

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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March 11, 2024

Start: 10:14 a.m.

Recess: 3:57 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés  
Chris Banks  
Tiffany Cabán  
Chi A. Ossé  
Lincoln Restler  
Kevin C. Riley  
Althea V. Stevens  
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Selvena N. Brooks-Powers  
Gale A. Brewer  
Crystal Hudson  
Carlina Rivera

A P P E A R A N C E S

Molly Wasow Park, Commissioner of the Department  
of Social Services

Joslyn Carter, Administrator of the Department of  
Homeless Services

Scott French, Administrator for the Human  
Resources Administration

Jill Berry, First Deputy Commissioner at  
Department of Social Services

Ellen Levine, Chief Program Performance and  
Financial Management Officer at the Human  
Resources Administration

Rosine Ferdinand, Executive Deputy Commissioner  
at the Human Resources Administration

Patrick DiStefano, Deputy Commissioner at  
Department of Social Services

Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director,  
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New  
York

Luchy Perez, Local 1549, DC 37

Tyce Grant, SNAP Eligibility Specialist and a  
member of AFSCME Local 1549 Local 1549, DC 37

Gladys Little, Eligibility Specialist and a  
Member of AFSCME Local 1549, DC 37

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

Allison Robinson, Case Manager at Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS), DC 37 (newly organized)

Jake Greenberg, Case Manager for Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS), DC 37 (newly organized)

Corinthia Carter, President of Legal Services Staff Association 2320 (UAW 9A)

Valentina Vidal, Bilingual Case Manager for the Workforce Development at GMHC

Brady Crain, Chief Executive Officer of Grand Central Labor Social Services

Terry Troia, President of Project Hospitality

Judith Rosenfeld, Vice President of Special Projects for Breaking Ground

Kristin Miller, Executive Director of Homeless Services United

Doreen Thomann-Howe, Chief Operating Officer for Project Renewal

Catherine Trapani, Assistant Vice President of Public Policy at Volunteers of America Greater New York

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

Alison Wilkey, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Campaigns with the Coalition for the Homeless

Pernell S. Brice, III, Vice President for Policy and Advocacy for The Children's Health Fund

Arturo Brito, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Health Fund

Raun Rasmussen, Executive Director of Legal Services

Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice for the Legal Aid Society

Abby Biberman, Associate Director of the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group

Cathy Cramer, Chief Executive Officer of Family Legal Care

McGregor Smyth, Executive Director of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Omarax Rosa, Director of Housing Justice at the Harlem Community Justice Center Program of the Center for Justice Innovation

Anna Arkin-Gallagher, Supervising Attorney and Policy Counsel in the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services

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

Greg Silverman, Chief Executive Officer of the Westside Campaign Against Hunger

Kim Moscaritolo, Director of Communications and Advocacy for Hunger Free America

Nicholas Buess, Director of Government Relations at the Food Bank for New York City

Jerome Nathaniel, Director of Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest

Paula Inhargue, Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses

Cathy Vargas, Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Nafisa Rahman, Welfare Rights Initiative Community Leadership Training Program

Meredith Levine, Senior Director of Information and Case Assistance and NYC Benefits Program at JASA

Michelle Berney, Director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center at the Community Service Society of New York

Towaki Komatsa, Self

Gabriela Sandoval Requena, Director of Policy and Communications at New Destiny

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

Tara Joy, Union Strong, Legal Services Staff Association 2320 (UAW 9A)

Gloria Kim, Director of Policy Research and Impact of the Human Services Council

Antonia House, TakeRoot Justice/CILEC

Tierra Labrada, Associate Director of Advocacy at the Supportive Housing Network of New York

James Dill, Housing and Services, Inc.

Lauren Schuster, Vice President of Government Affairs at Urban Resource Institute

Racquel Grant, Chief Development Officer for the Campaign Against Hunger for Melony Samuels

Nathalie Pierre-Louis, Assistant Program Director at the Resource Center Program of Goddard Riverside

Judith Secon, Deputy Executive Director at New York Common Pantry

Rachel Briant, attorney at Met Council

Jesenia Ponce, Coordinating Attorney for Policy and Advocacy at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

Elise C. Benusa, Government Relations Manager at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York

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

Peggy Herrera, leader and a member with Freedom Agenda and the Campaign to Close Rikers

Jay Edidin, Director of Advocacy at the Women's Community Justice Association

Juan Diaz, Policy Associate at Citizens Committee for Children

Jeanine Costley, Senior Vice President of Transitional Services at the Institute for Community Living

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sound check for the  
3 Committee on General Welfare. Today's date is March  
4 11, 2024, being recorded by Danny Huang in the  
5 Chambers.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and  
7 welcome to the New York City Preliminary Budget  
8 Hearing on the Committee on General Welfare.

9 At this time, please silent all  
10 electronic devices.

11 At no time, please do not approach the  
12 dais.

13 If you have any questions, please raise  
14 your hand. One of us, a Sergeant-at-Arms, will kindly  
15 assist you.

16 Thank you very much for your kind  
17 cooperation.

18 Chair, we are ready to begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. [GAVEL]  
20 Sorry, I'm still trying to catch up my hour that  
21 we're all missing, but I'm a little bit delayed. Good  
22 morning, everyone. I am Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala,  
23 Chair of the General Welfare Committee. Thank you for  
24 joining me for the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget  
25 Hearing for the General Welfare Committee.



2           We will hear from two agencies, the Human  
3 Resource Administration and the Department of  
4 Homeless Services, testifying under the umbrella of  
5 the Department of Social Services, DSS. The City's  
6 proposed Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget totals 109.4  
7 billion of which 14.8 billion, or 13.5 percent, funds  
8 DSS. This encompasses 10.8 billion for HRA and 4.0  
9 billion for DHS. DSS serves some of the most  
10 vulnerable populations in the city and these services  
11 are more vital now than ever. There were notable  
12 changes made in the Preliminary Plan for both  
13 agencies. HRA saw 1.5 billion in new needs added to  
14 Fiscal Year 2024 only, with the majority of that  
15 funding going towards entitlement programs lacking  
16 adequate baseline funding, including cash assistance,  
17 CityFHEPS vouchers, HASA emergency housing, and  
18 domestic violence shelters. Other adjustments and  
19 PEGs decreased HRA's budget by 112.6 million in  
20 Fiscal Year 2024, 128.6 million in Fiscal Year 2025,  
21 and by over 130 million in the outer years. On a  
22 positive note, I was very happy to see that the  
23 Preliminary Plan fully restored HRA's job training  
24 program, which had been cut in the November plan.

2           In the Preliminary Plan, DHS had 86  
3 million new needs in Fiscal Year 2024 only, notably,  
4 including 63.5 million to pay shelter security, the  
5 prevailing wage, which has been legislatively  
6 required for years but is still not baselined. PEGs  
7 decreased DHS's budget by 58.9 million in Fiscal Year  
8 2024 and by 89.3 million in Fiscal Year 2025 largely  
9 due to the impact from the asylum-seeker response  
10 cost re-estimate. I am concerned about the areas that  
11 the budget where the budget does not adequately  
12 support the essential programs administered by HRA  
13 and the necessary level of staffing required to  
14 provide clients with services in a timely manner.  
15 While HRA has made headway in the backlog of SNAP and  
16 cash assistance applications, denial rates have  
17 increased, which is troubling. We have been hearing  
18 that it is very difficult to get through to HRA by  
19 phone and that clients are experiencing very long  
20 wait times at HRA centers. I am also concerned that  
21 not enough support is being given to community-based  
22 organizations such as the ones operating the City's  
23 food pantries and soup kitchens.

24           While the budget maintains the essential  
25 benefits programs administered by HRA and the shelter

2 programs administered by DHS, we need to think more  
3 deeply about where we can most effectively allocate  
4 our limited city resources, especially during these  
5 uniquely challenging times. DHS's shelter census,  
6 which is now over 87,000, has nearly doubled over the  
7 past three years, largely due to the influx of asylum  
8 seekers. The ballooning shelter census and the high  
9 cost of the City's asylum-seeker response makes  
10 programs such as CityFHEPS more important than ever,  
11 and the best way to move long term shelter residents  
12 into stable permanent housing. However, this program  
13 suffers from both underfunding and numerous process  
14 bottlenecks on top of the difficulty of finding  
15 affordable housing in a very expensive city.

16 In today's hearing, we look forward to  
17 discussing adjustments made in the Preliminary Plan,  
18 including the PEGs, staffing for benefits  
19 administration, the impact of vacancies on agency  
20 operations, how DSS is working with contracted non-  
21 profit providers to improve contracting, the plan for  
22 asylum response efforts going forward, and the  
23 metrics included in the Fiscal 2024 Preliminary  
24 Mayors Management Report. It is the Council's job to  
25 carefully review the budgets and operations of City

2 agencies to ensure that we are good stewards of  
3 public dollars, and that we are providing the City's  
4 most vulnerable residents with the services that they  
5 need. This is a job that I take very seriously.

6 Before I welcome the Commissioner, I  
7 would like to acknowledge that we've been joined by  
8 Speaker Adams and Council Members Riley, Schulman,  
9 Cabán, and Avilés.

10 Finally, I would like to thank the  
11 General Welfare Committee Staff for their work on  
12 preparing this hearing, Phariha Rahman, Finance  
13 Analyst; Julia Haramis, Unit Head; Aminta Kilawan,  
14 Senior Counsel; Penina Rosenberg, Policy Analyst; and  
15 my Chief-of-Staff Elsie Encarnacion.

16 Now I would like to turn it over to  
17 Commissioner Park. Our Counsel will swear you in.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please raise your  
19 right hand.

20 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
21 whole truth, and nothing but the truth and respond  
22 honestly to Council Member questions?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: I do.

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I do.

25 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I do.

2 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: I do.

3 EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FERDINAND:

4 I do.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DISTEFANO: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may now begin.

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you. If we could  
8 go to the first slide on the presentation, please.

9 Good morning. My name is Molly Wasow  
10 Park. I'm the Commissioner of the Department of  
11 Social Services. I'm joined today by Joslyn Carter,  
12 Administrator of the Department of Homeless Services;  
13 Scott French, Administrator for the Human Resources  
14 Administration; Jill Berry, DSS First Deputy  
15 Commissioner; Ellen Levine, Chief Program Performance  
16 and Financial Management Officer; Rosene Ferdinand,  
17 Executive Deputy Commissioner, and Patrick DiStefano,  
18 Deputy Commissioner. Today we will provide an  
19 overview of the budgets for DSS, HRA, and DHS and  
20 highlight some of the programs and services we offer  
21 to support low-income New Yorkers. Next slide.

22 DSS is the largest government social  
23 services agency in the country, comprised of the  
24 Human Resources Administration, or HRA, and the  
25 Department of Homeless Services, DHS. Under the

2 consolidated management structure and the shared  
3 mission of DSS, HRA and DHS provide an integrated  
4 continuum of client services to millions of New  
5 Yorkers every day. Across the agencies, our primary  
6 goal is to create a path to sustainability for low-  
7 income New Yorkers through three pillars: First,  
8 streamlining access to social services, second,  
9 addressing homelessness and housing instability and,  
10 third, creating economic stability. In a joint effort  
11 to fight poverty and income inequality and to create  
12 housing opportunities, DSS, HRA, DHS collaborate with  
13 other public agencies and non-profit partners to  
14 reduce street homelessness, assist New Yorkers in  
15 successfully transitioning from shelter into  
16 permanent housing, and return to self-sufficiency  
17 through our various programs and services that we  
18 will discuss in more detail.

19 First, I will provide an overview of the  
20 projected DSS-HRA budget for FY25. Two slides  
21 forward, please.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And Commissioner, I'm  
23 sorry to interrupt, but when you have any graphs for  
24 accessibility purposes, can you just verbally  
25 interpret them?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: We are starting with  
5 an overview of the HRA budget. Before I get into the  
6 graph, DSS-HRA is dedicated to fighting poverty and  
7 income inequality, providing essential benefits,  
8 including cash assistance, nutrition and food  
9 programs, public health insurance, employment and  
10 transportation services, and access to housing,  
11 homelessness prevention and emergency assistance.  
12 DSS-HRA helps more than 3 million New Yorkers  
13 annually through the administration of more than 15  
14 major public benefit programs with a budgeted  
15 headcount of 12,000 people. As you see in this pie  
16 chart here, the FY25 budget for DSS-HRA is 10.8  
17 billion, including 8.4 billion in City funds. The  
18 majority, over 80 percent of the HRA City tax levy  
19 budget, is earmarked for benefits that the City  
20 administers on behalf of New York State. This  
21 includes cash assistance benefits, which is the red  
22 pie chart, about 12 percent of the total. Although we  
23 manage the application process for cash assistance,  
24 benefit levels and eligibility rules are set by State  
25 law and regulation. Medicaid, which is the very large

2 blue slice of the pie here, is also a critical  
3 component of the HRA budget. Medicaid funds services  
4 including homecare, managed care, mental health  
5 substance use services, hospice care, and so on. The  
6 program is really administered by New York State. The  
7 City pays a portion of Medicaid costs out of City tax  
8 levy, that's the 70 percent of the DSS-HRA City-  
9 funded budget shown here. HRA sends these funds  
10 directly to New York State, and the state uses it  
11 along with the state and federal funds it controls to  
12 pay medical providers and manage care plans. HRA also  
13 administers SNAP for 1.7 million clients. These  
14 benefits, which are federally funded to the tune of  
15 about 3.9 billion dollars a year, don't flow through  
16 our budget, but they represent another critical  
17 benefit that HRA is mandated to provide. I will note  
18 that the administration section of the budget, which  
19 is the purple wedge on the pie here, is the  
20 administration that covers both DSS, HRA, and DHS so  
21 it's for the full three agencies. Next slide.

22 I'd like to turn now to talking about  
23 staffing, which is a key concern for all of us. As  
24 you can see here, DSS-HRA headcount had dipped  
25 significantly so the bottom point in the graph shows



2 a sharp slope in the headcount and then rising fairly  
3 steeply. Due to our focus on frontline hiring, we  
4 have been able to grow aggressively in a number of  
5 areas, one of our successful strategies to address  
6 the cash and SNAP backlogs. Our current budgeted  
7 headcount is 12,127. Total HRA actuals is 10,981, or  
8 a 9 percent vacancy rate. There's still work to do,  
9 but that's down very substantially from where we were  
10 even a year ago. Of the almost 11,000 HRA employees,  
11 3,104 are working on cash and SNAP. We have hired  
12 nearly 1,000 people to process cash and SNAP benefits  
13 since January 2023 and have seen a net increase of  
14 535 people in these areas over the same time period.  
15 Next slide.

16 Now, I'd like to look at the PEGs we have  
17 taken over the last two plans. Over 80 percent of  
18 City funds in the DSS-HRA budget support public  
19 assistance and Medicaid. That rises to almost 90  
20 percent of tax levy when we include rental assistance  
21 in the calculation. On top of that, most of our  
22 programs have matching fund requirements so finding  
23 savings is a challenge. In November and January, HRA  
24 was able to find savings that largely avoided  
25 impacting our critical services. We achieved the

2 majority of our savings by looking first to  
3 administrative efficiencies and opportunities to  
4 maximize revenues to save City funds. However, since  
5 so little of our budget is discretionary, we  
6 sometimes had to make difficult choices. In these  
7 cases, we looked at options that will allow us to  
8 continue meeting our mandates in the most efficient  
9 ways. The agency's early actions identifying savings  
10 helped to balance the City budget and put us on  
11 better footing going forward. As the Mayor has said,  
12 if the City had not taken these early actions, it  
13 would not be able to forego the executive PEG. In the  
14 interest of time, I won't go through every item on  
15 this slide in detail, although I'm happy to answer  
16 questions, but a few items to highlight. We will  
17 achieve meaningful savings and leases by using  
18 existing City space for back-office IT functions. We  
19 were able to maximize the amount of federal revenue  
20 we were bringing in to support fringe benefits for  
21 HRA employees, and our multi-year investment in  
22 technology to support rental subsidy processing will  
23 allow us to speed up lease-ups and spend less on  
24 holding units available before a client can move in.

2 Now I'm going to pivot to an overview of the DHS  
3 budget. Two slides forward.

4           Great. Thank you. DHS is committed to  
5 providing safe temporary shelter, connecting New  
6 Yorkers experiencing homelessness to permanent  
7 housing, and addressing unsheltered homelessness.  
8 With it's not-for-profit partners, DHS is the largest  
9 municipal organization dedicated to addressing  
10 homelessness in the United States.

11           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Commissioner, can you  
12 move the mic a little closer because it's not picking  
13 up.

14           COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, sorry.

15           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

16           COMMISSIONER PARK: The agency has an FY  
17 25 budget of 3.9 billion of which 1.9 billion is City  
18 tax levy and a budgeted head count of 1,905. Over 95  
19 percent of the DHS budget supports shelter for  
20 families and individuals and services for the  
21 unsheltered, including outreach and low-barrier beds.  
22 The DHS budget is broken out as follows in FY25, 996  
23 million for family shelter, comprised of a  
24 combination of city, state, and federal funds. That  
25 is the purple wedge on the pie chart here; 714

2 million for adult shelter, virtually all City tax  
3 levy funded, the green piece of the pie; 278 million  
4 for our street outreach services, including low-  
5 barrier beds, which is are also primarily City tax  
6 levy funded; and the small blue bar is general  
7 administration and support, that's about 4 percent of  
8 the budget. There's 1.8 billion in our budget for  
9 asylum-seeker sanctuary sites and services. We have  
10 actually excluded that from the pie chart here to  
11 show a more representative picture of the DHS budget  
12 overall. Next slide.

13           The DHS budget is largely a function of  
14 the shelter census. As of March 6th, the overall DHS  
15 census was 86,360 people, an increase of more than  
16 41,000 since the beginning of 2022, before the surge  
17 in asylum seekers to New York City. Of the 86,000,  
18 approximately 62,000, or over 70 percent, are  
19 families made up of children and their adult parents  
20 and caregivers. Children make up nearly 40 percent of  
21 all people in shelter. The families with children are  
22 the larger blue wedge on the pie chart here. Those  
23 are the children, and then the yellow represents the  
24 adults in the family with children so the lighter  
25 blue and the yellow combined represent families with

2 children altogether. Today, approximately 36 percent  
3 of the overall census is made up of asylum seekers,  
4 over 30,000 people. In January 2022, the census is  
5 around 45,000 lower than it was in 2020 immediately  
6 pre-pandemic. As asylum seekers came to New York City  
7 and began to enter shelter in large numbers, they  
8 drove up the census, which increased sharply over the  
9 past nearly two years. Asylum seekers account for 75  
10 percent of the growth in the DHS census relative to  
11 January of 2022. Next slide.

