funding for SBS-related matters,
18 how does that generally work? Is it easy to access
19 the funding? Does it take time? A lot of different
20 processes that could delay it?

21 COMMISSIONER KIM: I'll pass this to our
22 Executive Deputy Commissioner, Michael Forte.

23 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE:
24 Okay. Thank you. Hi. We access a bunch of different
25 funding sources and they all have different

2 requirements, but we navigate them as necessary, and
3 our real objective is just to try to draw down as
4 much funding as possible to bring it into New York
5 City and basically whatever the requirements are,
6 we'll kind of alter our processes to do that, and we
7 haven't encountered any particular obstacles with the
8 funding that you are referring to.

9 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And how long does it
10 generally take to get access to the state funding
11 based on the many processes.

12 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE: It
13 just varies when it's allocated. A lot of times,
14 different funding sources, sometimes it will flow
15 through other agencies. Often times, we're allowed to
16 start spending on the programs before we actually
17 have the money in hand as long as we have a
18 commitment so it really, across all of our funding
19 streams, programs haven't been hindered because of
20 the administrative work necessary to draw down the
21 funding and, if anything, we want to put the focus on
22 allocate more to us and we'll just navigate whatever
23 the requirements are versus necessarily altering the
24 programs to make the requirements less burdensome.

2 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. The Governor's
3 budget proposals also included 40.2 million dollars
4 to address property crimes and bring relief to small
5 businesses. How can SBS play a role in making sure
6 that our small businesses have access to any new
7 resources offered by the State.

8 COMMISSIONER KIM: On the budget side,
9 I'll turn it over to Executive Deputy Commissioner
10 Forte.

11 On the retail theft question, I know
12 that's a big priority for you and for us as well.
13 Mayor Adams has always said public safety is the
14 prerequisite to prosperity, and he also hones in on
15 the importance of small business owners having safe
16 environments for customers to continue to come in,
17 and he formed the Retail Theft Summit last year. It
18 wasn't a one-and-done event. From that, we've formed
19 a number of subcommittees, and I personally sit on
20 two of the subcommittees. One is using technology to
21 prevent retail theft and the other one is local
22 retailer theft challenges, and we have been active
23 participants at SBS on those subcommittees, and we
24 hope that best practices will be shared amongst the
25 members. It includes business owners, small and big,

2 and associations that also represent a number of
3 small business owners as well as many agencies in the
4 city so this kind of cooperative task force on retail
5 theft hopefully will come up with more solutions to a
6 problem that exists now but is trending downward.

7 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE:

8 Yeah, and on the state funding again, that's still
9 being finalized and deliberated in Albany, but the
10 money becomes available in two different ways. One
11 way may be through the agency directly, where we
12 would draw down the funds and distribute it to
13 businesses and people looking to start businesses.
14 Another way is where the state makes that funding
15 available directly to businesses, and then we look at
16 ourselves as a catalyst and a way of spreading that
17 word. In both cases, we are very, very hungry for
18 more to try to get the word out. Anytime anyone's
19 going to make funding available, we want to take a
20 look at it and we find out, through various channels,
21 we have our IGA team watching it, we have a strategic
22 initiatives unit that also looks to private funding,
23 grant opportunities, also part of the partnership
24 with the Council. Anything that anyone becomes aware
25 of, please let us know. We're willing to put in the

2 work to look at it and to try to get those funds and
3 operationalize it.

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: I would say that the
5 one way also when the state makes funding available
6 for small business owners through some kind of a
7 program grant, what we'll do is we'll make sure that
8 information is on our NYC Funds Finder. That is also
9 the first in the country where the Biden/Harris
10 Administration, they looked for a municipal partner
11 to roll this out and funded the entire project, where
12 we came in, partnered with them, and now there's a
13 one-stop-shop website, NYC Funds Finder, where any
14 small business can go and not just learn about New
15 York City loan and grant programs but they can access
16 state loan and grant programs as well as federal and
17 no other city in the country has city, state, and
18 federal on one website, and the beauty of all this
19 too is that at the end of this website you can
20 actually connect to somebody who's a financing expert
21 at one of our business solution centers because,
22 again, we recognize that not everyone can navigate
23 websites and we have populations for whatever reason
24 they feel more comfortable with in-person. We make
25 sure that on this website you can connect directly,

2 make an appointment with the financing advisor, and
3 then they can get their needs served that way.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yep, and just want to
5 thank you for that. You and your team have been
6 extremely helpful with ensuring that our small
7 businesses have access to all the resources they
8 need. For example, if they're going to get an
9 inspection, making sure that someone goes in before
10 the inspection to make sure that they know what
11 they're going to be inspecting and making sure that
12 all the pieces are where they need to be so they
13 could pass the inspection and they wouldn't have any
14 delays in opening their business or whatever the
15 matter is so I just want to thank you for that.

16 COMMISSIONER KIM: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: On the issue of
18 funding, moving on to federal funding, coronavirus
19 pandemic obviously affected our city in many
20 different ways. It specifically affected our small
21 businesses. They had to shut down from one day to the
22 next, suffered economically and in many other
23 different ways, and the federal government was
24 helpful with funding to help these small businesses
25 recover. Can you talk about that funding? How much

2 did we receive? What's the period for the funding?

3 I'm hearing we're getting close to depleting the
4 funds.

5 COMMISSIONER KIM: During the pandemic,
6 the federal funds came through the state and then to
7 us, and then we administered a number of different
8 big grant programs. We had 100-million-dollar grant
9 program, and then we had various other programs that
10 also gave out hundreds of millions of dollars. I
11 don't remember the exact amount. It might have been
12 300, but it was one-time federal funds to make sure
13 that those businesses stayed alive and we were able
14 to take some of the remaining funds and use it to
15 create the New York City Small Business Opportunity
16 Fund that I put into my testimony. That investment, a
17 small investment, with great partners like Goldman
18 Sachs and MasterCard for MasterCard Center for
19 Inclusive Growth, allowed us to then leverage our
20 small city dollars into the largest public private
21 partnership loan fund, exactly 1,046 businesses
22 benefited and 80 percent were M/WBE, 69 percent were
23 BIPOC self-identified owners, 59 percent was in LMI
24 communities, but the money got distributed to every
25 single City Council District so we were very.

2 creative in using whatever funds we had to then
3 multiply and leverage it, and that model is something
4 that now we're talking to a lot more folks about
5 potential future public-private partnerships on all
6 levels. I'll give you one other example where The Ron
7 Mollis Foundation, Ron and Carrie Mollis Foundation,
8 they partnered with us to do NYCHA entrepreneurship
9 competition and they've done this two years now where
10 they've awarded 20,000 dollars to 10 NYCHA businesses
11 in each of the two years and, by doing that, Small
12 Business Services comes in, without ever putting
13 money in, but because of the relationships we have
14 and because of all the free business resources we
15 have, we're able to educate the business owners and
16 do some of the work that you referenced, our New York
17 City Business Express Service Team, NYC BEST for
18 short, where we do compliance advising, we help them
19 navigate through government. If somebody is opening a
20 restaurant, we can help them understand how to get
21 their licenses and permits much faster than if they
22 were trying to navigate themselves. With the federal
23 funds, those one-time large investments, while they
24 might not be there, we found other creative ways,
25 including the NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund,

2 and also one other way we've done this is we've done
3 a couple of federal partnerships with the NYC Funds
4 Finder I had mentioned, again. We made sure that the
5 federal government would partner with New York City
6 and that they would put in the money, but that we
7 would provide all of the resources and access to our
8 small businesses. One last example, and I wish
9 Council Member Krishnan was still here, but the
10 federal government wanted to do economic summits
11 around Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific
12 Islander businesses, and they chose New York City as
13 a place to come and we partnered with them to make
14 sure that all of the businesses, M/WBEs, can get to
15 that summit where all the federal resources were also
16 explained to them very clearly. I think the
17 partnership with the federal government is incredibly
18 important and, at SBS, we're always looking for
19 creative ways to work with them which doesn't
20 necessarily have to cost us money out of our pocket.

21 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. The
22 Preliminary Plan includes 43.4 million in federal
23 funding. How much of this federal funding is COVID
24 relief funding that's expiring at the end of the
25 year?