12 This slide here is a visual  
13 representation of the trend that I just discussed.  
14 The red line is the non-asylum census. You can see  
15 it's about 7 percent below the pre-pandemic level and  
16 well below the pre-pandemic peak of 61,400 reached in  
17 January of 2019. The blue line represents the total  
18 census with the space between the red line and the  
19 blue line being the asylum seekers. You can see that  
20 the very rapid growth over the last two years has  
21 been very much driven by the asylum seekers. We noted  
22 at the beginning of this presentation that the DHS  
23 budget is 3.9 billion next year, a significant  
24 increase over the DHS budget before the asylum  
25 seekers began entering shelter in large numbers. The

significant increases in the DHS budget this year and next year over prior years are primarily due to asylum seeker costs. 36 percent of the DHS budget this year is allocated for asylum seeker costs, increasing to 45 percent in FY25. This funding in DHS is allocated primarily for sanctuary sites, for the cost of migrants in regular DHS shelters, for supplies, and for staff and overtime costs related exclusively to asylum seekers. The current agreement with the State for reimbursement of asylums costs is 71 percent City tax levy and 29 percent state. As of March 2024, DHS has submitted claims to New York State on behalf of DHS, HRA, H and H, and other City agencies totaling over 1.5 billion. Last State Fiscal Year, the State allocated 1 billion towards New York City costs, and we're waiting for enactment of the State's Fiscal Year '24-'25 budget to see if the State will allocate additional funds. The Governor's proposal included 2 billion. More generally, we continue to advocate with the state and federal governments to provide adequate funding and pathways to work and sustainability for these newest immigrants to our city and country.

2           Despite the influx of asylum seekers and  
3 its impact on our agencies, we have not lost focus on  
4 shelter housing placements. We have seen increases in  
5 permanent housing placements from the DHS system as a  
6 result of the agency's efforts to move families and  
7 individuals out of shelter. In FY23, there were close  
8 to 15,000 placements from shelter, an increase of 17  
9 percent over the prior year. In the first four months  
10 of this year, there were 5,400 placements, an  
11 increase of 11 percent over that same time window  
12 last year. Next slide.

13           Our engagement with individuals  
14 experiencing unsheltered homelessness is another  
15 critical component of DHS's work. Since the start of  
16 this Administration, DSS-DHS has doubled outreach  
17 staffing, we have nearly 400 outreach staff on the  
18 ground as of today, and aggressively expanded low-  
19 barrier bed capacity, bringing nearly 300 new beds  
20 online since August 2023 alone with more than 3,900  
21 such beds online as of today. As a result of critical  
22 investments in 24/7 outreach efforts and the  
23 intensification of end-of-line efforts as part of the  
24 Subway Safety Plan, referrals to shelter and low  
25 barrier placements increased 71 percent in FY23.

2 Since the launch of the Subway Safety Plan in  
3 February 2022, more than 6,100 New Yorkers have been  
4 connected to shelter from the subways, and I'm  
5 incredibly pleased to report that thanks to critical  
6 investments in a comprehensive continuum of care,  
7 DSS-DHS more than doubled the number of permanent  
8 housing placements for people experiencing  
9 unsheltered homelessness year over year. DHS placed  
10 almost 1,000 New Yorkers residing in low-barrier  
11 programs to permanent housing in FY23. I want to  
12 pause on that figure. That is close to 1,000 people  
13 who used to sleep on the streets and subways who now  
14 have a lease and a place to call a permanent home.  
15 Next slide.

16 I know we're all rightfully concerned  
17 about staffing, however, DHS has not had the same  
18 kind of headcount swings that other agencies have  
19 faced. DHS staffing has remained relatively steady  
20 over the past 18 months as you see this line here is  
21 relatively flat and has increased slightly since the  
22 end of last Fiscal Year. DHS head count is just over  
23 1,900, and the agency has a vacancy rate of 7.5  
24 percent. Next slide.



2           The DHS approach to PEGs is comparable to  
3 that at HRA. We look to avoid programmatic impacts  
4 wherever possible, but again, we're faced with some  
5 difficult choices. In some cases, we were able to  
6 achieve savings by improving service delivery. New  
7 York State created a Rental Supplement Program, RSP,  
8 that can serve long-term stayers in shelter who are  
9 undocumented. By helping these families and  
10 individuals exit shelter, we will see savings in our  
11 shelter budget. Unfortunately, language in the State  
12 budget claws back most of the money for State budget  
13 savings, but we will be able to do a one-time cohort  
14 of about 650 households. DSS is required to use an  
15 outside vendor to administer the program as we are  
16 not allowed to use the State system that we normally  
17 use for payments. Once this vendor is in place later  
18 this spring, we will be able to start issuing  
19 vouchers. There are also major changes in the DHS  
20 budget associated with asylum seekers. I want to be  
21 clear that the savings in the DHS budget reflect  
22 lower than previously projected asylum census for the  
23 agency. While there were savings in some of the other  
24 agencies responding to the asylum crisis that did

2 change service delivery models, there were no service  
3 cuts for asylum seekers in DSS or DHS. Next slide.

4           As I mentioned at the start of my  
5 testimony, our primary goal is to create a path to  
6 sustainability for low-income New Yorkers through  
7 three pillars of work, streamlining access to social  
8 services, addressing homelessness and housing  
9 instability, and creating economic stability. I'm  
10 going to talk about each of these in turn, starting  
11 with some of the work where we have successfully  
12 modernized and implemented process improvements to  
13 streamline access to social services and benefits.  
14 The graph here is showing SNAP applications and  
15 caseload increases over time. The green line is SNAP  
16 applications and the blue line above is the caseload.  
17 You've all heard a lot about DSS and SNAP and cash  
18 processing. First, I'd like to recognize that over  
19 the last couple of years, DSS saw the highest SNAP  
20 applications and caseload since the period  
21 immediately following Superstorm Sandy. As you can  
22 clearly see, that's the spike early in 2020, there  
23 was a surge of applications at the beginning of the  
24 pandemic. Due to our investment in Access HRA and the  
25 ability of clients to apply, recertify, and interview

2 online and on the phone, we were able to manage the  
3 surge and ensure clients got these important  
4 benefits. The federal and state governments also  
5 provided a series of easements that suspended certain  
6 requirements and allowed us to postpone  
7 recertifications. This simplified the process for  
8 clients and staff during the health emergency but led  
9 to spikes in caseload processing once normal  
10 requirements were back in place. These and other  
11 factors contributed to a backlog in applications and  
12 recertifications, but I'm very pleased to say that  
13 thanks to the hiring of additional staff, investments  
14 in technology, and process improvements, we have  
15 nearly eliminated the backlog. I will have more to  
16 say on that in a minute, but first I want to give  
17 some more detail on cash assistance. Next slide.

18           This chart here, the blue line shows the  
19 total cash assistance caseload, the orange line shows  
20 applications, and you'll see both of those are  
21 rising. As the City Council is aware, in recent  
22 years, New York City has seen remarkably high  
23 increases in cash assistance applications and  
24 recipients due to a variety of factors. At the height  
25 of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, DSS-HRA

received nearly 13,000 more applications than the previous year, a 53 percent increase. That increased need for cash assistance has continued. In FY24, the average number of cash assistance applications exceeded 47,000 per month, demonstrating New Yorkers' continuing need for economic support. In addition, we have significantly reduced the barriers to access benefits. We believe that increasing access to benefits via our online platform and mobile app, Access HRA, results in more applications. That's the right thing to do, but also increases workload for the agency. Demand for one-time emergency rental assistance is growing as well. In FY23, HRA issued emergency rent payments to over 40,000 households. The graph here, the both the blue and orange lines show both one time and recurring recipients. In January 2024, there were 505,000 ongoing and 5,000 one-time recipients. The increased caseload has budget implications for the city. The FY24 Preliminary Budget for cash assistance is 2.5 billion to support an average of 500,000 recipients through June of 2024. 816 million of which 467 million was tax levy was added in the Preliminary Budget for FY24 based on these projected costs. Next slide.

2           As I mentioned earlier, I am immensely  
3 pleased to report that DSS has nearly cleared the  
4 backlog of 46,000 cash assistance and 4,000 SNAP  
5 applications, ensuring low-income New Yorkers can  
6 quickly and easily access the federal benefits that  
7 they qualify for. This chart tracks the backlog back  
8 to the beginning of February 2023. You can see it  
9 spiked in the summer and is extremely substantially  
10 down to very close to zero. Investments in staffing,  
11 technology and process improvements have reduced the  
12 backlog of cases by 97 percent for cash assistance  
13 and 90 percent for SNAP. In total, the City processed  
14 more than 600,000 cash assistance and SNAP  
15 applications since the July backlog peak. Faced with  
16 a record number of applications as federal pandemic-  
17 related support expired, the City deployed a robust  
18 plan to process applications quickly and make it  
19 easier for low-income New Yorkers to access critical  
20 benefits. DSS hired nearly 1,000 new staff people  
21 since January 2023 to process cash assistance and  
22 SNAP applications, doubled down on training for  
23 staff, and strengthened remote application processes  
24 to make it easier to apply for benefits. The agency  
25 also worked closely with Chief Efficiency Officer

2 Denise Clay and the Mayor's Office of Efficiency to  
3 identify application process enhancements to  
4 eliminate bottlenecks that contributed to the  
5 backlog. We also developed and implemented plans to  
6 expedite the processes going forward. As of January  
7 2024, more than 1.73 million New Yorkers are  
8 receiving SNAP benefits, and more than 510,000 New  
9 Yorkers are receiving cash benefits. I'd like to  
10 thank our dedicated staff for their hard work  
11 throughout the pandemic and over these challenging  
12 couple of years for their ongoing commitment to  
13 serving New Yorkers every day. It has been a  
14 difficult time, and they have done extraordinary job  
15 under extraordinary circumstances. The lessons  
16 learned from this experience have made us better  
17 prepared to handle this high volume of applications  
18 in the future. Next slide.

19 Cash and SNAP are our highest profile  
20 benefits, but there is so much more that the agency  
21 does. Even these additional highlights are just  
22 scratching the surface, but since I was last here to  
23 speak about the budget, we have also been able to  
24 expand child care assistance for those leaving the  
25 cash assistance roles, grow the Fair Fares program

2 that provides discounted transit benefits, and get  
3 heating and cooling assistance grants out to those  
4 who need them. Next slide.

5           Next, I would like to talk about some of  
6 the ways in which we've been able to further our  
7 goals of keeping New Yorkers in their homes, moving  
8 families and individuals out of shelter, and helping  
9 people remain stably housed. Wherever possible, we  
10 want to keep people in their homes. I want to  
11 highlight two of our most important tools for doing  
12 so. The bar graph on the left is our emergency rental  
13 assistance, also known as one-shot deals. This is a  
14 cash assistance benefit. What this graph shows here  
15 is that the number of households receiving emergency  
16 rental assistance in FY23 increased after a drop in  
17 FY21 and FY22 during the pandemic. This year, we are  
18 on track to dramatically exceed last year's spending.  
19 The chart on the right shows our legal assistance  
20 programs, which are also critical to keeping people  
21 housed. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Office of Civil  
22 Justice, or OCJ, funded legal organizations provided  
23 legal assistance to an estimated 98,000 New Yorkers  
24 in approximately 43,700 households across New York  
25 City. These households were facing housing

2 challenges, including eviction, disrepair, landlord  
3 harassment, and other threats to their tenancies. The  
4 number of households served in Fiscal Year 2023 is  
5 the highest on record since the start of the  
6 universal Access to Counsel program. These services  
7 proved to be essential. The number of eviction  
8 filings increased by more than 57,000, or  
9 approximately 83 percent, in the last year. However,  
10 it should be noted that eviction filings in FY23 were  
11 still significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels.  
12 Since 2014, OCJ has provided legal services ranging  
13 from brief advice to full representation in 291,000  
14 eviction and other housing-related matters. Based on  
15 estimated household size, that equates to more than  
16 700,000 New Yorkers served. OCJ will continue to work  
17 hand in hand with all civil justice stakeholders to  
18 make civil legal assistance available and effective  
19 for New York City tenants in need. Next slide.

20 For those who do enter shelter, we want  
21 to connect them back to permanent housing as quickly  
22 as possible. In FY23, DSS saw a 17 percent increase  
23 in permanent housing placements from shelter and, as  
24 the PMMR shows, we are on track to exceed those  
25 placement numbers this year. More New Yorkers are now



2 living safely and stably in supportive housing units.

3 In fact, 46 percent more New Yorkers were connected  
4 to permanent supportive housing in 2023 than in the  
5 preceding Fiscal Year and, as I mentioned earlier,

6 1,000 unsheltered individuals were placed in

7 permanent housing. DSS has also taken steps to

8 strengthen rental assistance programs. We've made

9 CityFHEPS easier to use by reducing work

10 requirements, eliminating the 90-day rule, allowing

11 for the use of CityFHEPS statewide, and streamlining

12 the program with technological improvements. To

13 ensure that more New Yorkers gain access to

14 affordable homes, DSS launched the Affordable Housing

15 Services initiative to use social service dollars to

16 create affordable housing. Through AHS, DSS will be

17 facilitating the creation of stable housing

18 opportunities for nearly 1,500 households and

19 shelter. Furthermore, the AHS initiative provides

20 sustainable funding solutions to help not-for-profit

21 providers secure long-term building-wide leases or

22 even acquire permanent housing sites, while providing

23 light-touch services for tenants who are formerly

24 experiencing homelessness. DSS has also rolled out

2 extensive training to improve and increase housing  
3 package submissions. Next slide.

4                   Now for the third pillar, creating  
5 economic stability. We recognize that more and more  
6 New Yorkers rely on our City's resources to make ends  
7 meet. In addition to the public benefits, rental  
8 assistance, and other essential resources we provide  
9 to help people get back on their feet, I will provide  
10 an overview of our career services and other supports  
11 that enable New Yorkers to secure steady income and  
12 live sustainable lives. DSS offers education,  
13 training, and employment services to help clients  
14 develop job skills and build a career that will lead  
15 to success and financial stability. These programs  
16 are funded in FY24 at a total budget of 300 million.  
17 As part of our revitalization efforts, we launched  
18 the Pathway to Industrial and Construction Careers,  
19 or PINCC, program to connect clients to jobs in these  
20 two industries. We're also restructuring our career  
21 services programs and contracts to ensure that we are  
22 focusing on connecting clients to growth industries  
23 with jobs with long-term potential. Thanks to changes  
24 in State law, we are able to implement new income  
25 disregards to support clients' economic growth. This

2 means that clients who are participating in training  
3 programs or who get a job do not immediately face a  
4 benefits cliff. As a result, they are more likely to  
5 achieve economic stability and growth. One that I'm  
6 particularly excited about, we are strengthening the  
7 pathway for our clients to access human service jobs.  
8 In FY23, human service providers hired nearly 6,000  
9 public assistance clients. This is a gain both for  
10 clients and for providers who are frequently  
11 struggling in the labor market. It's a priority to  
12 create and expand opportunities that will help low-  
13 income New Yorkers achieve sustainability, and our  
14 work reflects that.

15 I will close by underlining our ongoing  
16 commitment to break down government silos and improve  
17 access to services. DSS, HRA, DHS work to confront  
18 challenges that bridge across agencies and  
19 jurisdictional boundaries. Overcoming these  
20 challenges goes to the heart of creating the kind of  
21 caring, compassionate communities we seek to live in.  
22 We appreciate the opportunity to testify today and we  
23 welcome any questions you may have. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you for that  
25 presentation. I wanted to acknowledge that we've also

2 been joined by Council Members Ossé, Ung, Banks, and  
3 Stevens.

4 I would like to turn it over now to  
5 Speaker Adams for questions.

6 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you very much Deputy  
7 Speaker Chair Ayala, and good morning, Commissioner,  
8 good morning to your entire team, and thank you for  
9 being here this morning.

10 I'd like to start out by asking some  
11 questions regarding asylum-seeker response PEGs in  
12 the Preliminary Plan. As part of the Preliminary  
13 Plan, the administration has decreased the citywide  
14 planned expenditure for the asylum-seeker response  
15 effort by 504.2 million dollars in Fiscal 2024 and  
16 1.23 billion in 2025, a nearly 16 percent reduction  
17 of the expenses over the two Fiscal Years. The  
18 Administration has indicated that these savings were  
19 generated from a variety of actions, including the  
20 implementation of shelter time limit notices,  
21 efficiencies in HERC contracts, a shift of some HERC  
22 contracts to non-profit providers, and the  
23 recognition of current census trends. Given that DHS  
24 doesn't operate any of the HERCs, why are we seeing a  
25 PEG of 58.9 million dollars in Fiscal 2024 and 78.9

2 million dollars in Fiscal 2025 to DHS for asylum  
3 response costs?

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Speaker.  
5 That PEG is a reflection of really two things. One,  
6 that there are fewer asylum seekers in the DHS system  
7 than was originally forecasted when the budget was  
8 put together. That's overall that the census is a  
9 little bit still very high, but it's a little bit  
10 lower than was originally forecast when the budget  
11 was put together as well as the balance between the  
12 HERC system and the DHS system. The other piece of  
13 the savings that we contributed to was that we took  
14 over or are in the process of taking over some hotels  
15 from the HERC system and are going to be able to do  
16 it at lower cost.

17           SPEAKER ADAMS: How much of the cost  
18 reduction is the result of shelter time limit  
19 notices?

20           COMMISSIONER PARK: I cannot break out the  
21 specific dollar amount associated with that. Within  
22 the DHS system, we are doing the 30-day time limits  
23 for single adults and adult families. At this point  
24 in time, we are not currently applying time limits to  
25 families with children in the DHS system.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: That's noted. In looking  
3 at asylum-seeker response PEGs in the Executive Plan.  
4 On February 21st, 2024, the Mayor announced there  
5 will be an additional 10 percent PEG on asylum-seeker  
6 response costs included in the Executive Plan. This  
7 is in addition to the PEG included in the Preliminary  
8 Plan. Will there also be a reduction in the asylum  
9 response funding budgeted through DHS?

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: At this point, it's  
11 too early to answer that question. We're still  
12 working on the planning.

13 SPEAKER ADAMS: Do you foresee a time  
14 frame for that?

15 As part of the Executive Budget exercise,  
16 yes.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: Is DHS planning any  
18 expansions or changes to shelter time limits to  
19 achieve whatever target you have in mind?

20 COMMISSIONER PARK: We are working in  
21 conjunction with the overall City strategy around  
22 time limits. We are not doing anything independently.

23 SPEAKER ADAMS: So you're not looking at  
24 pursuing additional time limits on asylum-seeker  
25 families with children in the DHS system?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: That's something that  
3 we're still assessing right now. I don't have any  
4 concrete time when that will be decided.

5 SPEAKER ADAMS: But you do see a potential  
6 possibility for that?

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: There's a potential  
8 possibility. It's subject to not only what is  
9 happening in the City, but also State oversight.

10 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Does the  
11 Administration have plans to transition any HERCS  
12 operated by H AND H to DHS? I believe we heard part  
13 of that last week from OMB.

14 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, so there is one  
15 that has already been transitioned, and we are  
16 looking at additional sites.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: How many locations?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: As I said, one has  
19 happened already. There's another one to two under  
20 consideration right now, still under assessment.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: Which location has already  
22 happened?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: The Wingate hotel.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. How are savings  
25 anticipated?

2           COMMISSIONER PARK: So the H and H system  
3 primarily used contractors that were a bit more  
4 expensive than the DHS contractors so by  
5 transitioning to the not-for-profit model that DHS  
6 typically uses for shelter, we are able to achieve  
7 some savings.

8           SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. I think we're on the  
9 right road there, in looking at City contracting with  
10 non-profit providers then. We all know that the  
11 City's robust landscape of non-profit organizations  
12 provide community-based human services on behalf of  
13 the City to many of our most vulnerable residents.  
14 This is especially true for the Department of Social  
15 Services. DHS's contract budget totals 3.82 billion  
16 dollars, which is over 90 percent of the agency's  
17 budget, largely relating to shelter services. HRA's  
18 contract budget is nearly a billion dollars. It  
19 includes programs such as domestic violence shelters,  
20 housing and support services for low-income  
21 individuals who are HIV positive, workforce  
22 development programs for cash assistance clients, and  
23 food to stock our City's food pantries and soup  
24 kitchens. Many of these non-profits are struggling to  
25 keep their doors open, not only because the amounts



2 they're paid under City contracts do not keep pace  
3 with the cost of providing services, but also because  
4 it's so challenging to contract with the City and  
5 because payments are typically received well after  
6 they have provided services, and that is a huge  
7 complaint time and time again from our providers.  
8 Non-profits are forced to front large sums of money,  
9 which they often need to borrow at an additional cost  
10 to provide services. This is also coupled with the  
11 challenges of navigating the City's arduous  
12 contracting process. Many providers have expressed  
13 their reluctance to submit proposals for RFPs because  
14 they're simply afraid additional City contracting  
15 delays could put their organizations in an even more  
16 precarious financial position, and I think that  
17 everybody, all of my Colleagues here, have  
18 experienced this situation, which is in a lot of  
19 cases very dire for us so what is DSS doing to  
20 expedite the contracting and payment timeline for  
21 non-profit organizations, especially as it relates to  
22 DHS-contracted homeless service providers who are  
23 experiencing excessive contracting delays.

24 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, speaker.

25 Before I answer that question, I just want to the

2 record. It's the Wolcott Hotel, not Wingate. Sorry  
3 for my mistake.

4           So DSS takes its financial obligations to  
5 contractors very seriously. This is feedback that we  
6 have heard as well and that we are paying very close  
7 attention to and so, across DSS, all but one of our  
8 FY24 contracts are registered so that's something  
9 that we have been pushing very strongly. There is a  
10 multi-step process after contract registration so  
11 providers need to activate their budgets and then  
12 submit invoices on a monthly basis, and all of that  
13 is subject to several layers of review by the agency.  
14 That is not necessarily a structure of our own  
15 creation, right? This is part of the overall City  
16 financial management process. We absolutely believe  
17 that the checks and balances are important to make  
18 sure that we're using City resources appropriately,  
19 but we're also aware that slows down the payment  
20 process so we are always looking for ways that we can  
21 streamline our internal processes. That includes, as  
22 well as process changes, that also includes training,  
23 both for DSS staff, but also for providers. I think  
24 one of the challenges that we see frequently is that  
25 there's a lot of back and forth on the documentation

2 associated with invoices so the more that we can do  
3 to make sure that we are hitting all of the required  
4 documentation on step one, the better off we are all  
5 going to be. I think I'm probably not saying anything  
6 surprising, there's been a migration to PASSPort this  
7 year that has added additional challenges. I'm very  
8 confident in the long run that is going to make us  
9 all much better off, but recognizing that it has  
10 created some challenges this year. MOCS and OMB have  
11 been very supportive of giving additional advances to  
12 agencies so we have done that where we need to, but  
13 we continue to work closely with providers, do  
14 regular troubleshooting, and are looking for ways  
15 that we can make ongoing systemic improvements.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: I agree it's such a  
17 monumental issue with our non-profit organizations,  
18 and we have to do better, we just have to do better.  
19 Does DSS have an accounting of all non-profit  
20 contracting and payment delays?

21 COMMISSIONER PARK: Excuse me. I don't  
22 have anything with me, but we can certainly circle  
23 back.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: That's really important.  
25 If DSS doesn't have an accounting of these delays, of

2 these non-profits that are stuck in your logjam,  
3 that's an issue.

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: It is a little bit  
5 more nuanced because what one might consider,  
6 certainly not-for-profits would consider a delay when  
7 they have submitted an invoice and they have not been  
8 paid. If we don't have the required backup to go with  
9 that, from our perspective, we're still working with  
10 the provider to make sure that we are getting there.  
11 Prompt payment is really important, but so is that  
12 accountability and making sure that when we're here  
13 answering questions about audits on an accountability  
14 that we have done everything that we need so we're  
15 looking to strike that balance and looking to make  
16 sure that we are getting it right as quickly as  
17 possible but recognizing that the definition of delay  
18 can sometimes be a little bit nuanced there.

19           SPEAKER ADAMS: So if the box isn't  
20 checked on the non-profit side, then you're pushing  
21 it back and saying okay, this isn't a delay as far as  
22 DSS is concerned because we've now pushed that.

23           COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm saying it as an  
24 issue that we need to resolve across the board, but  
25 we frequently see challenges where we are not getting

2 complete documentation or where we potentially  
3 haven't gotten bids for subcontractors. It is our  
4 responsibility to make sure that providers understand  
5 what they need to do and that the process is as easy  
6 as possible for them to navigate but, under City  
7 rules, we're not allowed to make payments if we don't  
8 have all of that documentation or those bids.

9 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. What is DSS doing to  
10 ensure that City contract reimbursement rates are  
11 keeping pace with the cost of providing services and  
12 employing and retaining skilled staff?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: There are several  
14 things that we have done. We look on an individual  
15 contract-by-contract basis, we are happy to work with  
16 providers on needs related to costs that they are  
17 seeing, places where we have seen cost increases  
18 relative to our model budget or things like insurance  
19 and we know that's an ongoing issue. We work through  
20 that on a case-by-case basis. Recently within the DHS  
21 budgets, we gave providers some flexibility to  
22 realign some of their staffing salary levels so that  
23 they could recruit and retain staff better, and then  
24 there are always ongoing conversations with OMB about  
25 places where we think we need more systemic change.

2           SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Thank you. Shifting  
3 a little bit in talking about Fair Fares, I was very  
4 encouraged by your presentation and knowing that the  
5 numbers are up, what 310,000 or so, that's very  
6 encouraging. Fair Fares obviously continues to be a  
7 priority for this Council, and we were really happy  
8 that addition brought the baseline budget up to 95  
9 million and expanded the program eligibility from 100  
10 percent of the federal poverty level to 120 percent,  
11 which helps this vital program reach more city  
12 residents who need assistance with transportation  
13 costs. Just to get a little more insight into the  
14 program, I have the numbers, and I believe you said  
15 this, but when exactly was the expanded eligibility  
16 implemented?

17           COMMISSIONER PARK: November of 2023.

18           SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Can you give us a  
19 breakdown of the 95-million-dollar budget in the  
20 Fiscal Year 2024 by expense type?

21           ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: It's a tax levy  
22 funded program.

23           SPEAKER ADAMS: Say again?

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's a tax levy funded  
3 program, but maybe I'm not understanding the question  
4 correctly. I'm sorry.

5 SPEAKER ADAMS: All right. I'll ask a  
6 different one. What was actual spending, let's go to  
7 FY 2023.

8 COMMISSIONER PARK: Got it.

9 SPEAKER ADAMS: Actual spending.

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: Let me pull that up.  
11 One moment.

12 SPEAKER ADAMS: Got an assembly line.

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: All right. Yes.

14 SPEAKER ADAMS: That's good, teamwork  
15 makes the dream work.

16 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: 65 million.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: 65 million. Okay, and how  
18 much of that went towards client benefits?

19 COMMISSIONER PARK: 60 million.

20 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Where did the rest  
21 go?

22 COMMISSIONER PARK: Marketing the program  
23 and the staff that administers the program.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. What has actual  
25 spending been thus far in this year, 2024?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: We will circle back  
3 with you on that number.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Assembly lines  
5 (INAUDIBLE)

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's possible we'll  
7 have it before, but I don't want to hold things up.

8 SPEAKER ADAMS: All right. Thank you. When  
9 or will Fair Fares actually go to the OMNY system? Do  
10 we know?

11 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're starting a pilot  
12 with the OMNY system this year. We're working very  
13 closely with the MTA on that. Certainly, before the  
14 MTA transitions away from the MetroCard entirely, we  
15 will be in a position to be fully on cards.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: But we believe it will be  
17 this year.

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're absolutely  
19 starting a pilot this year, yeah.

20 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. What types of  
21 outreach and education is HRA doing to ensure that  
22 all eligible individuals are aware of the program?  
23 That's been our biggest issue.

24

25



2 COMMISSIONER PARK: We do a lot of  
3 outreach. I'm going to start, and then I will pass it  
4 over to First Deputy Commissioner Berry.

5 We do Transit Talk events with MTA. We  
6 promote it within the MTA customer service centers,  
7 promote it online, both through DSS online  
8 applications and with the MTA, but, Jill.

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY:  
10 Commissioner, I think you got a lot of it. We also do  
11 paid advertising in neighborhood newspapers. Local  
12 language newspapers, advertising in the bus shelters  
13 and in the subway system.

14 COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. Thank you. Do  
15 you see that outreach expanding further than what  
16 you're doing right now?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah,  
18 one of the things we really spend a lot of time with  
19 on the outreach is looking at those zip codes where  
20 it appears that people are eligible and not enrolling  
21 in the program and targeting the outreach each year  
22 to those specific zip codes and doing that, re-  
23 evaluating that each year.

24

25

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Thank you. Thank you  
3 for your testimony. I may have other questions later.  
4 Madam Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Yeah, I'm  
6 actually hosting ours for folks to come in and enroll  
7 because I think one of my Districts and Council  
8 Member Yusef Salaam's District is also impacted in  
9 that way so thank you for that.

10 I have so many questions, guys. I don't  
11 know where to start. We're going to be here for a  
12 minute. No.

13 Just out of curiosity, we've seen that  
14 there's been a significant increase in the number of  
15 applications for cash and SNAP benefits. What do you  
16 think is driving the increase because it seems pretty  
17 significant.

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think there's two  
19 primary things going on. First, during the pandemic,  
20 the federal government invested in a lot of anti-  
21 poverty programs, right? There was the enhanced child  
22 tax credit, there was enhanced unemployment, there  
23 was rental assistance, there were a variety of tools  
24 that we saw made a really significant difference in  
25 poverty, and then those have all been pulled back on

2 so I think what we're seeing in the benefits  
3 application right now is exposing that pandemic  
4 recovery has not happened equally across every  
5 community so that is a big issue, and a really  
6 serious one that we all need to be thinking about.

7           The other piece of it, which is slightly  
8 more positive, is I think we really have lowered the  
9 barrier to application significantly, right, so it  
10 used to be that you had to physically go into a  
11 center, and that taking a big chunk of time out of  
12 your day, getting on the subway, if you have kids,  
13 finding childcare, bringing them with you, for some  
14 people there were stigma associated with that. Now  
15 you can apply from your own home online at whatever  
16 time is convenient for you, and I think lowering  
17 those barriers has also contributed to the increase  
18 in applications.

19           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I was pleasantly  
20 surprised by the number of folks that have been  
21 connected to employment because, I think you and I  
22 have to discussed this, the applications and being  
23 accepted, approved for cash and SNAP benefits. It's  
24 an important step, but the long-term ability to  
25 become self-sufficient is equally as important, and

2 so I was happy to see that there were some  
3 restorations to the Employment Opportunities section  
4 of your budget.

5 All right, so regarding the CityFHEPS and  
6 HRA's Rental Assistance Program, so we're all aware  
7 that the City shelter system didn't just become  
8 overburdened in April of 2022 with the unanticipated  
9 influx of asylum seekers. Prior to their arrival, the  
10 DHS system was already strained. One of the proven  
11 strategies that the City can employ to address  
12 housing instability is the provision of rental  
13 assistance vouchers. The Council has repeatedly  
14 called on the Administration to increase baseline  
15 funding for CityFHEPS vouchers to align with actual  
16 spending more closely and to ensure that HRA has  
17 adequate staffing to support the efficient  
18 administration of vouchers. The Council has also  
19 called on the Administration to fund the HRA's budget  
20 to meet the requirements of the package of  
21 legislation the Council was recently passed to expand  
22 voucher eligibility, which became effective January  
23 9, 2024. To date, no additional funding has been  
24 added to this legislation. Currently, how many

2 individuals are enrolled in and using rental  
3 assistance vouchers?

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: There are about 38,000  
5 households currently receiving CityFHEPS.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 38,000, and I know  
7 that you mentioned in the beginning of your testimony  
8 that there were 1,000 individuals that were placed in  
9 permanent housing last year. Do you know how many of  
10 that 1,000 (INAUDIBLE) voucher.

11 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah. Just to clarify,  
12 the 1,000 are people who were individuals who were  
13 experiencing unsheltered homelessness so it's a  
14 subset of the overall...

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: (INAUDIBLE) supportive  
16 housing.

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: Very interesting to  
18 me, actually, about half of them went to supportive  
19 housing, but close to half used CityFHEPS so that was  
20 surprising to me, but it's absolutely an option for  
21 everybody.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Absolutely. How  
23 many additional individuals have been deemed eligible  
24 to receive shopping letters but are still residing in  
25

2 shelter while they search for an apartment or wait  
3 approval?

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: There are more than  
5 10,000 households that currently have a shopping  
6 letter but are in shelter and who are searching for  
7 housing.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and a shopping  
9 letter is good for 10 months?

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: We'll get back to you  
11 on that one probably before the end of the hearing.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, it would be nice  
13 to know how many. Is an individual able to extend it?

14 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, absolutely. If a  
15 household is continuing its eligibility so a family  
16 of children, for example, on public assistance,  
17 working 15 hours a week, if their shopping letter  
18 expires, it will automatically renew.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. It would be nice  
20 to know if you could get me the numbers of the number  
21 of times that they have been renewed for how many  
22 clients.

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How many people  
25 currently on staff at HRA administer the rental

2 assistance voucher program and how many of these  
3 positions are vacant?

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: There's a broad  
5 universe of people who touch the CityFHEPS process.  
6 It starts at DHS actually for people who are in  
7 shelter. DHS has a team of approximately 100, we will  
8 circle back with exact headcount numbers on each of  
9 these areas, but DHS has a team of people that work  
10 with shelter providers, review packages, HRA has a  
11 team of people, then there's everybody who cuts  
12 checks supported by our IT department, supported by  
13 finance, so there's a significant infrastructure that  
14 works on rental assistance. We will try and do a  
15 breakdown of all of those different areas and get  
16 back to you with that.

17           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. In regards to  
18 the budget because I think that this comes up every  
19 single budget cycle regarding the CityFHEPS program  
20 is the underfunded amounts that are presented as part  
21 of the Preliminary and, even sometimes the Executive  
22 Budget, it seems like the Administration usually over  
23 estimates the cost of certain programs to allow some  
24 level of flexibility but, when it relates to  
25 CityFHEPS program, it's usually always underfunded

2 and then adjustments are made later. Do we know why  
3 that's the case?

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: Rental assistance  
5 spending is very dynamic because it's a function both  
6 of the caseload and how many people were we enroll  
7 and then also, so that, rent levels, right, as FMR  
8 goes up, which has gone up quite substantially over  
9 the last several years, and then also trends in  
10 income because tenants are paying 30 percent of their  
11 income in rent so with that three-variable equation,  
12 it can be a somewhat difficult number to project  
13 multiple years out. We work year-by-year with OMB to  
14 make sure that we are putting the funding in the  
15 budget. There was a significant add this year in the  
16 budget for FY24 is, I believe, 744 million for  
17 CityFHEPS, which is a record.

18           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm just looking  
19 here to make sure. Okay.

20           COMMISSIONER PARK: Deputy Speaker, I'm  
21 sorry, it's 120 days for a shopping letter.

22           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 120 days? Oh, okay.  
23 Thought it was longer than that for some reason. I  
24 don't know where I got that from. Okay. The Adopted  
25 Budget of 2024 included a baseline reduction of 36.2



2 million for DHS and shelter service providers.  
3 Savings were to be generated from a 2.5 percent net  
4 reduction of shelter contracts and were permitted to  
5 reinvest half of that, or 2.5 percent, towards staff  
6 retention costs. At that time, DHS stated that  
7 shelter providers were not spending down all of the  
8 personnel service costs allowed in their contracts  
9 and, therefore, the reduction would not affect  
10 providers. Providers, though, have stated that the  
11 only reason that they could not spend the entirety of  
12 their contract was because of restrictions placed on  
13 what they could spend the funding on. Where is DHS in  
14 the process of implementing this change?

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
16 Member. Just to clarify, this is a PEG from the FY24  
17 cycle so from last year. Like all the other agencies,  
18 we had to take a PEG to address the City's financial  
19 position last year and because, as was noted, the  
20 overwhelming majority of our budget is passed through  
21 to not-for-profit contractors, we really had limited  
22 options and we couldn't entirely hold our not-for-  
23 profit providers harmless. In the past when we had to  
24 take cuts and we had imposed particular types of  
25 reductions on providers, what we heard back from them

2 was they know their budget and operations better than  
3 we ever can and that it makes more sense for them to  
4 have some flexibility in doing so, so the agency's  
5 cut PEG for last year was 4 percent. We passed  
6 through 2.5 percent to the not-for-profits and then  
7 gave them the additional flexibility on top of that  
8 to do some personnel realignment so that they were  
9 able to make some decisions that helped them. I think  
10 to the point that you speak to, we heard that some of  
11 the reasons that they had vacancies was because  
12 salaries were low so what we're saying is, yes, we  
13 need to take some of that as savings but some of that  
14 can also go to increasing particular salary lines,  
15 and we thought that flexibility and individual  
16 contract management made sense for the providers. We  
17 have worked with every provider to come up with a  
18 series of changes that made sense for them. I think  
19 the bulk of them are in place at this point.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. We're hearing  
21 from the providers that the cut has been quite  
22 painful, and I'm assuming that because of the  
23 conversations that are ongoing, has that changed?