2 COMMISSIONER KIM: None of that is COVID
3 expiring. That is all for WIOA dollars for the
4 workforce development programs. Since we manage the
5 18 Workforce1 centers, and that money goes to help
6 fund that.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yeah, and what are
8 programs that will continue to receive COVID funds in
9 the current and the next Fiscal Year?

10 COMMISSIONER KIM: I'll let you answer
11 this.

12 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE: I
13 believe that the last of it is when the Commissioner
14 referenced in the Opportunity Fund, that would be the
15 last of that federal, the COVID and the ARPA funding
16 that, that would be the end of it.

17 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, so the Small
18 Business Opportunity Fund will be the last program
19 related to federal funding?

20 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FORTE: I
21 believe so, yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. How will the
23 expiration of the federal COVID relief funds affect
24 programming for SBS?

2 COMMISSIONER KIM: I don't think it'll
3 have impact on our programming because we have the
4 sufficient headcount. As I mentioned, we actually
5 have more than since the start of the Administration
6 so we have sufficient headcount. We have the
7 sufficient budget. A lot of our focus has been on the
8 outreach that I had explained and the real
9 understanding of, reaching out to more New Yorkers,
10 getting into the communities with our Mobie the RV
11 truck. Moby has been to probably over 100
12 neighborhoods in the past year alone, and that is a
13 many, many-fold increase over what it had been doing
14 previous to that so examples of just being out there
15 with these sufficient resources and sufficient
16 headcount on our side has really led to helping
17 contribute to the economic recovery. The Mayor
18 yesterday announced record number of jobs again, the
19 second time we've broken this record in the past few
20 months. One in every six businesses in existence
21 today actually started since the Adams
22 Administration. I personally attribute a lot of it to
23 the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Maria Torres Springers',
24 the Economic Blueprint that they were able to set
25 forth. If you read the Blueprint on the SBS side,

2 we've implemented almost all of the recommendations
3 there, and each one has had significant impact on the
4 overall economy.

5 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Have we secured
6 other resources that will replace these federal funds
7 that we're no longer getting?

8 COMMISSIONER KIM: The pandemic era,
9 hundreds of millions of dollars of grants, that was a
10 one-time national event. I don't see that coming back
11 unless there's another event like that, and hopefully
12 there won't be. I really think that where it's
13 important is that as the federal government continues
14 to roll out new programs, that we're right there
15 partnering with them with as many of the rollout and
16 accessing as much of that money because we do have
17 over 200,000 small businesses in New York City, and
18 we should make sure that we get our fair share of any
19 of those types of programs that come out of the
20 federal government.

21 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Some final
22 questions about the Small Business Opportunity Fund
23 so that's obviously a program designed to help small
24 business owners by launching a public-private sector

2 loan fund directed at small businesses. How many
3 businesses have been served by that program?

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: Over 1,000. It's 1,046
5 businesses to be exact at an average of 80,000
6 dollars per business. The favorable program that was
7 created was because, again, no minimum credit score.
8 The other unique part of this program was that 15
9 percent of all the awardees are startups, and the
10 startups, as you all know, they have the toughest
11 time accessing capital, but what we're seeing in New
12 York City is that there are a lot of women-owned and
13 minority-owned businesses that were starting since
14 the pandemic. They came out and got creative, they
15 didn't want to go work in an office setting
16 necessarily so there are a lot of new small
17 businesses that were starting, but they had no way to
18 access capital, and then our program address that
19 need by making sure that 15 percent, we think it's a
20 very significant number compared to any other program
21 out there, of startups receive funding. Every City
22 Council District has received this funding and, as I
23 mentioned in the Bronx, 14 percent of the funds went
24 there and, traditionally, you've probably heard it
25 many times, the Bronx always felt like they weren't

2 getting their fair share. In this case, I think they
3 did get their fair share.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Only while it's
5 still on my head. Because we're jumping. I want to go
6 back to what you said here about the small, this is
7 really very interesting, about the interest rates for
8 small businesses. This is huge. That you're not doing
9 the credit, you're not doing the... (CROSS-TALK)

10 COMMISSIONER KIM: Minimum credit scores.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Talk to me about
12 that.

13 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, so that's huge
14 because you could be a business that is, let's say,
15 just example, your expenses are 5,000, your income is
16 10,000, so every Month you're making 5,000 a month
17 but, along the way while you were building up your
18 business, while you had to buy that kitchen
19 equipment, whatever it was, maybe you missed a credit
20 card payment, minimum payment of 100 dollars here and
21 there, and all these factors start hitting your
22 credit score So if you went to a bank with those
23 numbers and said hey, look, I'm positive, I'm
24 cashflow positive, but they're like yeah, but your
25 credit score is like 600 or maybe not 600, 500, so

2 sorry, you don't apply and so right there without
3 even having that discussion, they were knocked out
4 but in this fund, because we partnered with eight
5 community development financial institutions, CDFIs,
6 who are non-profit lenders, whose mission is to make
7 sure the money gets deployed to deserving businesses,
8 they would sit down with the business owner and not
9 worry, there is credit score information that might
10 be important, but it wasn't based on that one cut-off
11 number. They're able to then look at the particular
12 business situation and say, look, wow, you're making
13 5,000 a month, and this loan repayment would require
14 you to pay 300 dollars a month or 400, we think you
15 can do it and we're going to support you and, by the
16 way, we're going to connect SBS to you because
17 they're going to provide you with the compliance
18 advisor, the small business advocate, other types of
19 technical assistance programming to make sure you can
20 survive in your business, thrive in your business,
21 and repay the loan, right? At the end of the day,
22 it's still a loan, but they wanted to create an
23 environment and a setup where they had every support
24 needed to be able to successfully participate in the
25 program, and so that's why the startups, 15 percent

2 of them, right, that's over 100 businesses, all these
3 MWBEs that have been turned down multiple times from
4 traditional lenders, and they were now able to hire
5 people. I use that Buunni Coffee example. They're so
6 unique because not only are they able to expand to
7 another cafe, but they're able to use this money to
8 create the roastery itself, right, so now they're on
9 the manufacturing side, and what's great about that
10 is there's so many small mom-and-pop independent
11 coffee shops all around the city, and it's hard for
12 them to compete against sometimes the Starbucks of
13 the world. I was going to not name any particular
14 corporation, but one of the larger chain
15 corporations, but now they have a unique advantage
16 because you've got this mom-and-pop roastery that's
17 creating Ethiopian, taking Ethiopian beans and
18 creating unique flavors and that these small mom-and-
19 pops can buy from them or probably offer to white
20 label their own coffee beans as well, and now you've
21 got an economy upon an economy and so this is the
22 kind of leveraging of the money, the smaller dollar
23 amounts that we want to maximize for economic growth.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Because there's
25 so many young people, ages 25 to let's say 35.

2 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Entrepreneurship
4 is key.

5 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: And that's what
7 they want to be. They're entrepreneurs, and they've
8 got great ideas and lots of times they go to their
9 mothers and fathers and they ask their moms and dads
10 for some startup money. In today's world, it's really
11 not possible to give them what they need. I'm
12 interested in taking back a lot of this information
13 that I'm getting today. Plus, we're going to have
14 another conversation because I am going to do a town
15 hall in my District.

16 COMMISSIONER KIM: Awesome.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: And this way we
18 could bring in what I hope to be a couple hundred
19 people so they could actually hear what you have to
20 offer. Again, knowledge is power. People do not know
21 to the extent of how far you go unless you're sitting
22 here on this panel, if anybody's listening to this on
23 our NYC channel, which would be great but most are
24 not. I think bringing you to the community, us taking
25 our knowledge to our communities. We're key in

2 revving up small business through you so we are your
3 best public advocates as elected officials.

4 COMMISSIONER KIM: Absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: But my concern
6 does lie a lot with the entrepreneurs and these kids.
7 I don't want to see them give up. They're young
8 people, they got their whole future ahead of them,
9 and they got some great ideas, but they have no money
10 so I'd like to dive more into how we go about doing
11 that.