24 COMMISSIONER PARK: Cuts are unfortunately  
25 virtually always painful in our area. I think

2 there's, every once in a while, we can find something  
3 where we're actually improving service delivery and  
4 saving money but it's hard. We're providing essential  
5 services and serving vulnerable clients. I did not  
6 want to make that change. It was something that we  
7 had to do in order to meet targets, but we continue  
8 to work with individual providers to address  
9 particular concerns. There was at the same time the  
10 workforce enhancement funds that were added so that  
11 certainly didn't make providers whole, and we  
12 understand that the intent there was to grow, but it  
13 did provide a partial offset.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Have the anticipated  
15 cuts, have they caused a reduction of any type of  
16 service or the elimination of any positions at CBOs?

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: I can't speak to  
18 individual not-for-profit, individual shelter,  
19 whether or not they have reduced any headcount  
20 positions. Nobody was laid off, but I do believe  
21 there were some vacancy consolidations that were  
22 spread out across our many hundreds of shelters so I  
23 can't actually speak to the details, but I feel very  
24 confident that our providers are continuing to  
25 provide exceptional service. I think one of the

2 measures that I take most seriously is the number of  
3 clients that we are connecting to permanent housing.  
4 We saw a 17 percent increase last year, and we're on  
5 track to exceed that this year.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think what makes  
7 this more difficult and complicated is the fact that  
8 we're also not paying our contracts on time, and so  
9 any percentage that we're taking away from a budget  
10 that's already at a deficit in the beginning of the  
11 Fiscal Year is problematic, and I think that's an  
12 argument that I know it's true and, considering that  
13 the actual baseline reduction is only 36.2 million,  
14 in the scheme of things when I was little I thought  
15 that was a lot of money, I know now better, and I  
16 know that we can find that and I've seen plenty of  
17 new programs that have been announced in the last  
18 month that equal to far more than that that are new  
19 and necessary, but I guess in times when we're  
20 struggling, we shouldn't probably be adding a whole  
21 bunch of new programs and services so that we can  
22 keep the ones that we have intact, but that's just  
23 me.

24 Regarding the non-profits, because we  
25 passed a number of bills a couple of years ago

2 regarding the security guards, do you know if the  
3 non-profits are using City money to fund security  
4 guards at transitional housing and how are they  
5 ensuring that the security and safety of the staff  
6 and much less the residents is intact?

7           COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, absolutely. All  
8 of our shelter contracts include 24/7 security, so  
9 there's always on-site security that can be provided  
10 in a variety of different ways. In many cases, it's  
11 subcontracted out but, as some of our providers hire  
12 security guards directly, and they're part of the  
13 organization's direct payroll. We provide extensive  
14 training to not-for-profits in accordance with the  
15 laws that were passed so we really spend a lot of  
16 time on making sure that security guards have access  
17 to the appropriate training, and then I think as was  
18 noted earlier, we are funding the prevailing wage  
19 requirements as well on a year-over-year basis.

20           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I know that I  
21 have another question on security, but I'll get to  
22 it. The timeliness in the backlog. During the  
23 November Plan hearing, the OMB director told the  
24 Council that the SNAP program had addressed all the  
25 backlog and that Administration expected the cash

2 assistance program to be rid of their backlog by  
3 February. HRA has also stated that the agency has  
4 hired over 700 new staff to assist in making sure  
5 that the backlog was taken care of. The PMMR, which  
6 was recently released, reports that the timeliness  
7 for both programs has continued to be troublingly  
8 low. For the first four months of Fiscal Year 2024,  
9 cash assistance timelines reached a new low of 14.3  
10 percent and SNAP timeliness was at 41.6 percent. On  
11 March 4th, the Mayor announced that the cash and SNAP  
12 backlogs had been nearly entirely eliminated. Can you  
13 explain to us how HRA defines backlog as far as cash  
14 assistance and SNAP, and does it relate to both  
15 applications and recertifications?

16 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Deputy  
17 Speaker. Yes, the backlog includes any new  
18 application or annual recertification that's not  
19 processed within 30 days, and that's true for both  
20 cash and SNAP.

21 I want maybe take a minute to explain the  
22 distinction between what was in the PMMR and what we  
23 are saying now because it certainly does matter. The  
24 timeliness rates from the PMMR, as you know, reflect  
25 the first four months of the year. Over the summer,

2 so at the beginning of this Fiscal Year, that was our  
3 peak backlog, right? We were at 46,000 cash cases  
4 backlogged in July of 2023 and, as a result,  
5 timeliness rates at that point in time were very  
6 challenging. As we are reducing the backlog, the  
7 timeliness rates are improving significantly so for  
8 January, which actually reflect December  
9 applications, it was 55 percent for cash and 62.9  
10 percent for SNAP so still room for improvement there  
11 but significantly better than they were in the PMMR  
12 numbers. Because the timeliness rates lag slightly,  
13 they're always calculated on the previous month. You  
14 should see much better numbers for when April is  
15 released.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and did that  
17 relate to both applications and recertifications?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct. Those are  
19 combined timeliness numbers.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right. So  
21 how did HRA clear the backlog?

22 COMMISSIONER PARK: Great question. I'm  
23 very happy to answer that one. I'm going to give the  
24 top lines and then I will turn it over to  
25 Administrator French so we really had a three-pronged

2 strategy. We were focused on hiring staff, as I  
3 mentioned multiple times, close to 1,000 people over  
4 the last year for frontline cash and SNAP processing,  
5 investing in technology changes, and then doing some  
6 really significant process improvement, including  
7 waivers from the state, but I will let Administrator  
8 French give the details.

9 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Thank you,  
10 Commissioner. So yes, as the Commissioner said, we  
11 took a three-pronged approach. It really works  
12 together to get us to a place where we are operating  
13 as efficiently as we can. Aside from the staff, which  
14 we have been able to also hire throughout the hiring  
15 freeze, we were able to continue to stay focused on  
16 having our eligibility staff to be able to take in  
17 the applications, work with our clients, and make  
18 assessments. Through the use of technology and  
19 waivers from the State, we were able to look at  
20 processes that maybe didn't need to be done so  
21 manually and/or based upon information that we had,  
22 maybe we could look at a smaller subset of  
23 individuals who needed some efforts on our part but  
24 could be receive some waivers as well. One of those  
25 was on recertification, on a cash case, individuals



2 get a six-month mailer. This used to go to everybody.  
3 We, looking at our data, realized that usually only 9  
4 percent or so of clients actually had earned income  
5 which needed to be reported at that six month.  
6 Working with the state, we were able to get a waiver  
7 for the 91 percent of individuals who didn't need to  
8 submit it because there was no change in their case.  
9 As you can imagine, that's great for clients, but  
10 also for our workload, we're able to refocus our  
11 staff on applications and recertifications that need  
12 actual work done while not having them look at  
13 applications where there is no change so the case  
14 would continue as is. I'd say that's illustrative of  
15 the different types of ways we looked at it to  
16 improve the processes and make sure our staff are  
17 focusing on the cases that need our efforts but, for  
18 cases that didn't, clients would continue their  
19 benefits and staff could move on to the next case  
20 that needed some looking at.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So the waivers that  
22 were approved, are those are waivers that we used  
23 throughout the pandemic as well?

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, these are  
25 waivers that, many of them are waivers that we

2 developed as we were looking at the backlog. We have  
3 a group of individuals both on the program side, the  
4 legal side, our accountability office and our IT  
5 constantly looking at the ways in which we're doing  
6 our work and identifying additional places where we  
7 may be able to streamline the process so many of  
8 these waivers were a result of that. Additionally,  
9 another waiver we looked at and got agreement from  
10 the State was around selective case review for  
11 certain cases where usually supervisors needed to  
12 look at every case, but we were able to look at cases  
13 where we were able to waive the secondary review  
14 because the case itself was going to move forward and  
15 we had real confidence in that there were no errors  
16 related to the case.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. Are these  
18 waivers permanent? Is there any opportunity to change  
19 policy here so that they do become permanent?

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: At the moment, the  
21 waivers are ongoing. We continue to work with our  
22 oversight, OTDA, as well as other oversights at the  
23 federal level as needed. We are not looking at this  
24 moment to stop any of the waivers and, so as of right  
25 now, we are looking to keep them in place.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I ask because usually  
3 waivers are not indefinite, and we saw during the  
4 pandemic that they worked and then, as soon as we no  
5 longer had them, we saw an influx in the number of  
6 backlog cases so obviously we want to make sure that  
7 whatever positive trend we're on, that it's something  
8 that we can manage and that's sustainable.

9 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah, we  
10 definitely, working with our partners at OTDA, are  
11 looking to keep the waivers in place. I will say  
12 also, in conversations with others around the state  
13 as well who are experiencing the same challenges as  
14 New York was, as it relates to a high volume of  
15 applications and recertifications and keeping up with  
16 that, they have definitely looked to us and asked us  
17 what we have done, and I know others around the state  
18 are considering doing similar approaches that we are  
19 so it's definitely a partnership between us, and we  
20 are looking to keep these in place as long as we can.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, I hope that you  
22 could, and I think that there should be long-term  
23 conversations with OTDA about just making a policy  
24 change so that the waivers are no longer waivers but  
25 a matter of policy because a lot of the times a lot

2 of this work is really redundant and creates more  
3 bureaucracy than necessary.

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, OTDA have been  
5 terrific partners in this, and we will absolutely  
6 keep that open line of communication going. I think  
7 one of the small silver linings here is that we have  
8 found ways to make this process actually work better  
9 in ways that I think will make us more resilient  
10 going forward, and we certainly don't want to lose  
11 any ground there.

12           Sorry, I do have to correct one more  
13 statement that I made that PMMR timeliness rate is  
14 only applications. It doesn't include the  
15 recertifications.

16           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you tell us  
17 what the breakdown for, so obviously we heard, both  
18 from you guys today and from OMB Director Jacques  
19 Jiha last week, that HRA had hired 700 additional  
20 workers to address the backlog of cases in SNAP and  
21 cash assistance. Do you know what the breakdown is on  
22 the number of hires in the SNAP and cash assistance?

23           COMMISSIONER PARK: Just to slightly  
24 update the OMB number, we're actually at about 1,000  
25 people for frontline staff within cash and SNAP. That

2 is a great question on how that 1,000 breaks out  
3 between cash and SNAP. We will certainly circle back  
4 with you. In total on board, there are about 1,900  
5 people working on cash and 1,200 on SNAP.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. Is the rate  
7 of hiring keeping pace with the attrition rate in the  
8 agency?

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, so for those  
10 specifically 1,000 cash and SNAP frontline positions,  
11 we've had a net growth of 535 so we're exceeding  
12 attrition there.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. We're hearing  
14 from the City agencies that the City agency is still  
15 mandating overtime for workers. With the additional  
16 hires in HRA, why is mandatory overtime still  
17 occurring?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: We've significantly  
19 reduced our reliance on mandatory overtime. Every  
20 once in a while when we get a particular spike for a  
21 given day or a few days, we will do some mandatory  
22 overtime but, at this point, virtually all of our  
23 overtime is voluntary.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What is the  
3 current timeline rate for the processing of new SNAP  
4 applications and recertifications?

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Because we are at the  
6 point where our backlog is virtually eliminated,  
7 almost all of the applications are being processed  
8 within the 30-day window.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Moving on to  
10 system improvements. While we are glad to hear that  
11 HRA is working to resolve the backlog, we also want  
12 to ensure that the lessons have been learned and that  
13 the agency's processes have been improved in a  
14 sustainable way. What specific steps has HRA taken to  
15 improve processing of both cash and SNAP? You spoke  
16 about the OTDA situation. Has there been anything  
17 else?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think that the  
19 technology investments and technology improvements  
20 are really important so I'd say the on-demand  
21 interview process is one that is really helpful and  
22 that I think will make us more resilient going  
23 forward and we have continued to iterate on that so,  
24 just to take us back to the beginning, the interview  
25 requirement is a federal requirement, something that

2 you need to do in order to access benefits for both  
3 cash and SNAP, but more recently for cash, that used  
4 to be a fully in-person process. You had to go into a  
5 center. We were able to bring that on the phone, but  
6 the original version was what I keep calling a don't-  
7 call-us-we'll-call-you, and that didn't work as well  
8 as we wanted it to because the times that we were  
9 making calls weren't necessarily convenient for  
10 clients. We were able to pivot to an inbound calling  
11 system so people can call us when they need to, added  
12 a callback function so that if somebody doesn't want  
13 to wait on the phone that they are able to get a  
14 callback but holding their place in line, and then  
15 most recently, we have added some verification  
16 procedures so that really only calls related to  
17 interviews come in on that particular phone line.  
18 Other inquiries are routed elsewhere so that improves  
19 the efficiency and improves the client experience.  
20 All of this iterative process reflects the learning  
21 that we did, and I really do think that it's working  
22 much better now.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. This is all  
24 great, but we've been hearing from clients that it's  
25 really hard to get through HRA on the phone, and we

2 have seen reports of increased denial rates. What is  
3 the current denial rate for each SNAP and cash  
4 assistance, and how does that compare to pre-pandemic  
5 rates?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. Thank you. As of  
7 December, which is the most recent data that I have,  
8 the denial rate for SNAP was 52.8 percent and for  
9 cash it was 64 percent. For SNAP, it's marginally  
10 higher than the pre-Covid rate, but it is about 33  
11 percent higher for cash. Couple of things that I want  
12 to point out here. First of all, as I know you're  
13 aware, right, we aren't setting the rules and  
14 regulations for cash and SNAP. These are federal  
15 benefits and what we are doing is enforcing the state  
16 and federal regulations, but I also want to call back  
17 to what I talked about a bit in my testimony about  
18 lowering barriers to access, which is absolutely the  
19 right thing to do, but what we found is that many  
20 people apply earlier on in their journey, right, when  
21 you had to physically go into an office and deal with  
22 all the complications of physically going in, people  
23 were much more likely to have had every piece of  
24 documentation assembled, to have really done their  
25 own personal calculation of the trade-offs and



2 whether or not they were going to qualify for  
3 benefits. People now are much more likely to start  
4 the process early on. That's fine, but it does mean  
5 that there are fewer people who are completing their  
6 interview and that is the primary reason for denial.  
7 I think this is very consistent with what in other  
8 kinds of government benefits that when it's easier to  
9 access, more people start it, not necessarily more  
10 people complete it, and I think part of the reason  
11 why you're not seeing much of a change in the denial  
12 rate relative to pre-COVID for SNAP is that we had  
13 the online application for SNAP before COVID. For  
14 cash, it's really where the change is, and so that's  
15 why I think you're seeing that change.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So just so that I  
17 understand, people are starting an application but  
18 not completing it?

19 COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and how do we  
21 know that they didn't complete it because they  
22 didn't, they were trying to get through, they didn't  
23 understand the application, like are you gauging that  
24 it's that somebody started the process too soon or  
25

2 not that they had some sort of complexity completing  
3 the application?

4                   COMMISSIONER PARK: Good question. We're  
5 doing a few things to make sure that that is not an  
6 issue. First of all, we monitor wait times on the  
7 phone very closely. For cash, wait times these days  
8 are typically between an hour and a half with, as I  
9 mentioned, a callback function. For SNAP, it's about  
10 half an hour, give or take, and we know that we are  
11 completing more than 10,000 interviews every week so  
12 people are able to get through and people are able to  
13 get through that process. That being said, denial  
14 rates are a concern of ours as well so we had our  
15 Office of Accountability do a review. We are  
16 continually looking at the cases that are denied to  
17 make sure that there is nothing systemic going on,  
18 making sure that there's no training need. Thus far,  
19 we really haven't seen anything that would suggest  
20 that there's inappropriate denials happening. Lastly,  
21 we're really investing in CBOs that are out in the  
22 community and working, providing some hands-on  
23 support with clients so that if they do need more  
24 help getting through the process, that they have that  
25 resource.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and what have  
3 you heard about this whole situation with the phone?  
4 Because I think that since I've been in the Council,  
5 this has been like a constant, the complaints from  
6 applicants that they cannot get through on the phone.  
7 It just keeps coming up at every hearing, so I don't  
8 know that it's been resolved.

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: As I say, it is  
10 something that we monitor wait times incredibly  
11 carefully, and we will move staff around so if the  
12 wait times do seem to be creeping up, we will move  
13 people off of processing and move them to the phones  
14 so that we are making sure that wait times are  
15 staying balanced consistently on the cash side, an  
16 hour to an hour and a half. That's not a short wait  
17 time, but it is shorter than when people were going  
18 in person and, as I say, we do have that callback  
19 function. I would encourage you if you have specific  
20 people who are saying that they can't get through, if  
21 you could share names with us offline, that would be  
22 really helpful. Sometimes reverse engineering can  
23 help identify if there's an issue. Administrator  
24 French, anything you want to add?

2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Commissioner, I  
3 think you did get it, and I would just say every  
4 morning the team looks at where the needs are and  
5 they will move things around so if there is a high  
6 phone call volume, they'll move more staff there to  
7 keep the wait times within the hour and an hour and a  
8 half, but it's definitely something that we look at  
9 consistently and look at to find any trends that  
10 might be there where we need to dig a little bit  
11 deeper, but I would emphasize for both you and others  
12 in the community, if there are specifics where  
13 individuals are having challenges with the phone, it  
14 is good for us to know that so that we can also look  
15 on our side to see if there is some type of issue we  
16 just weren't aware of.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Since I have  
18 you, there were some similar complaints regarding the  
19 system that is used to complete applications. I  
20 forget the name of it, Gale maybe remembers because  
21 she remembers everything, but we had a hearing where  
22 we heard from some of the staff that you had  
23 transitioned during the pandemic to a new system that  
24 was then I guess put on hold during the pandemic and  
25 then reinstated once folks were back in the office,

2 but there were glitches with the system so, if a  
3 person was doing an application, it may have frozen,  
4 they couldn't fix it, and so they had to move on to  
5 another applicant, and they didn't know what happened  
6 to the applicant they had been working with, like  
7 there was no way of determining who picked it up at  
8 what point. What changes have been made to that  
9 system? Since technology is like one of the models  
10 that you're using to help expedite the processing of  
11 applications.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, so  
13 this is the ESPAS (phonetic) and the ANGIE systems,  
14 and those are specifically the systems that we use to  
15 process the SNAP only applications, not the cash  
16 assistance applications. We re-rolled out ANGIE and  
17 ESPAS in March of 2022, and we have since upgraded.  
18 That was version 1.0 of ANGIE, and ANGIE has since  
19 been rolled out to version 2.0, and that addresses, I  
20 think, a lot of the issues that staff were having.  
21 There are always some bugs as we roll out new  
22 systems. We do listen to staff concerns and  
23 complaints and do iterate on those systems. A couple  
24 of things. One was there was an ask to speak directly  
25 to the staff about their experience with the systems,

2 and we worked in partnership with the Mayor's Office  
3 of Efficiency on work groups with the frontline staff  
4 that use these systems to talk through what are the  
5 pain points both in the systems and the processes. We  
6 came up with a list of corrective actions, and we are  
7 in the process of implementing those to improve both  
8 the process and the system.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I'm going to try  
10 to run through these really quickly because I know  
11 that we have a bunch of questions from some of the  
12 Members, and I don't want to hold them here longer  
13 than I have to.

14 Regarding the funding swaps, the  
15 Preliminary Budget Plan includes an additional 500  
16 million of city funding in each Fiscals '26 and '27  
17 to support asylum seeker response efforts. In  
18 addition, the Plan also includes a swap of City funds  
19 for State funding with no net change to DHS's budget,  
20 220 million in Fiscal Year '24, and 750 million in  
21 '24. How were the amounts added in Fiscal Year '26  
22 and '27 determined and, as of the Preliminary Plan,  
23 all of the asylum response funding in Fiscal Year  
24 '26, let me go back to the first question because I

2 don't want to conflate the two. How were the amounts  
3 added?

4                   COMMISSIONER PARK: I will start and I  
5 will pass off to Chief Levine. There's a lot of  
6 uncertainty in the asylum space here, right? I think  
7 the one thing that we can say has been constant over  
8 the last two and a half years is the pace of change,  
9 right? That is the pace of people coming in, the  
10 breakdown between families with children and single  
11 adults' particular needs. We've had to adapt a number  
12 of times so I would say there is a fairly high level  
13 of projection going on here and that we will need to  
14 continue to iterate and adapt the asylum seeker  
15 budget as we know more about how things are actually  
16 playing out on the ground but, Chief Levine.

17                   CHIEF LEVINE: Thank you, Commissioner.  
18 State funds were added in anticipation of the State  
19 reimbursement that we have been achieving in our  
20 budget, and we added the 500 million in each of the  
21 outyears in anticipation of City costs that would  
22 continue through that period.

23                   CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. As of the  
24 Preliminary Plan, all of the City's asylum response  
25 funding in Fiscal Year '26 and '27 is budgeted

2 through DHS. Do you expect that DHS will assume full  
3 responsibility for response efforts by that time, or  
4 will some of this funding be transferred to other  
5 agencies?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: The first few months  
7 of the asylum seeker crisis, DHS was really very much  
8 the lead and it was a tremendous challenge for the  
9 agency. We have responsibilities, as does every  
10 agency, that go well beyond the asylum seekers so, at  
11 this point, the asylum seeker operation is a whole-  
12 of-government response and I do anticipate that to  
13 continue, and funding will be aligned as appropriate.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Given that the  
15 State and the City budget were released  
16 simultaneously this January, the funding swap made in  
17 the Preliminary Plan was made assuming that the level  
18 of State support the City would receive. If the State  
19 budget is enacted as proposed, what changes does the  
20 DHS anticipate it will need to make in the Executive  
21 Plan to accurately reflect the amount of State  
22 funding in DHS' budget?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're going to have to  
24 work with OMB to determine what's happening with the  
25 State budget, what's happening not only with our



2 budget, but with all of the other agencies that are  
3 serving asylum seekers, how the pace of claim is  
4 going, anything that's happening with the federal  
5 government so with the number of variables going  
6 right now, I feel like it's too early to answer that  
7 question but happy to circle back as we know more.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Regarding the  
9 contracted providers DHS is working with for asylum  
10 response, are they non-profit organizations?

11 COMMISSIONER PARK: Virtually all of our  
12 shelters either are or will be operated by not-for-  
13 profit organizations. We have grown much faster than  
14 the not-for-profit sector can staff up, and so we are  
15 very grateful to have National Guard who are staffing  
16 still some of our sites. I think roughly 50 of our  
17 asylum sites are still largely staffed by the  
18 National Guard, but our model is to transition to  
19 not-for-profit providers over time. It includes many  
20 of our traditional not-for-profit providers and many  
21 new organizations that have stepped up to work with  
22 us in this moment.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How many are run by  
24 the National Guard?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's approximately 50.  
3 We can circle back with the exact number.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 50?

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Any for-profit  
7 organizations? I believe there are one or two sites  
8 that are operated by for-profit organizations. Again,  
9 we can circle back with you on the specifics. All of  
10 them have responded through our RFP. Everything that  
11 we are doing in this space is competitively procured.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you provide  
13 an estimate of how much of the DHS' budgeted asylum  
14 seeker funding relates to contracts with for-profit  
15 providers?

16 COMMISSIONER PARK: I don't have that  
17 number with me, but we can circle back.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Does DHS permit  
19 providers to subcontract with for-profit  
20 organizations?

21 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's very standard  
22 within our shelter model that not-for-profits will  
23 subcontract with for-profit vendors for things like  
24 food and security, sometimes maintenance, and that is

2 true within both our traditional and our asylum  
3 portfolios.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you have any idea  
5 if the security funding is going to be baselined this  
6 year?

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're in ongoing  
8 conversations with OMB about the security funding.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's local law. It's  
10 been local law for years. It's not going away.

11 We would like to discuss the population  
12 of asylum seekers currently in DHS facilities. How  
13 many asylum seeker households and individuals are  
14 currently in the DHS shelter system?

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's just over 30,000  
16 individuals. The vast majority of those are families  
17 with children.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Emergency  
19 hotels. How many emergency hotel shelters has DHS  
20 opened to house asylum seekers?

21 COMMISSIONER PARK: Hold on, let me pull  
22 that up. We have 163 sites in total that are DHS  
23 asylum sites. Not all of those are hotels, however.  
24 The majority of those are hotels, but there are a  
25 handful of others so let me pull that exact number

2 or, in the interest of time, I can circle back with  
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Has DHS closed  
5 any emergency shelters since the influx began?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: There are certain  
7 sites that, yes, we have closed generally because of  
8 real estate issues, either the site owner has pulled  
9 back or we have decided that for whatever reason the  
10 site owner isn't meeting their obligations either for  
11 quality or rate, but we have generally speaking over  
12 the last two years seen growing to at best steady  
13 state census for asylum seekers so we have not been  
14 reducing our overall footprint for asylum.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm moving on to  
16 the community food connection program. Obviously,  
17 this is a vital resource providing much needed food  
18 to the city's vast network of food pantries and soup  
19 kitchens. This program is especially important given  
20 the current number of asylum seekers in the city who  
21 are not eligible for many public benefits programs.  
22 As of the Preliminary Plan, there is 57 million  
23 budgeted in Fiscal Year '24 for HRA's Community Food  
24 Connection Program. This drops to just 25.8 million  
25 in Fiscal Year 2025 and then 20.9 million in Fiscal

2 Years '26 and '27. That's a pretty substantial  
3 reduction. How will this program continue its current  
4 operations without additional funding added in Fiscal  
5 Year '25 and beyond, especially given both the  
6 increased need in the city and the higher cost of  
7 food?

8                   COMMISSIONER PARK: We're really committed  
9 to the CFC program, absolutely recognize the vital  
10 role that it plays in communities, and we're working  
11 very closely with OMB on the outyear funding.

12                   CHAIRPERSON AYALA: To add additional  
13 resources?

14                   COMMISSIONER PARK: We're courting to make  
15 sure that we're able to move forward with the program  
16 at the appropriate level, yes.

17                   CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is there currently a  
18 waitlist?

19                   COMMISSIONER PARK: The way the program  
20 works is that we make allocations to individual food  
21 pantries and community kitchens for an annual basis.  
22 They then place orders for groceries through our  
23 centralized vendor so there isn't a waitlist for  
24 funds because we've allocated out the year's funds  
25 for providers. I suppose it's possible that

2 individual food pantries or community kitchens would  
3 maintain a waitlist, but that wouldn't be something  
4 we're directly involved in.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right, but if the  
6 CFC providers need more food than they have been  
7 allotted for, what is the process and the timeframe  
8 for them to get approval to order more food?

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm going to ask First  
10 Deputy Commissioner Berry to speak.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We are  
12 now monitoring and providing food pantries with  
13 monthly reports on their allocations so that they can  
14 see how far along they are in their allocation  
15 process, whether they're spending over or under their  
16 allocations. We do reach out to those providers that  
17 are either under or overspending to understand.  
18 Sometimes there are reasons for that. There may be  
19 other funding they receive later in the year so  
20 they're using up their CFC allocation until that is  
21 available so that is one way that we're monitoring  
22 it. The other thing we do is as the Fiscal Year comes  
23 to a close, we're looking at what the allocations are  
24 that are left. If there are pantries that are  
25 underspending and they confirm that they will

2 underspend for the year, we take those funds and we  
3 reallocate them to pantries that are in need of  
4 funding, and that happens towards the end of the  
5 Fiscal Year so it'll happen in about May and June.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are there food  
7 pantries that are underspending? I don't know. I  
8 think in my District, I've seen a significant  
9 increase and we've actually been very purposeful here  
10 in the Council in ensuring that we didn't touch any  
11 of our food network funding because we understand  
12 that the need has increased, especially in  
13 communities that have seen an influx of asylum  
14 seekers because they just don't like the food that is  
15 being served to them at the shelters or don't find it  
16 to be enough to sustain them.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah,  
18 it's not typical to see a lot of underspending unless  
19 they are holding on to their CFC allocation because  
20 they had another allocation that they needed to spend  
21 sooner, whether from private donors or state  
22 allocation or other, but it is something we look at.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I don't see, and  
24 I know that, hey, listen, these are decisions that  
25 are made, but I don't see how we could ever justify

2 such a significant budget cut to such an important  
3 program that is ensuring, I'll tell you that the  
4 lines in my District are so long, they're so, so  
5 long, and I just assumed that after things stabilize  
6 after the beginning of the pandemic that the lines  
7 would become smaller and they've only grown so that's  
8 pretty consistent with what we're hearing from you as  
9 well today regarding the increased number of  
10 applications for both cash and SNAP applications,  
11 right, is that there's a huge demand for these  
12 services and that's why it's very difficult to  
13 comprehend why there would even be a discussion about  
14 cutting those. I think the only way to really help  
15 eradicate poverty is through workforce development  
16 and ensuring that folks have the infrastructure to,  
17 again, become and stay self-sufficient and unless  
18 we're equally applying funding to meet that need as  
19 well, then we're going to continue to be on an upward  
20 trend and, if that's the case, and we're not  
21 committing the dollars to workforce development or  
22 other viable options, and I think that there has to  
23 be a bigger conversation about why we shouldn't be  
24 cutting these safety net programs that are keeping  
25 people fed. That's a really, really big deal.



2 In the Preliminary Plan, there was also a  
3 baseline savings of 3.2 million, starting in Fiscal  
4 Year '26 from the WeCARE program efficiencies. WeCARE  
5 is a program that serves cash assistance clients with  
6 a medical or mental health barrier to employment. The  
7 program provides individuals vocational  
8 rehabilitation services to help engage them in work-  
9 related activities that lead to employment. HRA  
10 indicated to us that they will be exploring other  
11 City resources to provide this programming. How was  
12 the funding amount derived, and how will the savings  
13 be generated?

14 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Thank you. The  
15 savings generated for WeCARE, which will start in  
16 FY26, will align with a new contracting cycle that we  
17 will be doing and, as part of that cycle, we are  
18 looking at ways in which we can achieve greater  
19 operational efficiencies through the use of  
20 technology that better mirror the current job market,  
21 looking at ways in which we have flexible delivery  
22 models, using hybrid models that will be able to  
23 achieve some savings around things such as space but  
24 doesn't actually compromise the programmatic  
25 priorities of WeCARE so, programmatically, we will

2 still stay focused on employment and connection to  
3 employment for those with certain barriers as well as  
4 vocational education and training for those who maybe  
5 need a little bit more training before they can join  
6 the workforce as well as wellness supports for those  
7 who maybe have a short-term medical or mental health  
8 situation that's untreated that needs to be addressed  
9 first before looking at employment and then, for  
10 those who have long-term barriers to employment,  
11 connecting them to federal benefits such as SSI so  
12 the savings that we identified are really focused on  
13 operational savings through the utilization of  
14 technology and some other programs streamlining,  
15 including partnerships, but is not anticipated to  
16 make any programmatic impacts in regards to the  
17 priorities of the program. It's just better  
18 leveraging what we can now utilize in the post-COVID  
19 world.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So I'm assuming that  
21 because of the way that you responded to that  
22 question, that the funding cut is not going to impact  
23 operations for the program.

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Right, it won't  
25 impact programmatic operations for the program. The

2 other savings may be found through the utilization of  
3 maybe less space because utilizing a hybrid model,  
4 right, many things will be a balance of in-person as  
5 well as online or in partnership with partners who  
6 maybe can utilize their space so we were looking at  
7 savings along those lines but still providing the  
8 same level of programmatic offerings to our clients.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Are these  
10 services currently being provided by contracted  
11 providers?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes, they're  
13 currently being provided by existing WeCARE providers  
14 whose contracts will go through June 30, 2025.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Have they been  
16 notified?

17 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes, contractors  
18 are aware that a new funding cycle will be coming and  
19 that an RFP will be forthcoming.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Is the funding  
21 cut from HRA's budget the full cost of the current  
22 operations for these programs.

23 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I would turn the  
24 funding support, it's in our budget, but I think it  
25 is a mix of both.

2           COMMISSIONER PARK: But just to clarify,  
3 the WeCARE budget is on the order of magnitude of  
4 about 58 million dollars a year, and so this  
5 reduction is a relatively small share of that and,  
6 because it is only applicable once the new contracts  
7 go into effect, none of the existing contractors are  
8 losing money from their budget at this time.

9           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. is HRA  
10 advocating for those cuts to be restored in the  
11 Executive?

12           COMMISSIONER PARK: We are always talking  
13 to OMB about our budget as a whole. Certainly, as I  
14 said, given the very narrow window of discretionary  
15 City tax levy in our budget, the places where we had  
16 to look to make cuts were narrow, and we had to make  
17 some difficult decisions.

18           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. My last question  
19 is, Commissioner, you mentioned that the shopping  
20 letters expire at 120 days and the renewals are  
21 automatic. Are they automatic?

22           COMMISSIONER PARK: For somebody who's  
23 eligibility has just been maintained, so they were  
24 base eligibility criteria on public assistance,  
25 working more than 10 hours a week, that will be an

2 automatic renewal. If it was under one of the  
3 exception categories, that will require the agency to  
4 take some action assuming they still maintain those  
5 exception categories.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, because  
7 according to the policy bulletin of 2021-009,  
8 shopping letters are not automatically renewed. Is  
9 there a subsequent overriding policy bulletin.

10 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's not automatically  
11 renewed if you're If your circumstances have changed,  
12 right, so the fact that you had a shopping letter  
13 yesterday doesn't automatically mean you have a  
14 shopping letter today but, if you would have  
15 qualified for a new shopping letter, because you are  
16 still meeting all the eligibility criteria, then it  
17 will be renewed for you. You, as a client, don't need  
18 to take action so I think maybe we're using the word  
19 automatic differently but in that we are going to  
20 relook at the eligibility criteria but, assuming you  
21 meet them, it does happen.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right. I'm  
23 going to leave it there. I just wanted to know that I  
24 did see as part of the PEGs, two of my Jobs-Plus  
25 sites have been identified for cuts, Bronx Works in

2 the South Bronx and Urban Upbound in East Harlem. I  
3 am obviously very concerned about that. Again, I have  
4 some of the highest rates of poverty and some of the  
5 highest rates of gun violence, and these programs  
6 have been really great at capturing groups of folks  
7 that normally wouldn't, nowhere to go to find  
8 employment and they go way and above, they're not  
9 just finding you an apartment, but they're also  
10 following up and they are ensuring that you have  
11 transportation and that you're filling out your  
12 applications properly. There's a lot of hand holding  
13 that goes with the services that they provide, but  
14 I'm curious were those the only two that were  
15 identified for closure because I saw there weren't  
16 that many.

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Deputy  
18 Speaker and, certainly, I understand where you're  
19 coming from and have heard the feedback. Those are  
20 the only two Jobs-Plus programs that are funded  
21 directly by HRA. The others are through Why Am I so  
22 we did in this spirit of unfortunate and very hard  
23 choices given our limited discretionary tax levy did  
24 make cuts there. We are pivoting to focus on all of  
25 our borough-based employment models because it is a

2 way to make sure that we are continuing to connect  
3 people to employment service because I think I  
4 absolutely agree with you that workforce development  
5 is critical. It's a way that we can continue to do it  
6 while also meeting our financial obligations. People  
7 who are participating will be able to get access to  
8 MetroCard so that won't be a responsibility for them,  
9 and we are working on an outreach and notification  
10 strategy for clients.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What do you mean by  
12 borough-based employment model?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: We have a number of  
14 other contracts for employment services. Most of them  
15 are oriented, rather than at a specific NYCHA  
16 development the way that Jobs-Plus is, they have a  
17 broader geographic range and we're focusing on those  
18 because it does allow us to provide the services more  
19 efficiently. Again, not a decision that we wanted to  
20 reach but, given that 90 percent of our tax levy  
21 budget is spent on entitlements, the areas that we  
22 had to look were very limited.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So if I live in East  
24 Harlem or the South Bronx, where am I traveling to to  
25 obtain this level of service?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: We can certainly  
3 circle back with a list of the closest sites.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: This is one that I  
5 plan to make a big deal about because of the need in  
6 my community. I have a really good working  
7 relationship with both of these organizations, and I  
8 know how hard they work in our communities to make  
9 sure that they're working with some of the folks that  
10 are likelier to get into trouble if they were not  
11 engaged in workforce opportunities, but it's often  
12 the case that the neediest of people, like we have to  
13 travel outside of our communities to receive these  
14 services. We were supposed to get a workforce  
15 development site that was actually promised through  
16 the rezoning of East Harlem, and we're recently told  
17 that that was taken away, but that our constituents  
18 could go into Harlem workforce and utilize their  
19 resources. The idea of asking for that as part of a  
20 commitment was because there was a need, there was a  
21 huge demand for that level of service to be provided  
22 locally within the community so to lose that and to  
23 now have to hear that both Jobs-Plus programs will be  
24 leaving as well, will be closing, we're going to lose  
25 that resource, is really quite frankly annoying and



2 heartbreaking because I know how difficult it is,  
3 like I don't think that the City really understands  
4 like how much stress it is. It seems very simplistic  
5 to grab a MetroCard and just get on a train or get on  
6 a bus and go from place to place, but it becomes  
7 troublesome. You know, it's hard, and these services  
8 should be in the communities that need them. The same  
9 thing, if you have a high rate of evictions, those  
10 eviction services, prevention eviction services  
11 should be in that community. If there is a huge  
12 demand for food, you have a larger demand for  
13 applications for SNAP benefits in a specific  
14 community, then you should be purposely integrating  
15 yourself into that community. I don't support those  
16 cuts and I will not be supporting those cuts, and I'm  
17 hoping to see full restoration because I know that  
18 these programs and services are essential to both the  
19 South Bronx and East Harlem, and I cannot just allow  
20 that to disappear.