12 COMMISSIONER KIM: We'd be happy. I
13 personally would be very happy to go back to my old
14 neighborhood.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I was going to
16 say it's your hometown... (CROSS-TALK)

17 COMMISSIONER KIM: Yes, and we did our
18 walk there and it was walking down memory lane and
19 happy to talk to the entrepreneurs. I think what we
20 see at SBS is even beyond the capital access side,
21 we're able to get best practice ideas. I'll give you
22 a quick example. The toy stores around the city, they
23 were struggling competing against the big online e-
24 commerce companies and so we convened them all, or as
25 many, there was over 20 that came, I'm sure there are

2 many more, but we invited all of them. We found them,
3 we invited them, and when they sat there talking to
4 each other, one of the ideas that came up was that
5 even the bags themselves that they give out their
6 gifts when somebody purchases and the bags could have
7 cost them 50 cents on the dollar, but now working
8 together, if they buy together in bulk, they could
9 get that cost down sometimes to 35 cents, 30 cents,
10 and just that alone by talking to each other so those
11 are ideas that I would love to come share with your
12 District and your businesses there because, again,
13 and I'm told I need to plug the May Small Business
14 Resource Fair. It's going to be in Queens as well, in
15 every borough we're having it, and May is Small
16 Business Month, so if there's anything you'd like to
17 partner up with us on, we'd love to do it in your
18 District. Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you very
20 much.

21 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you, Council
22 Member Paladino.

23 I would also like to acknowledge Council
24 Member Sanchez, who has joined us via Zoom.

2 A few more questions about the Small
3 Business Opportunity Fund. You gave us some details,
4 it's a public-private partnership, a loan. Could you
5 give us a little bit more details how long the loan
6 is for? What's the maximum amount?

7 COMMISSIONER KIM: Sure. It was up to
8 250,000, dollars and the average was 80,000 per loan.
9 We actually anticipated early on that maybe people
10 would be seeking about 50,000 on average, and so
11 that's why we estimated maybe a slightly higher
12 number getting it, but we really wanted to
13 personalize, individualize this particular program to
14 make sure that we didn't just set a dollar amount and
15 say everyone gets the same amount because not every
16 business has the same need so this Buunni Coffee
17 example of getting 100,000 actually allows them to
18 open this roastery. If we gave them just 50,000, they
19 can't really open half a roastery, so they wouldn't
20 have been able to do anything with it. It would have
21 helped in other respects, but we wanted to the money
22 to go where it could have the greatest economic
23 impact, not just for that business, but for that
24 community and for the industry of business owners
25 that are in that field. It's a five-year loan period.

2 I believe at a certain dollar amount, it's six years.
3 I forget which, when it gets a higher dollar amount,
4 I think it might be a six-year amortization and
5 otherwise it's a five-year.

6 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, is it an
7 interest free loan?

8 COMMISSIONER KIM: Oh, 4 percent, 4
9 percent.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay.

11 COMMISSIONER KIM: Which is below market
12 rates. At the time when we launched it, I think
13 interest rates were as high as 7, 8 percent.

14 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Right.

15 COMMISSIONER KIM: And this is where I
16 really do have to give credit to our partners, like
17 Goldman Sachs and MasterCard Center for Inclusive
18 Growth to really come in and say, hey, we see the
19 need, we want to be helpful, and what we're trying to
20 do now is take this model that's been so successful.
21 Other cities have been interested in it. We just did
22 a national convening of SBSes of the United States,
23 and we had almost like 22 cities actually joined and,
24 when we talk about models like this, they were like,
25 wow, that's very innovative, we want to see how we

2 can do it in their city. What we want is the
3 corporate America and private partners to take more
4 note of it, other than just Goldman Sachs and
5 MasterCard, and say, we want to be part of this
6 version of 2.0.

7 The threshold for the longer term, okay,
8 so anything 100,000 or over is six years, and
9 anything below is five years.

10 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay, and what are
11 industries that were served through this program and
12 also how does SBS decide which businesses are awarded
13 these funds?

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: So most represented
15 industries, 15 percent food service, 15 percent
16 retail, 14 percent professional, scientific, and
17 technical services category, and, while we helped
18 design the program and partner up we had an
19 administrator, CRF, that did then work with the eight
20 CDFIs. I think the real notable point here too is
21 that, and I give so much credit to my team, in that a
22 lot of times when you create a big program like this
23 and there's going to be over 1,000 businesses and
24 tens of millions of dollars, it's easy to just say,
25 we're going to take the three or four biggest CDFIs

2 and just work with them, but we had an intentional
3 mission on this Opportunity Fund. We said, let's hit
4 it all, let's go for it all, and we wanted to make
5 sure that we could help support capacity building in
6 the smaller CDFIs so some of the relatively smaller
7 CDFIs, we wanted to bring them in and those are the
8 CDFIs that are really closely connected to
9 historically underserved communities. We wanted to
10 make sure they were part of this program so when they
11 came in, we were able to support them, and I think
12 now having gone through this experience, and it was
13 like drinking water out of a fire hose. In the first
14 couple of weeks, we had over 10,000 people express
15 interest so the processing by the CDFIs, it was the
16 CDFIs who made the decision on a case-by-case basis,
17 so SBS just helped design and oversee, but we didn't
18 make any decisions directly, because we really wanted
19 to leave it up to the community-based non-profit
20 lending institutions who know their community the
21 best to figure out where the money should go and how
22 much of the money should go there.

23 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Okay. Moving on to
24 questions about our smallest businesses, our vendors,
25 so what are services available to them? How many,

2 what are programs available, resources? How many
3 different regions and vendors have we served in the
4 last year?

5 COMMISSIONER KIM: When you talk about our
6 smallest vendors, I believe you're talking about our
7 street vendors?

8 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Street vendors, yes.

9 COMMISSIONER KIM: Because we at SBS also
10 consider street vendors to be the smallest of our
11 small businesses. We have, from Fiscal Year '21 to
12 '23, worked with QEDC, Queen's Economic Development
13 Corporation. They received a 634,000 Neighborhood 360
14 grant to support vending organizing in Corona Plaza
15 in Junction Boulevard. In Fiscal Year '23, the Street
16 Vendor Project that we've partnered with received the
17 410,000 Merchant Organizing grant in Harlem, Sunset
18 Park, and Fordham Road. The SVP, Street Vendor
19 Project Managing Director, Mohamed Attia, sits on our
20 Mayor's Small Business Advisory Commission. Now
21 that's a commission that came out of the Blueprint
22 where there are 49 members and many actual small
23 business owners, and we also have the Chambers of
24 Commerce and other organizations, but we have actual
25 small business owners sitting there, but Mohamed

2 Attia is part of our Small Business Advisory
3 Commission. One of the recommendations that came out
4 of that last year was to do a study to be able to
5 best plan for time, place, and manner and that's
6 something that is getting done this year, hopefully
7 by the end of the Fiscal Year, and we'll be able to
8 see best how and what resources that might need to be
9 get done. We did a mailing in Fiscal Year '24 to
10 22,000 mobile food vendors on supervisory licenses.
11 We wanted to make sure that they understood the
12 opportunities and the laws and being compliant. We
13 offer all of our business service, almost all of our
14 business services to street vendors that come and ask
15 at our Business Solution Center. We don't ask and say
16 are you a street vendor? It's more anybody, and we
17 don't ask for immigration status. We just serve
18 businesses that come through our seven Business
19 Solution Centers, ask for whatever help they need,
20 and we provide try to offer as best as we can all the
21 services.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yep, and we really
23 appreciate the partnership that all of you have had,
24 especially with the Street Vendor Project so really

2 appreciate all the, and Council Member Paladino has a
3 question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Concerning the
5 street vendors, we have a problem in my District. I
6 really need to know when we have, let's take Bell
7 Boulevard for prime example, we have vendors that are
8 setting up directly in front of and mirroring a
9 business that is paying rent on the boulevard. It's
10 literally a truck, several trucks down Bell, but this
11 one particular vendor is actually, like I said, doing
12 exactly what the storefront is doing, and it's just
13 not right. While I understand a street vendor needs
14 to make their money, and I believe in it, 100
15 percent, the problem is their locations and such. Do
16 we have any sort of ruling or any kind of things that
17 they need to follow through small business practices
18 because they cannot continue to impede upon people
19 who are struggling in bricks and mortar. While I
20 believe in vending, I believe that there's a place
21 for vending, and I know years ago, there used to be a
22 favorite hot dog guy was right outside the Whitestone
23 shopping center. His name was Jim and a retired
24 fireman, but the vendors always knew a place to be so
25 they would never, like I said, taking food out of

2 somebody who's paying big money for bricks and mortar
3 and really struggling so what can you help me out,
4 how can you help me with that?

5 COMMISSIONER KIM: I think that's what the
6 primary purpose of the study is. It will really focus
7 on time, place, and manner, and I think that's what
8 addresses your concern. There should be places that
9 are appropriate at the time that's appropriate and in
10 the manner that's appropriate. There are laws in
11 place. We at SBS are not a regulatory agency except
12 for our Small Waterfront Permits Department. They
13 just deal with a very specialized area but, other
14 than waterfronts, none of our divisions have any
15 regulatory power. I think, as you know, the Mayor has
16 put the enforcement powers on the compliance with any
17 kind of laws related to street vending with the
18 Department of Sanitation, and so they would be the
19 more appropriate agency to speak to. For us, at SBS,
20 we just want to make sure that anybody who comes to
21 us with a business, we can offer as many of the
22 services because at the end of the day, a successful
23 business hires people. Those record number of jobs
24 when it's 4.7 million jobs that were created in New
25 York City, the record number, over a million are

2 hired by small businesses alone, and so, without the
3 small businesses, the city would not look the same.
4 Companies under 50 employees, small businesses make
5 up 94 percent of all companies under 50 employees so
6 these are very powerful numbers that have real
7 community impact attached to them and, at SBS,
8 whatever business you're in, we want to be supportive
9 so that's something that I'll defer to you. Thank
10 you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. I'd also
13 like to acknowledge Council Member Hanks, who has
14 joined us.

15 A few more questions. The next related to
16 the Center for Workplace Accessibility and Inclusion.
17 It was announced that a new two-part investment to
18 support career advancement for those with
19 disabilities and expand access to internships and
20 training. Can you provide an update on the launch of
21 the Center for Workplace Accessibility and Inclusion?

22 COMMISSIONER KIM: Absolutely. We were
23 able to hire somebody we were working with the
24 Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities. This is
25 at our Brooklyn Workforce Center, and we're looking

2 forward to all of the implementation of the plan, but
3 we know that it's important to be able to give the
4 same access to people with disabilities. The
5 initiatives will feature curated trainings and,
6 again, we've already hired the staff to pilot this
7 initiative in the spring, and we can also connect you
8 with Mayor's Office of People with Disability and
9 Office of Talent, NYC Talent, that is really in
10 charge of this initiative.

11 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Do you have any data
12 on the rates of success either obtaining a job and
13 success rate after six months?

14 COMMISSIONER KIM: For?

15 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: For the new office,
16 for the new Center for Workplace Accessibility and
17 Inclusion.

18 COMMISSIONER KIM: You mean in terms of,
19 how would we answer that question? I'm not sure. Oh
20 yeah, it's being launched, it hasn't quite launched
21 at the initiative, and then it's being managed by
22 MOPD, Mayor's Office of People's Disability. It's
23 just using our Workforce Centers, but they're the
24 ones managing the program with Talent, Office of
25 Talent so we can connect you.

2 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Final question.

3 Obviously, our small businesses have a lot to offer.
4 They have a lot to offer to their local community,
5 but to the city as a whole, and it could be tough for
6 those disadvantaged commercial corridors to market
7 themselves so that everyone else can see what they
8 have to offer so is there anything that we, any
9 programs that we have on the issue of marketing so
10 that everyone could know what the different
11 businesses have to offer?

12 COMMISSIONER KIM: Absolutely. I think a
13 key component of marketing is to work and reach out
14 to New York City Convention and Tourism. I think if
15 you look at the numbers, when mayor Adam says New
16 York City is back, he's able to back it up with all
17 the numbers, and we have just an increasing rise of
18 tourism, over 63, 64 million tourists have been here.
19 What I would say is for Districts to work with the
20 tourism convention, work with us. I think what we've
21 heard from small business owners is that NYC Link,
22 those little poles where people can charge, they also
23 have free programs for marketing for small business
24 owners, and I don't think many small business owners
25 know that so that's something I think that would

2 highly recommend. Other things that we've done with,
3 or I have discussions with when I walk the corridors
4 was like, for example, Council Member Salamanca in
5 his District. I think there were murals that were
6 being put up right outside of areas that had a lot of
7 graffiti previously and, in some of the other
8 Districts too, the murals have become a tourist
9 attraction, and then I'll point to Murray Hill in
10 Flushing. What they've found is that individuals who
11 live in the Bronx, because of the rise of Korean pop
12 culture and Korean dramas on Netflix, apparently
13 people organize busloads to go visit Murray Hill as
14 if they're visiting Seoul, like little Seoul, and I
15 think that kind of exchange could happen two ways,
16 where if you can get amongst Council Members even
17 just sharing one unique aspect to help organize these
18 field trips to the other Districts. That's something
19 that I would really focus on. Then the merchant
20 organizers, the Merchant Associations, we've been
21 really partnering with them and then I think with the
22 Chambers of Commerce Chamber on the Go program and
23 the SBRN. EDC actually manages that you had referred
24 to. I think getting the small businesses to become
25 more savvy online, the digital marketing, we had

2 partnered up with MasterCard as well to provide free
3 digital marketing, and I think just helping to
4 promote their particular uniqueness about them is
5 something to do. I think with small business owners,
6 one of the other things I've seen is that they want
7 to drive more foot traffic so sometimes partnering up
8 with popular online brands that are only online, if
9 you're a very popular sunglass small business owner
10 in an area that maybe doesn't have as much traffic
11 but has a uniqueness to it that might attract New
12 Yorkers and tourists alike, they can reach out to
13 some of these companies and say, hey, look, you're
14 popular online, you don't have a storefront presence,
15 we pay rent, we have the storefront residence, and we
16 sell sneakers, and so maybe sunglasses and sneakers
17 aren't the best pair, but let's say hat and
18 sweatshirts, maybe better combo. You sell hats, we
19 sell sweatshirts. Why don't you borrow or sublease a
20 space in our store to sell your online wear and then
21 people who find them and follow them online will go
22 to that store just to go test and feel and touch
23 things that they couldn't do otherwise but, at the
24 same time while they're checking out the hats, they
25 see these cool sweatshirts that are very

2 neighborhood-based. I know up in the Bronx, there's a
3 group of guys that are really branding the Bronx
4 name. I think Randy Peers at Brooklyn Chamber has
5 done an incredible job branding the Brooklyn-made
6 products, and I think every borough, there should be
7 a Queens-made one, there should be a Brooklyn-made
8 one. I don't know if the Manhattan one will do very
9 well, but the rest of the boroughs, I think should
10 all have their brand, and they should have a store
11 space to combat the high cost of rent by sharing
12 retail space, whether it's a popular online brand or
13 with other complementary businesses so these are some
14 of the things that I think we're looking at SBS.
15 We've been studying it very closely. We understand
16 that storefront vacancy was something that we want to
17 address head on this year.

18 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you
19 so much.

20 Any other questions? All right, thank you
21 so much for your testimony. We really appreciate all
22 the information you provided. You were very specific
23 with all the details so we appreciate it and, yeah,
24 look forward to continuing our work on the many

2 topics that we talked about. Thank you for joining
3 us.

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you very much,
5 and we expect to see you with the guitar at the next
6 show.

7 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Yes, we will.

8 COMMISSIONER KIM: We'll do a video
9 presentation of our jingle. You do it with the
10 guitar, please. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: I'll think about it. I
12 heard she's a pianist, right?

13 All right. Thank you so much, and I'll
14 pass it back to the Committee Counsel, Jessica
15 Boulet, so she could open it up for public testimony.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you,
17 Chair, and thank you so much to our panelists today.

18 We'll now turn to public testimony. I
19 will call up panelists three at a time.

20 I'd like to remind everyone at the outset
21 that every panelist will have two minutes to present
22 their testimony. No recording is permitted while
23 presenting testimony, and please wait to begin until
24 the sergeant has started the timer.