21           With that, thank you. I want to recognize  
22 that we were also joined by Council Member Brooks-  
23 Powers, Restler, and Brewer, and I think that our  
24 Speaker has a followup question.

2           SPEAKER ADAMS: Just a quick followup, and  
3 I emphatically support everything that the Deputy  
4 Speaker just said. Resources in the community are  
5 essential and should never be taken away from those  
6 that need them the most. I just wanted to backtrack  
7 because I needed clarification on the emergency hotel  
8 shelter situation, and I don't think that I really,  
9 really heard that. How many emergency hotel shelters  
10 have been closed since the influx began?

11           COMMISSIONER PARK: I will need to circle  
12 back on an exact number. It is a handful of hotels  
13 that have been closed in the order of magnitude of a  
14 half dozen, and the reasons we have closed them is  
15 because we found that there was some issue with that  
16 particular site, right? In some cases, the owner  
17 decided that they no longer wanted to work with us or  
18 we found that there were physical violations, other  
19 kinds of things that meant that we didn't think it  
20 was appropriate to continue using the site. In those  
21 cases, we found other placements for clients so we  
22 are not downsizing our footprint at this time to  
23 serve asylum seekers because we have ongoing need. Of  
24 our total asylum sites, we have 162 total, all but  
25 seven are hotels.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Is there a breakdown  
3 by borough for us?

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: I can certainly do  
5 that. I have a breakdown by borough.

6 SPEAKER ADAMS: And by type as well.

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. I have that  
8 crosstab, it's a lot of numbers, we will send that  
9 over to your office.

10 SPEAKER ADAMS: That's really, really  
11 important that we see that.

12 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

13 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Can you provide a  
14 per diem cost breakdown of each shelter, housing  
15 type, or broken down by asylum or non-asylum?

16 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. Absolutely. Our  
17 overall per diem numbers, so these are macro level,  
18 for single adults, the average per diem is \$145.13;  
19 for adult families, which is any family composition  
20 that doesn't include a minor child, it's \$24351; and  
21 for families with children, it's \$232.40. The overall  
22 asylum per diem, and this is a citywide asylum number  
23 is, I believe, let me double check that, \$388 is the  
24 overall asylum. That is inclusive of both the DHS  
25 system and HERRC system.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: And the HERRCs?

3 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: Do you see those numbers  
5 changing at all?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: I absolutely think  
7 that we will see changes in the asylum number as  
8 there is a push to manage costs down. I think what is  
9 most important for DHS in terms of managing our  
10 overall per diem numbers is making sure that we are  
11 focused on siting long term shelters rather than  
12 using hotels. Commercial hotels are an incredibly  
13 expensive way to provide shelter. It is why, separate  
14 and apart from the asylum crisis, that we have a  
15 pipeline of shelters and continue to open shelters.  
16 Even though our goal is to reduce the size of the  
17 shelter population, it's really important that we  
18 take action to get out of hotels. Even before the  
19 asylum crisis...

20 SPEAKER ADAMS: Preaching to the choir,  
21 Commissioner, preaching to the choir.

22 COMMISSIONER PARK: Even before the asylum  
23 crisis, we learned something like...

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Even before the asylum  
25 crisis...

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: 5,000 hotel rooms...

3 SPEAKER ADAMS: Absolutely right. This has  
4 been a clarion call for particularly Southeast Queens  
5 and my District for decades.

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes. We'd made real  
7 progress. We had all the families with children  
8 hotels closed. We obviously had to take a big step  
9 back from that progress, which is very unfortunate,  
10 but we remain really committed to it, and we are  
11 continuing to site and open new high-quality shelters  
12 and buildings that are really designed to meet the  
13 needs of both communities and of people experiencing  
14 homelessness. They are better for clients. They're  
15 better for communities, and they're less expensive,  
16 and we're committed to that.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: Agree with the movement  
18 from hotels. Overall goal will always be to get  
19 everyone into housing.

20 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you for your  
22 testimony. Deputy Speaker.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We've also  
24 been joined by Council Member Rivera.

2 We will now hear from Council Member  
3 Brooks-Powers followed by Council Member Riley.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,  
5 Madam Chair. I'd just like to follow up on the  
6 Speaker's questions regarding Fair Fares, and I'll  
7 just ask them all together and then you can respond  
8 and then I have one regarding EBT fraud.

9 As it pertains to Fair Fares, are you  
10 able to provide an update on what the current uptake  
11 rate for Fair Fares is, how many New Yorkers are  
12 signed up as of today in terms of eligible New  
13 Yorkers, and then you mentioned 5 million dollars was  
14 spent in Fiscal Year '23 on marketing and staffing  
15 for Fair Fares. Have you studied which avenues of  
16 distribution are most effective, as in what are the  
17 most effective ways to get people to sign up? Also,  
18 I'm just curious, you mentioned that there's been  
19 some outreach done around that but, in particular,  
20 where the household income levels are lower, has it  
21 been done in a strategic way to reach those  
22 communities, and I'm curious as to what particular  
23 outlets in terms of newspapers or radio stations have  
24 been invested in for that. Then you talked about the  
25 coordination with MTA on Fair Fares, about an OMNY

2 pilot and also the distribution at MTA's customer  
3 service centers, can you talk a little bit more about  
4 how DSS and the MTA coordinate on Fair Fares, what  
5 does that partnership look like, do you have any data  
6 on how successful the MTA's outreach at their service  
7 centers has been? I'll close with the EBT fraud, as I  
8 mentioned. In Rockaway, in particular, we've seen a  
9 spike in recent years in reports of welfare fraud.  
10 New Yorkers are being victimized by skimming. For  
11 example, their EBT card information is stolen and  
12 copied and then used by someone else. Can you talk  
13 about how DSS is seeking to address EBT fraud, what  
14 kind of outreach has been done to educate New Yorkers  
15 about EBT fraud, and I will acknowledge that you have  
16 sent out communication in terms of trying to recoup  
17 some of those dollars. I'm interested in how  
18 successful it's been. Again, we've had an uptick in  
19 terms of complaints about that, and there have been  
20 concerns and complaints about the local office that's  
21 in Far Rockaway and the support that they're able or  
22 not able to get there. Thank you.

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely. Let me  
24 start with the skimming questions and then, between  
25

2 the team and I, we will answer the Fair Fares  
3 question.

4 Skimming is just horrific. It's people  
5 preying on the most vulnerable, really something that  
6 we should all be ashamed is happening at all. Thanks  
7 to changes in state law, we are able to do  
8 reimbursement now. We have thus far approved a total  
9 of 21.6 million in replacement benefits. The majority  
10 of that is SNAP but that includes some cash as well.  
11 The deadline for making retroactive claims, so this  
12 is before the change in State law, has been extended  
13 to April 1st so there's still a little bit of time to  
14 submit those and then people will still be able to do  
15 claims on an ongoing basis if they detect fraud. We  
16 have been trying to communicate that as widely as  
17 possible so really pushing that out but, if you have  
18 particular places where you think we should be  
19 engaging on that, happy to collaborate. We are  
20 processing those centrally through DSS rather than  
21 doing it at individual site offices. We wanted to do  
22 it that way because we needed to be able to walk and  
23 chew gum at the same time, right? We had to make  
24 progress on our cash and SNAP backlogs, making sure  
25 we're getting benefits in people's hands, and we



2 needed to be processing the skimming so we did a  
3 little bit of dividing up of our work of labor, but I  
4 think the process has gone, we've been able to move  
5 very quickly and with far less impact on other  
6 operations than I was originally anxious that we  
7 would. I think the best option in terms of longer-  
8 term solutions to skimming, because I heard that as  
9 part of your question as well, is making sure that  
10 the cards are chipped. That is something that the  
11 State is the one actually issuing the cards so  
12 something we're in conversations with OTDA on, and I  
13 know that they're looking at.

14           On Fair Fares, let me get it started, and  
15 I will pass off to Colleagues. As of the beginning of  
16 this month, we had 317,300 people and enrolled in  
17 Fair Fares so not all of them are using Fair Fares on  
18 a regular basis, but all of those people have access  
19 to it. We've tried a lot of different things on the  
20 marketing, some of which we talked about already but,  
21 in addition to what we've already talked about,  
22 partnering with a slew of other agencies and training  
23 their staff so that whenever they're engaging with  
24 people in communities, that they are able to enroll  
25 people in Fair Fares and to talk up the program. That

2 includes almost 100 DOE school-based staff so that  
3 we're trying to really meet people where they are and  
4 marketing it as well within the various asylum  
5 facilities because immigration status is not a  
6 requirement for receiving the benefit. We're  
7 distributing promotional materials in libraries. ACS  
8 has shared out materials, right? We're really trying  
9 to go with a lot of different options, but Scott or  
10 Jill, either of you would like to chime in?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And are you  
12 doing them in multiple languages as well?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely, yes.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Just a  
15 few more things on some of the targeted outreach  
16 we're doing, and then the pilot with the MTA is we  
17 reassess every year before we start our marketing  
18 campaign those zip codes where we know that there are  
19 people who are eligible and not enrolled, and we  
20 target the outreach in those areas, the bus shelter  
21 ads and the community marketing in terms of community  
22 newspapers and all that. We target those specifically  
23 to those zip codes where we know that there is under-  
24 enrollment. We have robocall and text and mailing  
25 outreach to those of our clients that we believe are

2 eligible and not enrolled so we're targeting those  
3 specific individuals and, where we have found a lot  
4 of success, the things that have been the most  
5 successful, are those partnerships with the MTA so  
6 that's where we are meeting those people who are  
7 using public transportation and letting them know  
8 about Fair Fares, so those Transit Talk events, those  
9 customer service event partnerships that we do with  
10 the MTA, we generally see really good enrollment  
11 numbers after those. We are working really closely  
12 with the MTA on the rollout to OMNY. We want this to  
13 go as smoothly as possible for the Fair Fares  
14 population. We started outreach to some of our Fair  
15 Fares participants to participate in a small pilot of  
16 about 50 people so that we can make sure that we are  
17 designing a transition and a system that works well  
18 for our clients and that none of our clients are left  
19 behind when we do the transition from MetroCard to  
20 OMNY.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you  
22 for that. Commissioner, I will take you up on an  
23 offer in terms of collaborate and, and if there's a  
24 flyer about the EBT that we can share, if you could  
25 send it to the Council Members?

2 I'll just close by requesting a breakdown  
3 of the local ethnic media that you all are  
4 contracting with, in particular for my District so we  
5 have the Rockaway Wave, we got Where It's At Media,  
6 and a network of hyperlocal press. I have not seen  
7 any advertisement about Fair Fares in any of this so  
8 I'm just curious in terms of what that outreach looks  
9 where there's a lower household income. Thank you,  
10 Madam Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council  
12 Member Riley.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair  
14 Ayala. Just a few questions. First on economic  
15 stability. Love the programs that you guys are doing.  
16 One thing I did not hear about is the IDNYC cards  
17 program so the Admin's goal of supporting family  
18 transition out of emergency shelters requires  
19 pathways for jobs and housing. That starts with  
20 having a proper ID first. Additionally, domestic  
21 violence and disaster survivors rely on the ability  
22 to provide new ID for them to get their lives back on  
23 track. With that being stated, how many IDNYC cards  
24 were awarded by HRA in FY24 to migrant shelter  
25 residents, how many do you expect to award an FY25,

2 and how many applicants did not receive NYC IDs in FY  
3 '25 that applied?

4           COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
5 Member. We currently have more than two million  
6 people have been issued IDNYC. It's about 2.2  
7 million. We can get back to you with how many each  
8 year, but it has grown steadily over time since the  
9 program was originally launched. We are promoting it  
10 a variety of different ways. We're doing work in  
11 specific asylum sites, but we are also making sure  
12 that New Yorkers of all backgrounds have access to  
13 the card as well. In terms of how many were denied  
14 over, generally speaking people are receiving the  
15 card, and we are happy to work with people when they,  
16 if they don't initially bring the documentation  
17 that's needed to access the card, rather than just  
18 reject them, we will defer the application and work  
19 with them further but, Administrator French?

20           ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Thank you,  
21 Commissioner. I can say that for IDNYC in FY24, we  
22 are ahead of where we were in FY23 year-to-date of  
23 the number of cards distributed so we expect to  
24 exceed that. For context, in the first six months of  
25 FY24, there were a total of 92,000 new IDNYC cards

2 distributed compared to 89,000 in FY23. We also saw a  
3 significant increase in people looking for the cards  
4 and that did result in some sites having large  
5 numbers of individuals line up outside early in the  
6 morning. Some of them also lined up overnight. Much  
7 of this we found was connected to misconceptions  
8 around what the IDNYC card can and cannot do for you  
9 as it relates to someone's immigration status. We  
10 agree that an ID card is very important and  
11 essential, but there was definitely misunderstandings  
12 in regards to the card being a tool that was useful  
13 in your asylum application, which it was not, so we  
14 worked closely with our partners at MOIA as well as  
15 some other community partners to make it clear what  
16 the ID could and could not do and then we also looked  
17 at ways wanting to protect the health and safety of  
18 individuals. We moved to, at the end of January, an  
19 all-appointment system for IDNYC, which actually  
20 allowed us to maximize the number of appointments we  
21 could provide so, every Friday in the afternoon,  
22 6,800 IDNYC appointments are released for the  
23 following Monday through Friday and, in working with  
24 MOIA and community partners as well as our partners  
25 at H AND H, HPD, and NYCEM, we have done intensive

2 outreach to the asylum-seeking population around the  
3 card itself, how to sign up for an appointment either  
4 online or through 3-1-1, and we have found that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: I don't want to  
6 (INAUDIBLE), but I have a lot of questions. If I may,  
7 Chair. What was the total spent in FY24 on emergency  
8 shelter medical services, and did the Administration  
9 discuss exploring partnerships with urgent care sites  
10 such as CityMD or any other community medical  
11 providers to subsidize costs?

12 COMMISSIONER PARK: Some of our emergency  
13 shelter sites have on-site medical, others of them  
14 entirely depend on partnerships with community sites.  
15 I think we will likely need to get back to you on the  
16 total spending because those are going to be line  
17 items within individual contracts so it's going to  
18 take some work to pull but, absolutely, partnerships  
19 are really important. One of our PEGs in the Plan  
20 this year is to make sure that we're using better use  
21 of the H and H SHOW vans for providing medical care  
22 at drop-in centers.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you. The  
24 remaining 1.3 billion DHS contract budget provides  
25 service to homeless individuals such as emergency

2 housing, outreach, food, counseling, medical aid, and  
3 other support is needed. What is the total that is  
4 being directed to emergency housing, and is this  
5 outlined by intended use, land procurement, or  
6 facility upgrades?

7           COMMISSIONER PARK: The vast majority of  
8 our shelters are contracted, and the contract budget  
9 is inclusive of the real estate, the staff, the food,  
10 the social services, maintenance, the entire thing.  
11 Individual contracts have line-item budgets, but the  
12 City's budget is broken out families with children,  
13 single adults, adult families.

14           COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you. Just two  
15 more questions. The Preliminary Plan includes an  
16 additional 46.5 million in Fiscal Year 2024 only from  
17 the City and State funding sources to meet increased  
18 demand from HIV and AIDS service administration,  
19 single room occupancy emergency shelter units. Based  
20 on January's PEG Plan submitted by HRA and the RFP  
21 for the RISE program provided vocational services for  
22 HASA clients will not be renewed. This program was  
23 administered by CBOs that, by HRA's estimates, this  
24 change will bring savings to the bottom line. For  
25 HASA clients, that will mean an immediate end to the



2 workforce development program effective by FY25, so  
3 what is the plan to support CBOs who have  
4 historically done this work and are impacted by these  
5 PEGs?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
7 Member. Just to be clear, the new need was  
8 specifically on the bed side of the operation. Within  
9 the HASA program, we do both emergency and slightly  
10 longer-term Tier 2 shelters, and so we will be  
11 investing in, sorry, not Tier 2, but HASA Emergency  
12 Housing, we will be investing more money there, so  
13 the funding is there to make up gaps in those  
14 budgets. With respect to the employment contract,  
15 it's a challenging one. As I noted before, close to  
16 90 percent of our tax levy budget is spent on  
17 entitlement programs so when we were looking for  
18 options for cuts, we had very few options. Most HASA  
19 clients are eligible for all of their remaining  
20 employment services programs. We do have a  
21 significant range of employment services programs so  
22 we will be making referrals for clients to the other  
23 programs but, Administrative French.

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, that's what  
25 we'll be doing. We'll be connecting before the

2 program ends with all of the clients for the RISE  
3 program, and we will be connecting them to local  
4 career services programs or other programs they might  
5 be interested that we currently run and that can  
6 provide them employment supports.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you. Lastly,  
8 the Subway Safety Plan. Could you give me the total  
9 budget for the Subway Safety Plan? I know that 16  
10 million was added in Fiscal Year 2024. Do you believe  
11 that this plan has been effective? I just read an  
12 article that was just released today. I believe it  
13 has close to 380 homeless individuals who are  
14 sleeping on the subways. Do you believe it has been  
15 effective since it's been implemented in 2022, and  
16 how has the Governor's plan to release the National  
17 Guard interfere with the Subway Plan? I took the  
18 train here from Baychester today. The entire subway  
19 was full with people sleeping on it, and I didn't see  
20 any outreach worker or anyone trying to help them  
21 out, and I did see a lot of individuals who are  
22 coming on the train speaking very horribly about  
23 these individuals so I just want to know do you  
24 believe that this plan is successful? If you could

2 just give me some numbers and that's my last  
3 question. Thank you, Chair.