2 I will open it up for Council Member
3 questions after each panel in full has completed
4 their testimony.

5 All right so to begin, I'd like to invite
6 Tshering Gurung, Randy Peers, and Meredith Phillips
7 Almeida.

8 All right, thank you, and Randy, if you'd
9 like to begin, we can go your right to left.

10 RANDY PEERS: Great. Thank you, Chair
11 Feliz and the Small Business Committee Members,
12 appreciate you having me here today. I'm Randy Peers,
13 President and CEO of the Brooklyn Chamber of
14 Commerce. I do want to say, Mr. Chairman, your
15 comprehensive questioning of the Commissioner gave me
16 all this other stuff to talk about. I'm going to get
17 through my testimony quickly, which you have written
18 anyway. Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce is the leading
19 voice for the small business community in Brooklyn,
20 62,000 businesses in total in Brooklyn. One of the
21 programs that came up a couple of times, including
22 from Council Member Krishnan, was the Small Business
23 Resource Network, of which both the Administration as
24 well as City Council have a part to play in that.
25 It's one of the COVID era programs that can continue

2 if we receive restored funding. Meredith is going to
3 speak about it more directly, but the bottom line is
4 it's called the Five Borough Chamber Alliance in the
5 Council side, 500,000, which of course we're asking
6 for a restoration, and then the 1.5 million one-shot
7 included in the SBS budget for Fiscal '24, which will
8 help to expand and maintain the SBRN in underserved
9 commercial corridors throughout the borough. Once
10 again, Meredith is going to talk a little bit about
11 that a little bit further, but you raised a good
12 point about the state. When we talk about the retail
13 theft mitigation efforts, tax credits are at the top
14 of the list in terms of the government's proposals,
15 right? If we offer tax credits for retail theft
16 mitigation like we installed security cameras, but no
17 small business knows about it, you've now got you've
18 got a tax credit that nobody can use, right, but the
19 Small Business Resource Network, because it's a case
20 management and outreach model, where we deploy
21 resource specialists in every neighborhood, in every
22 community through all five chambers, so it's not just
23 the Brooklyn Chamber, is a mechanism, we speak 14
24 different languages, it's a mechanism, for example,
25 this is one example of how we can get more resources

2 in the hands of businesses because we have the teams
3 on the ground. That was a very good observation
4 there. Oh, that's it. Chamber on the Go, restore, and
5 we have a speaker ask, 150,000, specifically to
6 support M/WBE certification efforts.

7 MEREDITH PHILLIPS ALMEIDA: Good
8 afternoon. Thank you, Chair and Committee Members. As
9 Randy mentioned, my name is Meredith Phillips
10 Almeida. I'm here to speak specifically about the
11 Small Business Resource Network and request the
12 restoration and baselining of the 1.5 million that
13 appeared in FY24 into FY25 and also for the
14 restoration of 500K for the Five Borough Chamber
15 Alliance. At this moment, there is no funding SBRN in
16 FY25 budget so we're here to talk about how important
17 this program is. Launched in 2020 as a pandemic
18 business recovery effort, SBRN is a comprehensive
19 approach to small business resiliency that offers
20 free personalized guidance for small businesses and
21 incorporates a few special sauce components. Also, I
22 always like to talk about field outreach, meeting
23 businesses where they are, at times serving
24 businesses where they are, and the ability to connect
25 businesses to resources from both the public and

2 private sector. Again, originally launched as a
3 pandemic recovery effort, we're still out there
4 today. Our team is serving thousands of businesses. I
5 don't need to tell you that we don't need a pandemic
6 for small businesses to need support so the need is
7 still relevant and important as ever. Our team is in
8 the field, like Randy said, communicating in multiple
9 languages, connecting businesses who are
10 traditionally disconnected from information about
11 these support services in a case management model.
12 It's not about just sending an email or saying let's
13 attend a webinar. When extra support is needed, our
14 team is there to handhold, to help complete
15 application, to stay involved for an extended period,
16 especially when humans are required for problem-
17 solving, right? This is what is needed. I always say
18 that, if you've heard me talk about this before, I
19 say this all the time, I think the key to resiliency
20 is knowing where to find help before you are in
21 crisis. When you have a flood or your refrigeration
22 system breaks down, that's not the time to start
23 Googling and figure out where you need help so what I
24 think is key to our program is our team is making
25 relationships through trust in the field, creating

2 these relationships so businesses know where to go
3 and connect to these in city and private sector
4 programs. Thank you.

5 TSHERING GURUNG: Good afternoon, Chair
6 Feliz and all the Members of the Finance and Small
7 Business Committee. It's a pleasure to be here today.
8 My name is Tshering Gurung, and I'm a Senior Manager
9 of Business Development and Training at Accompany
10 Capital, which is a certified community development
11 financial institution established in 1997, and I
12 heard Commissioner speak about CDFI so it was really
13 good to hear the work that we have done, and
14 Accompany Capital's mission is to create pathways to
15 prosperity for immigrant, refugee, and underserved
16 entrepreneurs across the city by providing access to
17 affordable credit, financial education, and training
18 in technology and best business practices. We also
19 offer free webinars, community resource fairs and
20 workshops as well as Matching Savings Program for
21 refugees sponsored by the Federal Government Office
22 of Refugee Resettlement. Our diverse staff speak over
23 12 languages and dialects, including Spanish, Urdu,
24 Russian, French, and Nepali. We work with each client
25 in their own language whenever possible to provide

2 them with individual technical assistance, including
3 how to open a bank account, how to establish or
4 repair their credit, how to develop business and
5 marketing plans, and how to access affordable credit.
6 Since our inception, we have expanded economic
7 opportunities for minority owned businesses,
8 dispersing over 60 million in business loans, ranging
9 from 500-dollars microloans to street vendors and
10 hair braiders to 350,000 in community advantage loans
11 to finance larger projects, such as renovation and
12 equipment for a new restaurant. We have assisted
13 nearly 10,000 unique businesses and created almost
14 3,000 new jobs and saved more than 11,000 jobs
15 citywide. As you develop the City's Council Fiscal
16 Year 25 Preliminary Budget Response, we strongly
17 encourage you to recommend an increase in resources
18 for small business providers, especially those that
19 dedicate their work to underserved entrepreneurs.
20 Small business owners across the city are facing
21 various issues from rent arrears, landlord
22 harassment, financial challenges, and competition
23 from big retailers. In order to assist entrepreneurs
24 with this trouble, especially those that have culture
25 or language barriers, providers on the ground need

2 your support. Beyond the Preliminary Budget, we also
3 encourage...

4 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Please conclude.

5 TSHERING GURUNG: Okay. Thank you so much
6 for your time and, on behalf of everyone at Accompany
7 Capital, we look forward to strengthening our
8 partnership with you. Thank you for your time today.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I'm sorry. I
10 didn't get your name.

11 MEREDITH PHILLIPS ALMEIDA: Meredith.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Meredith. How are
13 you, Meredith? I liked what you had to say. First of
14 all, it's really nice to hear human factor has a big
15 part in this. Everything is relied on these, which is
16 great, serves its purpose, but there's a lot of, we
17 need human contact and, going back to entrepreneurs,
18 going back to small business owners, I was a small
19 business owner for over 30 years. My sister, Joanne,
20 is still a business owner, manufacturing, and now
21 she's grown. She's here in the East Coast and on the
22 West Coast. We know a little bit about startups and
23 how difficult it is. My whole family basically is
24 entrepreneurs except for two sisters but, with that
25 being said, I'm always open to how, especially I

2 talked about our younger people, the ones 25 to 35
3 who have zero dollars, excellent heads that work in a
4 business sense, great ideas, and the fact that you
5 want to inform the people and what tools you're able
6 to give the people. This is what's interesting to me
7 the most, is how do I get these people with these
8 great ideas off the ground, stop being afraid, and a
9 lot of them have nothing. I want to hear more about
10 what you do collectively or your individuals here
11 today, correct? So I do want to, I'll separate you
12 accordingly. I'm sorry because I'm in Queens, you're
13 in Brooklyn. We got the Queens Chamber of Commerce,
14 okay, but you do a lot and I'm interested in you so
15 you'll give me your card at the end of this and we
16 could have a private conversation, all right and you,
17 I would like to talk to as well. This whole thing has
18 been a real, for me, like I said, and my family being
19 in small business, now we have our younger people in
20 my family and others coming to me, what do I do, so
21 this is a learning experience and I'm grateful to
22 have it, but I need to know more. Thank you.