4                   COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
5 Member. Some really important issues that you raised  
6 there. People who are experiencing unsheltered  
7 homelessness have been failed by every level of  
8 government, all parts of society, right? They've  
9 fallen through every crack there is to fall through  
10 and working with this population and addressing that  
11 is something that is incredibly challenging and goes  
12 well beyond just DHS. One of the things that I think  
13 is really most important about the Subway Safety Plan  
14 is that it brings together DHS, DOHMH, H AND H, MTA,  
15 NYPD, a host of other agencies really thinking more  
16 comprehensively than we've done in the past about  
17 meeting people's needs. I think there's a lot of  
18 really positive indicators. Just to read off a few  
19 statistics, we've had more than 394,000 engagements,  
20 almost 7,000 unique individuals placed either into  
21 shelter or what we call our low-barrier beds, safe  
22 havens and stabilization beds, and 397 people who  
23 have been permanently housed, right, so they now have  
24 a lease, an apartment, keys. It's really challenging  
25 and really iterative work. With some of these

2 individuals, it's going to take dozens or even  
3 hundreds of points of contact, right? That's why  
4 394,000 engagements translates into 7,000 placements  
5 because these are people who, as I say, have been  
6 failed by everybody. I'd also say that we're seeing  
7 real success. We are absolutely getting some of our  
8 most challenging cases indoors. One of the things  
9 that we do is work very closely on really specific  
10 individuals, and we know that they are the specific  
11 individuals that this cross-agency group is focused  
12 on. We're seeing really strong success rates of  
13 getting people indoors. It's also not entirely a  
14 static population as somebody is released from the  
15 hospital, as there is whatever the next crisis in  
16 their lives is, the next person has failed, right,  
17 they become our next client. We are going to continue  
18 working at it. I see a lot of indications of success,  
19 but it's also not going to be something that's solved  
20 quickly.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: And the total  
22 budget?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: Slightly difficult  
24 question to answer because it does cross so many  
25 agencies. There was about 170 million dollars a year

2 added to the DHS budget, but that builds on what  
3 we're doing already and what we're already doing  
4 within the subways, what we were already investing in  
5 low-barrier beds. That is a piece of it, and that's  
6 what was added as a result of this initiative, but I  
7 wouldn't say that's the total spending because it  
8 wouldn't be possible without the baseline budgets of  
9 DHS, DOHMH, everybody else.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you.

11 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Commissioner, if I  
12 may, could I just add one thing? It would be remiss  
13 of me if I didn't, as a social worker, just really  
14 amplify the 397 individuals who actually ended up in  
15 permanent housing. There were 394,000 contacts, but  
16 our goal is to have folks move from being on the  
17 street or subways going to shelter where there is a  
18 regular shelter, a low-barrier, and actually getting  
19 a key so almost 400 people were able to do that, and  
20 that is the goal that we have, the ultimate goal,  
21 that people wake up with a key and going to their own  
22 beds and their own units. That, for us, is success  
23 for this program, too.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, and,  
3 Commissioner, I didn't know if you answered, how is  
4 the Governor's plan going to affect this?

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, sorry. At this  
6 point, I don't anticipate that it will affect it, but  
7 it's something that we're looking at very closely. We  
8 are still out at the end-of-line subway stations.  
9 We're still doing all of the work.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: She was on record  
11 saying that if you don't want to ride the train,  
12 don't want to get your bags checked, you shouldn't  
13 ride the train, so I'm assuming this is going to  
14 affect the outreach that you guys are going to have.

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: First of all, most of  
16 the outrage for what it's worth happens in the  
17 stations rather than literally on the trains. I think  
18 this is a place where we're going to have to wait and  
19 see and engage with our colleagues at the State level  
20 before I can say anything definitively. The plans  
21 were developed separately from one another so we're  
22 going to have to make sure that there are no adverse  
23 impacts.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you. Thank  
25 you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council  
3 Member Schulman is next but, before she gets on, I  
4 just wanted to piggyback on the IDNYC issue. In the  
5 Bronx, we have just one IDNYC site. In Manhattan, we  
6 have three. Because we have more people applying,  
7 it's become increasingly difficult to even get an  
8 appointment. Could you explain why the Bronx just has  
9 just the one site and is there any intention to  
10 increase the amount of sites to accommodate the  
11 demand in all boroughs?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes, happy to speak  
13 to that. One of the Bronx sites that we did have we  
14 ran into space challenges that made that site not  
15 something we could continue with so currently we do  
16 only have one site. We are consistently looking for  
17 ways both that we can look to expand the capacity at  
18 that site as well as looking at other potential  
19 opportunities that may come to us in regards to being  
20 able to open another site in the Bronx. We're also  
21 very happy to connect and work with Council Members  
22 like we have done before as well to do some pop-ups  
23 if that would also be helpful on some needs, but I  
24 understand and see the need in the Bronx of one site  
25 is not comparable to the other boroughs.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I get that you would  
3 want to do things, but what have you done since the  
4 other site closed to ensure that you're identifying  
5 another location or to collaborate with Council  
6 Members, like maybe using their offices when  
7 possible. What action have you guys taken?

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We first started by  
9 looking at ways in which we could expand the capacity  
10 at the one existing site that we do have in the  
11 Bronx, and we are looking at the moment to see if  
12 there are other opportunities for space. We have not  
13 identified one yet that would meet the needs that we  
14 would require from both a waiting area and other  
15 aspects. We're happy to reach out to the Council  
16 Members in the Bronx, but we've also been connecting  
17 with our colleagues at MOIA to identify other  
18 community partnerships in the Bronx that we might be  
19 able to work with. At this point, the needs have been  
20 taken over by the other sites. I understand that's  
21 not right in the Bronx. It is something that we are  
22 continuing to work on as we have stabilized at least  
23 the appointment system online so that we can look at  
24 ways in which we can make sure that our footprint  
25 covers all of New York City.



2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I would hope so  
3 because if I see that the demand is growing that  
4 tells me that we need more of whatever it is that  
5 we're supplying, but I also would have loved to have  
6 heard from you as opposed to me having to bring it up  
7 at a Committee hearing. I think that is a reflection  
8 of it shows good-faith efforts on behalf of the  
9 agency with the borough and the impacted individuals  
10 that may be looking for these resources. I didn't  
11 even know that there was only one until a reporter  
12 called me and I was made aware that that there was  
13 just one and I thought has anybody looked at the map  
14 of the Bronx, like the Bronx is it's a pretty decent-  
15 sized borough and traveling to and from 249th Street  
16 is not as easy as you would think so I'm really  
17 disappointed that to date there's only that one site.  
18 I think it's a disservice to the borough, and I know  
19 that is a resource that we desperately need, but I  
20 not only want to advocate for more in the Bronx, but  
21 citywide. I'm seeing longer wait times for an  
22 appointment so that means that the demand is higher.  
23 Maybe working, I don't know, I would imagine that  
24 working with MOIA and making that resource available  
25 at HERRCs and asylum-seeking shelters, maybe you can

2 do pop-ups there as well because it seems like a lot  
3 of the demand is driven by that population as well  
4 but, obviously, we need more sites.

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Council Member, I do  
6 apologize for communication breakdowns. We will  
7 certainly work on that going forward. We are doing  
8 pop-ups with the HERRCs and the asylum sites to make  
9 sure that we are bringing meeting people where they  
10 are with that respect and happy to collaborate with  
11 you offline on a potential replacement site in the  
12 Bronx.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Appreciate it. Thank  
14 you. Council Member Schulman.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you,  
16 Chair. I wanted to go back to the little bit of line  
17 of questioning of, good afternoon, Commissioner,  
18 sorry, of my Colleague, Council Member Riley. For the  
19 for the employment services contract with HASA, who  
20 is the contracted provider right now?

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: The Gay Men's  
22 Health Crisis, GMHC.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And what type of  
24 clients does the contract serve?

25 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: HASA clients.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. So how was  
3 the determination made to include this PEG in the  
4 Preliminary Plan and how was the PEG amount  
5 calculated?

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: As the Commissioner  
7 said, very difficult choices had to be made given 90  
8 percent of our budget is committed to entitlements so  
9 there were no easy choices for us but, looking at our  
10 overall employment services and the other offerings  
11 we have borough-based, this contract was one of the  
12 ones that we unfortunately had to put up for the PEG.  
13 The contract's value is approximately 280,000.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: You're taking  
15 this internally, correct?

16 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: So GMHC, which I  
18 worked for in a previous life, serves a client  
19 population with a long history of mistrust in  
20 government and healthcare-related service delivery.  
21 They've built a relationship and reputation with  
22 these communities for over 42 years, which is  
23 critical to their ability to successfully manage the  
24 RISE contract so how will HRA cultivate the same

2 trust and relationship with HASA clients to ensure  
3 similarly successful outcomes?

4 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Our workers will  
5 work closely with GMHC before the contract itself  
6 ends to make them aware of the other offerings that  
7 we can have and that we can connect them to. We'll  
8 provide communications to them and explain to them in  
9 detail what other services are available that can be  
10 comparable to what they receive at GMHC, but it will  
11 definitely be a shift, but it is something that we  
12 will do closely with GMHC and through our HASA case  
13 workers and other outreach workers who have  
14 connections to our HASA clients as well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I presume from  
16 your response that you're not going to ask for  
17 restoration of the PEG in the Executive Plan.

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're working really  
19 closely with OMB on our budget overall, but I really  
20 just do want to reiterate what Administrator French  
21 said. This is not a cut that we wanted to take.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: No. Understood.

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: We were faced with a  
24 tremendously difficult set of circumstances and a  
25 very limited pool of discretionary tax levy.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: All right. I  
3 just wanted to just quickly ask a followup question  
4 again to what Council Member Riley mentioned about  
5 the Subway Safety Program. My understanding is that  
6 from folks I've spoken to and that are working in the  
7 program and everything else that there's a need for  
8 nurses because what happens is when the police bring  
9 somebody to a hospital, they're discharged right  
10 away, but if a nurse makes the recommendation that  
11 they go to a hospital, they get treatment, and they  
12 stay for a while so I wanted to ask you about that.

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: Administrator Carter,  
14 you want to talk about our RFP for nurses?

15 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Oh, sure. Thank  
16 you, Council Member. We actually do now have a small  
17 cadre of nurses that's with our outreach teams, and  
18 we are putting out in our RFP to actually bring more  
19 nurses to the teams because we do agree that we  
20 certainly need nurses to be in those outreach teams  
21 because we know that if the nurses are with when they  
22 get to the hospital, that there's a different  
23 connection that's made so we are certainly working in  
24 that very much and we are walking lockstep with you  
25 on that. Absolutely. Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very  
3 much. Thank you, Council Member Schulman.

4 We will now hear from Council Member  
5 Restler followed by Brewer.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Great. I didn't  
7 know I was coming up, but I'm ready.

8 Commissioner, it's always good to see  
9 you. I know I sometimes give you a hard time at these  
10 hearings, but I will say on the record I have a lot  
11 of respect for you and appreciate the hard work of  
12 you and your team. It's not an easy job.

13 There are a couple items I'd really like  
14 to dig in on today. Firstly are placements in NYCHA,  
15 which as you know has been something I've been very  
16 concerned about in the trajectories and the changes  
17 that we've seen in this Administration. Year-over-  
18 year, based on the PMMR stats, we're on pace for a 30  
19 percent reduction in the number of people placed in  
20 NYCHA or in Section 8 relative to last year. As  
21 homelessness increases, that's a major concerning  
22 trend. I'm even more concerned about the placement in  
23 NYCHA specifically. When the Mayor came into office,  
24 we had placed 1,597, 1,600 households in NYCHA  
25 apartments in 2021. This year, we're on pace for 480

2 based on the PMMR so a two third reduction in the  
3 number of homeless people that are getting placed  
4 into NYCHA. This is the housing stock that we  
5 control, our best solution for moving homeless  
6 families out into housing. What is HRA and DSS and  
7 DHS doing to reverse this terrible trend? There are  
8 5,000 vacant NYCHA apartments, 10 times as many as  
9 when the Mayor arrived. What are you all doing to fix  
10 this?

11 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
12 Member. That's not a question that I can answer solo,  
13 right, because it certainly involves NYCHA as well.  
14 What I can say is that we are steadily increasing the  
15 pace of our permanent housing placements with a  
16 particular focus on our subsidized housing placements  
17 saw a 17 percent increase in housing placements  
18 overall. This year, we are on track based on the PMMR  
19 data to exceed that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate you  
21 made some progress in other places. I'm on the clock  
22 though, but is there anything you can say because you  
23 feel the urgency more than anybody in City  
24 government? You are on the hook on this census, which  
25 has exploded, partly as a result of migrants, partly

2 not, the census has exploded. You feel it every day.  
3 You want to drive that number down. 5,000 vacant  
4 NYCHA apartments, two-thirds reduction in NYCHA  
5 placements of homeless families since the Mayor came  
6 into office happening each year. What are we doing  
7 about it?

8           COMMISSIONER PARK: Again, I don't want to  
9 speak for NYCHA, but I really respect the work that  
10 they are doing to ensure the long-term stabilization  
11 of that housing stock, right? If we lose NYCHA, we  
12 are all in a much worse off place as I think we all  
13 know that it is housing with very serious physical  
14 issues, but you can't do large-scale physical rehab  
15 with a 100 percent occupied portfolio. You have to be  
16 able to checkerboard. You have to be able to do  
17 internal relocation. We are absolutely taking  
18 advantage of every NYCHA unit that is available to  
19 us, and I'm going to have to defer more details to  
20 them.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I have to say  
22 would, Madam Deputy Speaker, could I do one more  
23 item? I appreciate this is NYCHA's job to fix up the  
24 housing, but if you're not advocating with all of  
25 your potential power and pressure on City Hall to fix



2 this, it's not going to get fixed. I don't have  
3 faith. We've seen no progress from NYCHA in a year  
4 and a half of us screaming from the rooftops. They've  
5 tried to cut funding from the budget time and again  
6 for NYCHA repairs so I just am asking that we try to  
7 work together to push this Administration to get  
8 their house in order so that we don't see the number  
9 of vacant apartments continue to increase. The number  
10 of homeless people who are stuck in the shelter  
11 system because we are no longer placing people in  
12 NYCHA in any meaningful way is a major problem.

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: I am a fierce advocate  
14 for housing placements for our clients. I'm always  
15 happy to collaborate, but...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: Rest assured I am  
18 working every angle.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay, it's just  
20 every data point we see is things getting worse, not  
21 better.

22 Last item, I just want to ask is the FY25  
23 budgeted headcount is 11,998, a decrease of 136  
24 positions and a decrease of 1,659 positions since  
25 FY21. We're talking about 13, 14 percent decrease in

2 HRA headcount just since the Mayor came into office  
3 despite one in four New Yorkers living in poverty and  
4 you all having highest cash assistance and food  
5 stamps roles that you've had in decades. Do you think  
6 you can actually manage the agency effectively with  
7 this head count, and I just will note that when  
8 Administrator Fitzpatrick, who I have a lot of  
9 respect for testified, and congratulations  
10 Administrator French testified before this committee  
11 last year, she said that in her 40-year history at  
12 HRA the head count in the agency had never been that  
13 low. Do you believe that you can meet the needs a of  
14 New Yorkers with poverty growing as significantly as  
15 it is with this massive reduction in headcount that  
16 the Mayor has imposed, that OMB has imposed on you  
17 since he came into office?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
19 Member. With respect to the change between FY24 and  
20 FY25, that is a piece that is still under negotiation  
21 and conversation. I don't think those numbers are  
22 finalized yet.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But it is the  
24 proposed, I mean it is the headcount in the  
25 Preliminary Budget that the Mayor released.

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: Emphasis on  
3 preliminary.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Totally, and  
5 we'll fight to restore it.

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: We're still under  
7 negotiation.

8 With respect to the larger trends, yes,  
9 head count is down over a long period of time, but  
10 there have also been significant shifts in the way  
11 that benefits are administered, right? So at this  
12 point, about 90 percent of cash and SNAP applications  
13 are received online, right? It's a very different  
14 process than it looked like even 10 years ago so,  
15 absolutely, the people who do the work are the  
16 lifeblood of the agency. We need to keep monitoring  
17 that. We need to keep hiring to fill up our  
18 vacancies, and that's something that this team can  
19 tell you I've been very laser-focused on and you see  
20 that the growth in our head count.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So what are the  
22 number of vacancies at HRA today?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: We have about a 9  
24 percent vacancy rate. It's about 1,100 people, which  
25 it's higher than I would like it to be, but it is

2 close to half of what it was a year ago so we've been  
3 really making a lot of progress. We're focused on  
4 continuing to fill the vacancies that we have and  
5 continuing to make process improvements. If there's  
6 needs to change going forward, we certainly will, but  
7 the fact that we've been able to virtually eliminate  
8 the cash and SNAP backlogs, I think really does show  
9 that we can manage with our resources.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you're  
11 confident you'll be able to maintain the provision of  
12 cash assistance and food stamps without backlogs  
13 growing?

14 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think we are in a  
15 much better place than we are. Certainly, we're going  
16 to have to keep monitoring application trends and  
17 things like that. We will make adjustments as needed  
18 but, yes, I feel much better about where we are now.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. I hope that  
20 we'll be able to fight to restore your headcount  
21 together. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council  
23 Member Brewer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
25 much. First, I want to give a shout out to a Gregory

2 Edwards who is on the Home Visit Unit Center number  
3 90 because he came one Friday night back and forth to  
4 Brooklyn to get a client in our office, 8 o'clock at  
5 night, the SNAP card, so I just want to be sure that  
6 he gets the credit that he deserves.

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you very much,  
8 Council Member.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Cliff. You  
10 mentioned earlier when you were talking in your  
11 opening remarks, I was in the National League of  
12 Cities this weekend, and there were several people  
13 there from the federal agency, and they are, I think  
14 you're doing better than they are, they are worried  
15 around the country because obviously you give people  
16 benefits, they don't want to take them because  
17 they're worried about losing other opportunities. How  
18 are you dealing with that? Is that an issue in New  
19 York? You mentioned it earlier.

20 COMMISSIONER PARK: The income disregard?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, the cliff,  
22 what I call the cliff problem, but yes.