23 RANDY PEERS: So could I just, so the
24 Small Business Resource Network is all five chambers
25 and we all work together.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Right.

3 RANDY PEERS: Tom and Lisa and Linda and
4 Jessica. We're all, And Tom and I are tortured Mets
5 fans, so we also commiserate on a whole other level.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Oh, yeah, okay,
7 good.

8 RANDY PEERS: And think about a case
9 management model where we have outreach and
10 assessment teams that knock on doors and connect
11 businesses but, on your very specific question about
12 where do you point a new entrepreneur because it
13 relates to SBS services so they run something called
14 the Business Solution Centers. These are actually
15 WIOA funded, so it's actually part of the workforce
16 funding on the federal side. We, the Brooklyn
17 Chamber, happen to run the one in Brooklyn. There's
18 an amazing program, eight session program called
19 Business Basics.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Okay.

21 RANDY PEERS: We point every new
22 entrepreneur to that program because it puts them
23 through soup to nuts everything you need to know
24 about starting a business because a lot of times a
25 small business owner just doesn't know how to run a

2 business. They know how to bake cookies or they know
3 how to do something really well, but they don't know
4 the aspect of actually running the business so before
5 they leap and before they take out that second
6 mortgage on their home and dump it into a business,
7 we want them to have all the tools that they need
8 and, by the way, that program is virtual as well as
9 in-person and it's done in multiple languages so it's
10 an SBS program, it's through the Business Solution
11 Centers. I always say it's the first step for any new
12 entrepreneur so there's a great resource out there
13 that a new entrepreneur can tap into.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Yeah, because I
15 related very much to when you said the plumber and
16 when you have the flood and all of a sudden you
17 decide you need to find a plumber. That's basically
18 the mindset of the younger generation. Going through
19 our aches and pains, we started, my husband started
20 his business when he was 26. He's now 70. We are
21 outside-the-box thinkers. Small business owners,
22 entrepreneurs, we all we learn how to survive. We
23 learn how to, cause it's survival, thinking outside
24 the box. There's always a way to get through to the
25 next step. There has to be because you never say die,

2 you never give up. I just want a springboard where
3 people could go. People don't often listen to their
4 parents or their family members. They much rather get
5 it directly from another source, and that's something
6 that will definitely come in handy for all of us, but
7 this is something that I'm really, I'm so happy I'm
8 on this Committee, it's brand new to me, but business
9 and small business is not so I'm really looking
10 forward to a very great year coming up working on
11 this Committee so thank you so very much. Thank you
12 to my chairman. Thank you very much.

13 MEREDITH PHILLIPS ALMEIDA: Could I also
14 add something to my colleague when you said so? Yes,
15 I was breezing through and was remiss that I didn't
16 mention that this program is a partnership between
17 the five Chambers and citywide and that allows us to
18 share resources information even staff and language
19 capacity at times, and Randy's example was a great
20 example for why this is important. Amplification of
21 what exists from city agency is super important.
22 Every business owner that's out there doesn't know
23 that this program exists at the Business Solutions
24 Center but, because our team is on the ground in all
25 five boroughs and does know that, when they encounter

2 someone who needs that specific service, they're able
3 to make that referral. We even refer to Accompany
4 Capital at times. We are able to refer them to pro
5 bono business strategy advisors if they're in that
6 phase. We are experts in the ever-changing landscape
7 of small business resources, which is incredibly
8 complex so our team knows what's out there so that
9 when you approach us, we can say have you reached out
10 to Accompany, I think they'd be a great fit, there's
11 someone there who speaks the language that you prefer
12 to communicate in, and they have products that are
13 great fit for you. You should go to the Business
14 Solution Center. They're the best fit for you right
15 now in this phase so I love that example because it
16 shows why it's important to maintain this capacity at
17 the neighborhood level and reach these businesses who
18 are not necessarily aware of these things or
19 connected to this information.

20 TSHERING GURUNG: Can I add something? I
21 did hear Council Member Shekar, where our office is,
22 we belong to his District, and he mentioned about the
23 language barrier and the challenges, and that's
24 especially very specific for immigrant-owned
25 businesses, and that's the majority of the clientele

2 we work with and having a diverse staff who speaks
3 the language, who understand the culture background
4 really helps because we are able to speak in the
5 language, yeah, exactly, and it also kind of helps,
6 the trust factor because many new Americans, they
7 don't understand the financial system, they don't
8 know about credit because that never, they didn't
9 have any of that system back home so just helping
10 them understand about the whole credit system, the
11 financial system in U.S., so there's a lot of
12 education needed in addition to access to financing
13 and having a great network, a referral network is so
14 key and that's something we've been hearing again and
15 again from all our resource partners that we all are
16 part of this ecosystem and we should know about each
17 other's resources, right? Where to refer them to if
18 there's if it's a service that we cannot provide so
19 if it's a pre-startup business, we should refer them
20 to SBS or SBDCs to help them with the idea stage, to
21 help them with the business plan and when they are
22 ready for the funding, SBS knows that, okay, these
23 are the CDFI partners where I can refer them to.
24 Similarly, we work closely with all the Chambers of
25

2 Commerce and refer them when they need the services
3 that they offer.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you so
5 much.

6 All right, I think we can call our next
7 panel. It will be Carina Kaufman-Gutiérrez, Nick
8 Aquino, and then Kayt Tiskus.

9 You may begin.

10 CARINA KAUFMAN-GUTIÉRREZ: Good afternoon.
11 My name is Carina Kaufman-Gutiérrez, and I'm the
12 Deputy Director at the Street Vendor Project, a
13 membership-based organization of over 2,900 street
14 vendors. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
15 today. We respectfully request from City Council to
16 sustain and expand our Small Business Empowerment
17 Program for street vendors. The demand for street
18 vendor education and services continues to grow as
19 the population transformed during the pandemic and
20 continues to increase as many asylum seekers are
21 beginning to vend as well. It's critical that there
22 be an investment in education and training for these
23 emerging small business owners to help them know
24 their rights and their responsibilities, which SVP is
25 primed to do. We are the one-stop-shop for street

2 vendors that will provide you with legal
3 representation when you receive a ticket, help you
4 navigate the complex street vending laws in seven
5 languages, and offer training to build your skills to
6 grow your street vending business. Despite being a
7 small team of three full-time organizers, two part
8 time and one lawyer on staff, in just the first eight
9 months of this Fiscal Year, we have supported 414
10 vendors with individual consultations on topics
11 ranging from sales tax filings to filing loan
12 applications. Of these, in the past year, 57 percent
13 of our small business consultations were in Spanish,
14 20 percent in Mandarin, 14 percent in English, 5
15 percent in Arabic, and 3 in Bangla. 59 percent of our
16 consultations were with female-identifying street
17 vendors. We also hold monthly workshops at our
18 membership meetings with a regular attendance of 50
19 to 75 individuals and tonight's, for example, is on
20 registering for e-payment systems. We also conduct
21 regular street outreach to vendors to connect them
22 with services, often with a fellow SVP member
23 alongside us to continue building trust when so many
24 have faced scams in the street vending world. Each of
25 these engagements is with the purpose of helping a

2 small business owner to grow and become part of the
3 formalized economy. Respectfully, SVP really fulfills
4 a critical role. There is no city agency that
5 meaningfully serves street vendors. Respectfully, in
6 September 2023, SBS reported that they did not have
7 staff dedicated to street vending, does not conduct
8 in-person educational outreach to vendors, and did
9 not have data on how many street vendors had access
10 to any of their services and, unfortunately, the
11 information shared today, respectfully, was incorrect
12 about a study being funded this Fiscal Year. It will
13 not be funded as was told to the SBAC. This is a
14 stark difference when compared with the investment in
15 enforcement. DSNY, as of the FY24 adopted budget,
16 currently has 2.9 million budgeted for the Office of
17 Street Vendor Enforcement, which is set to increase
18 to 4.7 million by FY27. Street Vendor Project, we are
19 very eager to increase services to street vendors,
20 but we really need City Council's support to increase
21 our capacity and, by empowering vendors to improve
22 their financial literacy, our services help them
23 integrate into the formalized economy, allowing them
24 to open bank accounts, access credit, regularly pay
25 and file taxes, and grow their businesses. Thank you

2 so much for your consideration of this proposal and
3 in supporting the street vendors who make New York
4 City beautiful and diverse. Thank you.

5 NICK AQUINO: Good afternoon. My name is
6 Nick Aquino, and I am a staff attorney with the
7 Microenterprise Project of Volunteers of Legal
8 Service. For over 20 years, the VOL's Microenterprise
9 Project has helped small business owners access free
10 legal services. We partner with the City,
11 particularly SBS, to connect with clients. For many
12 New Yorkers and under-resourced communities,
13 entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to build
14 wealth for themselves and future generations. A
15 thriving small business ecosystem also strengthens
16 the local community. Many of our clients operate
17 neighborhood institutions like delis, cafes, and
18 barbershops that serve the dual purpose as a
19 community space that can't easily be replicated.
20 While we strive to provide free legal services for as
21 many New Yorkers as possible, we cannot solve this
22 problem alone. Leveraging City resources is
23 essential. For example, on February 28th, VOLS
24 launched its partnership with SBS' Black
25 Entrepreneurs in NYC program, and, there, VOLS

2 facilitated a presentation on business legal
3 considerations to an audience of black entrepreneurs,
4 a community that is vastly under-represented in New
5 York City's business owner community. We rely on
6 essential SBS and other City programs to connect our
7 clients with non-legal support. For example, SBS'
8 financing assistance programming offers our clients a
9 necessary lifeline. Similarly, without well-resourced
10 social networks due to historic discrimination, our
11 M/WBE-certified clients benefit greatly from SBS'
12 procurement opportunities. In sum, without City
13 services to reduce the barrier to entry of under
14 resourced entrepreneurs, the dream of small business
15 ownership would be the exclusive purview of the
16 wealthy and well-resourced. Also, without your
17 support in the form of discretionary funding, VOLS
18 wouldn't be able to bring free legal services to New
19 York City entrepreneurs. Thank you.

20 KAYT TISKUS: Good morning, or good
21 afternoon, at this point. Thank you so much for
22 spending your time with us today, Chair Feliz, and
23 the rest of the Committee. My name is Kayt Tiskus.
24 I'm with Collective Public Affairs, and what I do is
25 I work with many City Council initiatives to help

2 with the running of their programs and to help with
3 the securing of funding and to help City Councilors
4 understand what it is that those programs do. I
5 wanted to emphasize the work of three initiatives
6 that work with SBS today and use this moment to note
7 that SBS' resources in the executive budget receiving
8 cuts and losses really impact the ability of other
9 providers who partner with the City to be able to
10 provide those services in an efficient way and also
11 to note that, as partners try to step in and fill the
12 gaps, loss of funding or even just holding steady on
13 the same amount of funding can really impact the
14 number of people that they serve. The Workers
15 Cooperative Business Development Initiative is a
16 wonderful entry into small business ownership for
17 many folks, especially New Yorkers, especially New
18 Yorkers who may have documents that are in a
19 complicated situation to meaningfully participate in
20 business ownership. The Pride at Work initiative
21 helps LGBT people get into high road union employment
22 and is also administered through SBS. And the
23 Domestic Workers Empowerment Initiative helps
24 domestic workers understand their rights and
25 responsibilities and to connect to the services and

2 particularly human rights protections that City
3 Council fought so hard to get for them. All of them
4 have significant funding asks for this year, but also
5 require a strong partner from SBS, and so the cuts to
6 the executive budget will impact those initiatives
7 abilities to function as well. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: All right. If
9 there are no questions, then thank you all very much,
10 and I will call up our next panel.

11 We could have Elsa Samaniego, Ana
12 Salgado, and Gregory Morris.

13 ANA SALGADO: Honorable Chair, Member
14 Feliz and Committee Members of the New York City
15 Council. I'm Ana Salgado, Mental Health Coordinator
16 at Mixteca Organization. I appreciate your time, and
17 I'm honored to have the opportunity to testify before
18 you today, representing Mixteca, an organization
19 dedicated to serving Latin and indigenous communities
20 in Sunset Park and Greater New York City. We
21 recognize the profound challenge of our immigrant and
22 indigenous community encounter, which a longstanding
23 commitment to widening our immigrant community and
24 responding to the humanitarian crisis of newly
25 arrived asylum seekers. Mixteca stands at the

2 forefront of community-based support. Today, I'm here
3 to introduce our Workforce Development Program,
4 STELAR, means Striving Through Education, Leadership,
5 and Access to Resources. STELAR was established with
6 the aim of empowering our community with the skills,
7 resources, and tools necessary to strengthen their
8 socioeconomic well-being through education,
9 entrepreneurship, and career guidance. Conceived
10 during the onset of the asylum seeker humanitarian
11 crisis, and the labor shortage experienced by our
12 immigrant community during the COVID-19 pandemic,
13 STELAR endeavors to equip immigrant communities with
14 entrepreneurship skills to navigate challenging
15 times. As the coordinator and facilitator of STELAR,
16 I have the privilege of closely working with
17 participants, understanding their stories and their
18 motivations for joining the program. An overwhelming
19 19 percent of participants enrolled in the program
20 are unemployed, seeking skills and resources to
21 secure a source of income for themselves.
22 Unemployment presents challenges in any context, but
23 it becomes even more intimidating in a city like New
24 York, known for its resiliency yet burdened by high
25 cost of living. The Latin community tirelessly

2 strives to confront economic challenges and, by
3 supporting Mixteca, we can provide families and
4 communities with a mean to overcome obstacles and a
5 brighter future. Okay, thank you. STELAR is an
6 example, a program that works to connect social
7 support, education, workplace, preparation, career.
8 It's important to mention all these areas because
9 it's the work that can be accomplished when the
10 organization and the community have the support and
11 (INAUDIBLE) from the city to do the work. In
12 considering resources allocation, I implore you to
13 prioritize funding for Mixteca. We are a frontline
14 organization vital in providing essential services to
15 our own migrant community. Your support is essential
16 in obtaining capital funding to expand and continue
17 delivering culturally competent service, including
18 STELAR. Thank you for your time and attention to this
19 matter.

20 ELSA SAMANIEGO: [SPEAKING SPANISH]

21 ANA SALGADO: I will read the translation
22 of Elsa's testimony. Good afternoon, honorable
23 Members of the New York City Council. My name is Elsa
24 Samaniego, community leader, activist, and
25 participant in the STELAR group. I'm here because I

2 want to share with you how important it has been for
3 me, my family, and my colleagues to participate in
4 this program. STELAR is giving me the tools that I
5 need to start my own artisan candle business. I learn
6 how to make them, I learn how to present my business,
7 and I'm learning about business plan and regulations
8 and consumer protection in New York City. I know that
9 I still have a long way to go and I still have to
10 continue learning many things, but I consider myself
11 an entrepreneurial woman and STELAR gives me both the
12 strength to believe that I can do it and the tools to
13 make it real. I know that programs like this are only
14 possible with the support and the support of many. We
15 need investment and small business program and
16 investment in Mixteca and similar organizations that
17 provide support to me, my family, and my other
18 colleagues in the STELAR group, entrepreneur women
19 who want to get ahead. Thank you.

20 GREGORY MORRIS: Thank you for the
21 opportunity to provide testimony, Council Member. My
22 name is Greg Morris. I'm the CEO of the New York City
23 Workforce Development Association. That is an
24 organization that serves as a resource and support
25 workforce development providers, 220 in total,

2 serving almost half a million New Yorkers on an
3 annual basis. Our membership indicates that the
4 majority of participants that our providers serve are
5 women, young adults, NYCHA residents, immigrants,
6 refugees, asylum seekers, and justice-involved
7 individuals. Our job essentially in the workforce
8 development ecosystem is to track the value and
9 impact of the commitments the City Administration
10 makes in support of job readiness and training, to
11 serve as a resource to employers and employer
12 intermediaries seeking talent, and advocate for the
13 budgetary legislative and regulatory action items
14 that maximize access and equity in programs and
15 services that are central to our efforts so that
16 means industry-specific skill development, college
17 and career exploration, internships, apprenticeships,
18 re-skilling, up-skilling options, as well as
19 employment, placement, retention, and supportive
20 services. I wanted to take, the testimony can be
21 submitted online and I'm happy to talk to you and
22 your team about any of the specific details we have
23 about strategy related to workforce development in
24 New York City, but I specifically came to this
25 hearing because the Small Business Services has

2 responsibility for 18 Workforce1 centers in New York
3 City and, as they reported in the preliminary hearing
4 report, their numbers are down in terms of
5 placements, usage. It's also the case that the amount
6 of money that those sites have is down as well, and I
7 want to flag that and I want to champion the fact
8 that you talked about it related to the disabilities
9 office, but we don't track job placement. We don't
10 track outcomes. If you look at the MMR, we really
11 don't know how it is that the investment the City is
12 making in Workforce1 is resulting in better
13 opportunities for New Yorkers seeking job opportunity
14 in the city so I just want to flag that, and I think
15 one of the solutions to that could be the City
16 Council having its own workforce development task
17 force or committee that would call to mind both this
18 agency and others coming to the table reporting
19 outcomes related to the investments the
20 Administration makes in job development and training
21 so that all New Yorkers can benefit from those
22 investments. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: All right, since there
24 are no questions. Thank you very much. Gracias. I

2 don't have any other registrants for in-person
3 testimony. Please let me know if we missed you.

4 I will turn to our Zoom panelists at this
5 time. Let's see, I believe we have online Michael
6 Haber, Jessica Walker, and Pilar DeJesus. We'll go in
7 that order.

8 For Zoom panelists, once your name is
9 called, a Member of our Staff will unmute you, and
10 the Sergeant-at-Arms will give you the go-ahead to
11 begin. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce you
12 may begin before beginning your testimony.

13 If we could start with Michael Haber.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

15 MICHAEL HABER: Good afternoon. My name is
16 Michael Haber, and I'm the Director of the Community
17 and Economic Development Program at Brooklyn Legal
18 Services Corp A, or Brooklyn A. Brooklyn A is seeking
19 funding for our Community and Economic Development
20 Program, which provides legal support for small
21 businesses and non-profits across the five boroughs,
22 and calling for a continuation of SBS' Commercial
23 Lease Assistance Program. Partnering with SBS to
24 provide services through the CLA Program has allowed
25 us to shift our focus to commercial lease assistance

2 to small businesses over the last six years. Last
3 Fiscal Year, our Small Business Program served small
4 businesses on 1,334 matters. We provided assistance
5 to businesses in every Council District in New York
6 City in FY22 and all but one in FY23. Each and every
7 one of these neighborhood businesses plays a crucial
8 role as part of their communities. Despite our
9 successes with the CLA program, we have some ideas
10 for how to improve it. First and foremost, continued
11 funding of the program with immediate issuance of a
12 negotiated acquisition extension agreement to ensure
13 continuity of services and timely issuance of an RFP
14 for a new contract cycle.

15 Second, while we appreciate all the
16 efforts that SBS has undertaken to assist with our
17 outreach efforts, Brooklyn A is a legal services
18 provider and not a marketing firm and we believe that
19 the CLA program needs additional assistance from the
20 City to support our outreach efforts. With additional
21 investment in and management of the marketing of the
22 CLA program from SBS, we could dramatically increase
23 our services to small businesses across the City,
24 making more business owners aware of these critical
25 services.

2 Thirdly, many small businesses are
3 struggling with landlord lawsuits that have come
4 about because they fell behind in paying their rents,
5 sometimes by just a few thousand dollars. The CLA
6 program does not allow us to litigate on behalf of
7 our clients, even though most small businesses cannot
8 afford to pay for court costs and attorneys for
9 litigation. Brooklyn A has seen repeatedly that if
10 landlords are aware that attorneys cannot appear in
11 court on behalf of small business clients, they may
12 evict long-time tenants and jack up rents causing
13 damages to small businesses across the city. Several
14 options would allow for an increase in small business
15 support and litigation court capacity on a trial or
16 pilot basis, including allowing CLA counsel to appear
17 in court...

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

19 MICHAEL HABER: For a limited portion of
20 certain agreements. Thank you for your time.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: All right,
22 we'll move to our next panelist. Thank you very much.

23 Next up we have Jessica Walker.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 JESSICA WALKER: Hi, I'm Jessica Walker.
3 I'm the President of the Manhattan Chamber of
4 Commerce. I want to just reiterate what my
5 colleagues, Meredith and Randy, spoke about earlier.
6 In particular, we are very supportive of our Small
7 Business Resource Network and also the Chamber on the
8 Go programs. I just wanted to highlight, because they
9 did such a great job, I just wanted to highlight a
10 few things. First and foremost, just how effective
11 the program is. Since its inception in October 2020,
12 we have reached more than 47,000 businesses
13 throughout the city, and the stat that I'm most proud
14 of is that most of the people we've helped, 76
15 percent of the businesses we've reached have been
16 minority and women-owned businesses, and the vast
17 majority of businesses we've reached have had four or
18 fewer employees so these really are the businesses
19 who need the help the most, who often are forgotten
20 or just don't know where to go and really do need the
21 support and the resources, so very helpful, it's a
22 very terrific program. The other thing I want to
23 reiterate, I think Randy spoke about it, is that the
24 Chamber on the Go program really does help to amplify
25 all the good programs that the City has and that

2 small businesses may never know about if it's not for
3 the outreach that we're doing. The Lease Negotiation
4 Program, the M/WBE Certification Programs, all of
5 that great stuff, the City grants and loans. We're
6 the ones getting the word out about that. Again, we
7 just want to request that the City Council
8 discretionary money, it's 500,000 dollars citywide
9 for the Five Borough Chamber Alliance. The other pot
10 of money runs through EDC. It's called the EDC
11 Business Resource Center. It's administered by SBS
12 but runs through EDC and then, of course, the Chamber
13 on the Go program is a City Council discretionary
14 fund. We support it and we would love to see that
15 fully restored in the City budget. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you. Any
17 questions?

18 All right, thank you very much, and then
19 we'll move on to Pilar DeJesus.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

21 PILAR DEJESUS: Hi, good afternoon. I
22 apologize I couldn't be there in person. I was
23 trying, but I don't know. Meetings kept me here. My
24 name is Pilar DeJesus. I am an advocacy coordinator
25 at TakeRoot Justice. TakeRoot Justice provides legal

2 services. Participatory research and policy support
3 to straighten the work of grassroots and community-
4 based groups in New York City to dismantle racial and
5 economic and social oppression, and I'm going to
6 submit a more formal testimony. This is going to be
7 more informal. I'm just really want to continue to
8 encourage the Council to continue to fund the Worker
9 Cooperative Development Initiative. It is something
10 that, as I think as we all know or as we, as the
11 Council may know that, worker cooperatives provide a
12 value, especially when we're talking.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Sorry, it seems
14 like you've been muted or we've lost sound. Oh, no,
15 we can't hear you. You seem to be unmuted on our end.
16 Are you able to unmute yourself? Okay. And there's
17 nothing we can do on our end? All right. If you're
18 wearing headphones, maybe that was it?

19 Thank you for coming, and if you are able
20 to submit written testimony, obviously, that'll be in
21 the record as well. All right.

22 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: And I'll make sure to
23 look at the testimony. Thank you so much. I'll make
24 sure to, yeah, read the written testimony. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you so
3 much, and is there anyone else on Zoom that we have
4 missed?

5 Great. In that case, thank you again to
6 everybody who testified today, and I'll turn it back
7 to Chair Feliz.

8 CHAIRPERSON FELIZ: Thank you so much.
9 Thank you everyone who testified today. Thank you to
10 the Administration for all the information. Thank you
11 also to the public for bringing your unique
12 perspective and experiences on the issue, really
13 appreciate the input.

14 With that said, today's hearing is hereby
15 adjourned. Thank you so much. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 8, 2024