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: New York State last  
24 year passed legislation that gave us what we call our  
25 Earned Income Disregard so it allows us to continue

2 to provide cash assistance benefits when people are  
3 in subsidized training and subsidized employment  
4 programs and does a one-time six month earned income  
5 disregard for people who have gotten non-subsidized  
6 employment There's a lot of nuance behind that which  
7 we can certainly get into offline because it does get  
8 very complicated, but the short answer is it means  
9 that it's it smooths out some of that cliff.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I think it's  
11 still an issue because I hear a lot from my NYCHA  
12 residents who do not want to get X, Y, and Z because  
13 they're nervous about losing, they don't understand  
14 that their rent is still going to stay at 30 percent,  
15 but maybe offline discussion because I think it's not  
16 solved, the problem.

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think it has helped  
18 it. I would agree that it has not solved.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And the feds are  
20 looking to have some more support, just FYI.

21 COMMISSIONER PARK: Happy to have an  
22 offline.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, number two.  
24 The feds also stated that on Friday they were meeting  
25 with you or OMB and the problem of figuring out what

2 is still owed in terms of the migrant situation? I  
3 don't know if this is you or just Health and  
4 Hospitals. They think they've solved it. Remember,  
5 this was a big OMB discussion with the Director. Has  
6 that been solved?

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: I can assure you it  
8 was not me they were meeting with on Friday, so I  
9 will talk to Colleagues and we'll circle back.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The issue of  
11 direct poverty money. Now, CSS just put out a report,  
12 I'm sure you saw it, 1.5 million adults, 420,000 kids  
13 in New York City are in poverty, big numbers, bigger  
14 than the past, so are we thinking about doing what  
15 other cities are doing, which is direct dollars to  
16 those who are in a poverty situation?

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: There are a number of  
18 ongoing pilot programs, pilot initiatives around  
19 direct cash transfer programs. Some of them show  
20 somewhat promising results, some of them it's too  
21 early to tell. It's something that I'm always happy  
22 to look at. There's all kinds of really complicated  
23 interaction with federal benefits, both on a client  
24 level, making sure that we don't run into a cliff  
25 issue, but also making sure that we aren't losing out

2 opportunity to claim federal dollars and replacing  
3 federal spending with City funding, which creates  
4 challenges as well.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so I'd like  
6 to hear more about that offline. Mainchance, 3.5-  
7 million cut. As you know, I support Mainchance  
8 strongly. They are going to be applying for Safe  
9 Haven, which might address some of the concerns you  
10 have. Just like the Chair feels strongly about the  
11 Bronx programs for workforce, I feel the same way  
12 about Mainchance. What can we do to restore the 3.5  
13 million or would you be amenable to the Safe Haven  
14 proposal?

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
16 Member.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You know that I  
18 care about this. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER PARK: As you've discussed  
20 with me and with Administrator Carter, we're happy to  
21 look at a Safe Haven proposal. It will need to go  
22 through the competitive RFP process, but we're more  
23 than happy to take a look at that. Our shift has  
24 generally been at this point towards looking at drop-



2 in centers that are coupled with beds. We feel like  
3 that...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They'll have beds.

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: That continuum of care  
6 model works better for clients.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Just  
8 finally, vacant units in supportive housing. How many  
9 of them are vacant in supportive housing or in places  
10 that I don't want to mention because I know where  
11 some of them are, but people want single rooms and so  
12 congregate housing, how many beds are, do you keep  
13 track of that, because some congregate housing, non-  
14 profits, have a lot of vacancies.

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
16 Member. I think I'm following your question and,  
17 between Administrator French and I, we will do our  
18 best. The overall vacancy number for supportive  
19 housing for the units that we track through our CAP  
20 system, it's a fluid number, but it's about 1,900  
21 units.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That are vacant  
23 today?

24 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, a lot of those  
25 are in process. They don't physically have somebody

2 in them, but the person has been matched, it's in  
3 process. There are units that are just coming online.  
4 There's a variety of different stories there. In that  
5 number are a non-trivial number of SRO units. These  
6 do tend to be units that are a little bit harder to  
7 lease up. We recognize that that they are less  
8 appealing to clients. We're working with the  
9 providers who operate them. One of the things that I  
10 think is a challenge is that with rental subsidies,  
11 you're generally expected to pay 30 percent of your  
12 income in rent and, certainly, If I could pay 30  
13 percent of my income in rent for an SRO or for a  
14 studio, I would hold out for the studio. Within  
15 CityFHEPS, which is a program that we control, we  
16 have changed that so that now, if you're renting an  
17 SRO unit, it's a flat 50 dollars rather than the 30  
18 percent of income, but many of the SRO units have  
19 rental subsidies that we don't control so we're  
20 looking if there's other ways that we can address  
21 that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I, thank you  
23 very much. I have more, but maybe second round.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We want to  
3 hear from Council Member Banks followed by Council  
4 Member Rivera followed by Stevens and then Hudson.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Chair. I  
6 just had a couple of questions particularly about the  
7 skimming of the EBT cards, and I wanted to know  
8 particularly, specifically, I know earlier one of my  
9 Colleagues had asked about it. When a client or  
10 participant reports or it's known that the EBT card  
11 has been compromised the timeframe after the  
12 investigation is being done, why does it take so long  
13 for them to start getting back their benefits,  
14 particularly the EBT card access?

15 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
16 Member. Until fairly recently, we actually were not  
17 legally allowed to replace benefits at all. When  
18 people reported skimming, it was replace your card  
19 and that is the only option. There was a change in  
20 State law that allowed us to replace benefits that  
21 were stolen. I think we've actually been processing  
22 claims quite quickly. One of my colleagues may have  
23 the timeframe on that, but there are...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Yeah, if we can get  
25 this timeframe...

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: That's what I'm  
4 more concerned about.

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay. There are  
6 certainly many people who, if they experienced  
7 skimming a year ago, they were not able to  
8 immediately apply for replacement benefits because  
9 frankly the replacement didn't exist. We're very glad  
10 that it now does, although as I mentioned, I think  
11 the longer-term solution is chipping the cards.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: On  
13 timeframes, typically within three days of  
14 determination...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Three days, okay.

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: The  
17 benefits are loaded on the card, and we rarely have  
18 any applications that are more than 10 days old. If  
19 you have constituents with longer time frames, just  
20 let us know.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you. Seems  
22 there's been some cases where when it comes to the  
23 FHEPS voucher, it seems there's been cases where the  
24 amounts that should be corresponding with the agreed  
25 upon rents that's approved by the voucher are not

2 being honored by the landlord, and I wanted to know  
3 what is being done by to fix that situation because  
4 folks are being taken into court for the remainder  
5 balance.

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: It is absolutely a  
7 violation of regulation to do any side agreements  
8 that is prohibitive by landlords so I would  
9 appreciate it if you could send us cases on that  
10 offline.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Rivera.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you very  
14 much, Madam Chair. I just want to ask a followup to  
15 Mainchance, which is in my District. On average, do  
16 you know how many clients does this site currently  
17 serve a day? How was the decision made to close this  
18 center? What metrics were utilized? You mentioned  
19 that they don't have beds. Was that ultimately what  
20 prompted you? Where is the next closest drop-in  
21 center located? Does it have adequate funding and  
22 capacity to serve additional clients?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
24 Member. I'm going to start now, and I will pass it  
25 over to Administrator Carter. Yes, the basic premises

2 that we've been trying to move our drop-in center  
3 model slowly but towards a system where we're  
4 coupling drop-in centers with stabilization or Safe  
5 Haven beds so that we're really providing a true  
6 continuum of care for clients but, Administrator  
7 Carter, can you speak to the additional details?

8 ADMINISTRATOR CARTER: Thank you, and  
9 thank you, Council Member. I'll get back to you in  
10 terms of the number of clients, but one of the things  
11 that our Street Solutions Division has been looking  
12 at is how do we administer services to the  
13 unsheltered, and so I talked about how do we help  
14 earlier in the Subway Safety Plan, the throughput,  
15 and so we do want to make connections and make that  
16 Division to be able to have a connection from chairs  
17 to bed to exits, and so we're moving that Division to  
18 have that real collaborative setup where you can come  
19 into a chair, make that connection to a staff to be  
20 able to get to a bed and to move to permanency so  
21 that's how we're trying to realign our three  
22 solutions area so that is why we made that decision  
23 for the Mainchance. One of the things that we're also  
24 doing is really making sure that those who use  
25 Mainchance that they know where the other ones are.

2 Manhattan is the only borough that had three drop-in  
3 centers, the other outer boroughs only had one so  
4 there are two that's in Manhattan. There's one on  
5 West 14 and there's one on West 30 so we're making  
6 sure that they're aware of where those are and we're  
7 going to be putting up signs and they're beginning to  
8 talk to the clients as they come in of where they're  
9 going to be and we'll make sure we share that  
10 information.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay. Thank you.

12 Before you do all that, I want to make sure that  
13 we're working with the people at Mainchance because  
14 our goal here, as you heard from my Colleague,  
15 Council Member Brewer who is very invested in this  
16 site, is to keep it open and operating. They're  
17 critical to that area and to the work that you do. I  
18 just want to ask very quickly with my time, I see the  
19 Archdiocese is here. I want to thank them for making  
20 available St. Bridget's and the work that we're doing  
21 there. Do you know the cost to operate the St.  
22 Bridget's re-ticketing facility in the East Village?  
23 Yes or no?

24 COMMISSIONER PARK: No. I'm sorry.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: All right. Have  
3 you done an analysis of external or duplicative costs  
4 to continually reprocessing people through your  
5 systems such as transportation, food waste,  
6 administrative costs?

7 COMMISSIONER PARK: Council Member, we as  
8 a City and, at this point, I'm speaking as an  
9 Administration official, not specifically for DSS,  
10 but have really been struggling to meet the needs of  
11 the asylum seekers. The time limits are a challenging  
12 policy option, and I certainly acknowledge that, but  
13 we are in an emergency situation that really merits  
14 emergency solutions. We need to make sure that we are  
15 focused on moving people through, none of these  
16 individuals came to the United States for shelter,  
17 they came for work, for opportunity so making sure  
18 that we are focused on that and really that we're  
19 also making space for the next round of people  
20 because, although it is not quite as bad as it's  
21 been, the buses haven't stopped. We continue to get  
22 people every day. So recognize the challenges that  
23 come with the 30-day time limit but also really need  
24 to acknowledge that we are in an emergency situation.



2           Because this isn't in the DSS budget, I  
3 can't speak to the specific dollar amount.

4           COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: No, and I know  
5 that because of the OEM and H and H, but I did ask  
6 you this question just a few days ago in fact, so I  
7 was hoping, I'm disappointed you didn't bring that  
8 number, you don't have that number with you since I  
9 had asked about St. Bridget's, and all I'll just say  
10 is that just my questions are really rooted in  
11 looking at the efficiencies to your processes,  
12 operating the waitlists, the costs associated with  
13 mobile outreach like for those that are sleeping on  
14 the street or in the subways, and how have those  
15 analyses been going? I mean we want to make sure that  
16 the cost of street outreach and shelter stays is  
17 clear, right? We want to house folks. We don't want  
18 them sleeping on the street.

19           COMMISSIONER PARK: I couldn't agree more.  
20 Permanent housing is the end goal for everybody.  
21 We're really focused on that within the agency. It's  
22 why we saw the 17 percent increase last year that  
23 we're on track to exceed this year.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay. Thank you  
25 very much, Madam Chair, for the time.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Just to  
3 follow up to Council Member Rivera's question.  
4 Obviously, we agree that we're in a dire situation  
5 here and one of the tools that we do have at the  
6 table to try to expedite the move-outs of folks,  
7 independent of the 30- and 60-day rule, which I  
8 obviously do not agree with, is getting them to work.  
9 Would you be able to tell us who's responsible for  
10 applying for working papers from the federal  
11 government for the asylum seekers?

12 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think I understand  
13 the question, but bear with me if I need to clarify,  
14 obviously it's an application to the feds for work  
15 authorization, either as standalone for somebody  
16 who's applied for asylum or in conjunction with a TPS  
17 application. The City has stood up extensive clinics  
18 to help people do those applications so that has been  
19 run out of City Hall, out of the Mayor's Office for  
20 Asylum Seeker Operations, and I think tens of  
21 thousands of people have been able to submit  
22 applications. The actual work authorization  
23 documentation goes to the individual themselves, not  
24 to the City, so we don't have specific numbers on the  
25 number of people who have received work

2 authorization, but my understanding, anecdotally, is  
3 that the success rate is very high.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you know how many  
5 applications have been filed?

6 COMMISSIONER PARK: It's something along  
7 the order of 25,000 or 30,000, but I'll get back to  
8 you with the specific number.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Would you know  
10 how many employees or contractors are working on  
11 this?

12 COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm sorry. I don't  
13 since it's not directly under my purview.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. Thank you.  
15 Council Member Stevens followed by Hudson. Hello.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Good afternoon.  
17 I'm over here. I just have a couple of questions and  
18 there are various topics. The first question I have  
19 is, does the agency have any delays in processing  
20 childcare applications, and what is the average  
21 processing time for a childcare application?

22 COMMISSIONER PARK: That is largely not  
23 processed at DSS. I think it is and, Administrator  
24 French, please jump in here, but we are part of the  
25 childcare equation in that people who are on public

2 assistance can qualify also for childcare assistance,  
3 but it's not administered through the agency.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay, so I know  
5 Deputy Speaker already started to ask questions about  
6 the IDs in New York, across the city. The website  
7 often times out or will not populate appointments. Is  
8 there an issue with the administrative need to  
9 further invest in the technology?

10 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I have not heard of  
11 systemic issues with the website but, if there are  
12 specifics that you have, let me know, but we are  
13 releasing 6,800 appointments weekly, and most of  
14 those are then scheduled through the website, but I'm  
15 happy also to talk to individuals on my side to see  
16 if there's anything, but I haven't heard of any  
17 systemic challenges with the website. That doesn't  
18 mean people...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I will say, you  
20 might not have heard of systemic challenges, but we  
21 are hearing challenges back in our office around  
22 getting them so it might not be a technology thing,  
23 which is why I'm asking, is there looking for  
24 advancements to experience in some of the technology  
25 because we have been hearing in my office and in a

2 couple of other Members' offices where they've been  
3 experiencing delays or not being able to get an  
4 appointment. Just thinking maybe how do we make sure  
5 we expand in technology because that is something we  
6 often lack at the City where we're having programs  
7 that's already outdated when we get them.

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, we are  
9 definitely always looking at ways in which we can  
10 enhance our technology so this is something that  
11 we'll definitely take back and talk to the team about  
12 and happy to follow up with you or others as well on  
13 the specific issues folks might be experiencing so we  
14 can see if we experience them on testing on our side  
15 as well.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay. Just  
17 another question to follow up with this. Because  
18 there has been a rise and an increase in use of the  
19 IDs. Is there anything fiscally prohibiting the  
20 administration from creating a direct IDNYC hotline  
21 in addition to the current 3-1-1 questions redirect,  
22 and what does the staffing look like for this?

23 COMMISSIONER PARK: Certainly, there would  
24 be a cost implication for doing a direct hotline. I  
25 think it's not something that we've actively looked

2 at, which we certainly are happy to have a  
3 conversation with you about that, and I think one of  
4 the advantages of 3-1-1 is that it is a single place  
5 to go, right, so nobody has to know this is the  
6 number you call for IDNYC inquiries as opposed to  
7 everything else. Happy to have a conversation about  
8 what you're envisioning, but I do want to make sure  
9 that we're leveraging the 3-1-1 infrastructure.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Absolutely. I'm  
11 an advocate to make sure that people are using 3-1-1,  
12 understanding that it helps us collect data, but I  
13 think just also thinking about even within that  
14 infrastructure, how do we use that more as a  
15 resource?

16 My last question is over the weekend, we  
17 did hear about some employees who were processed for  
18 stealing some identities of folks who were in the  
19 shelter. What are you guys doing to prevent this from  
20 happening again, and what are some of the steps that  
21 you're implementing now after this has broken?

22 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, let me start by  
23 saying I'm horrified by the situation, and these four  
24 individuals do not represent the 12,000 employees who  
25 work hard on behalf of low-income New Yorkers every

2 day, and I'm very grateful for the District Attorney  
3 for the thorough investigation that they did. We do  
4 take our clients' privacy very seriously and fraud  
5 prevention. We have a number of mechanisms in place  
6 where we do a series of fraud detection mechanisms,  
7 looking at people's benefits, using data to see if  
8 there's any patterns of inappropriate benefit use. We  
9 have privacy guidelines and have been enhancing those  
10 in conjunction with OTI to make sure that we are  
11 putting all the protections in place to make sure  
12 that systems can't be hacked, that only eligible  
13 people have access to data. I would say clearly from  
14 this, it indicates that we have work to do so we will  
15 be following up with the Department of Investigation  
16 and the District Attorney's Office to make any  
17 changes in process that seem appropriate.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, no, thank  
19 you, and I say all that to just say because obviously  
20 there's a number of things going on in the City in  
21 these last couple of months with fraudulence and  
22 people losing the trust and the systems that we put  
23 in place and, just thinking about, with all of those  
24 things, this is still able to happen, and so thinking  
25 about what are some new innovative things that we can

2 do and, even on the conversation around technology,  
3 how are we using those to help and support some of  
4 this work so definitely would love to continue to  
5 have conversations about what we're doing to make  
6 sure we're securing and keeping everyone's  
7 information as safe as possible as we're moving  
8 forward.

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: Appreciate that. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council  
12 Member Hudson.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much,  
14 Chair, and hello, how are you all? The Preliminary  
15 Plan includes City fund savings of 1 million dollars  
16 in Fiscal 2024 and 3 million in Fiscal 2025 from the  
17 NYC Benefits Program, which contracts with community-  
18 based non-profit organizations across the city to  
19 provide assistance with public benefits, eligibility  
20 screening, and applications. Funding for this program  
21 was first added at Fiscal 2023 adoption as a joint  
22 priority between the Administration and the Council,  
23 and it's a vital resource aiming to increase public  
24 benefits enrollment amongst low-income city  
25 residents. How will the savings be generated, and is



2 HRA advocating for this cut to be restored in the  
3 Executive Plan?

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you, Council  
5 Member. We are big cheerleaders for this initiative.  
6 We think it is really important that we continue to  
7 fund CBOs to do this outreach and engagement work.  
8 When the program was originally stood up in order to  
9 be able to move quickly, there was a third-party  
10 intermediary so right now we don't directly hold the  
11 contracts with the CBOs. We are able to now take  
12 those over so that we're losing a layer of  
13 administrative costs in between, but we're going to  
14 continue to work with the CBOs.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Are you referring  
16 to CUNY?

17 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: As the third  
19 party? So you're saying that they will or will not  
20 continue to administer the program?

21 COMMISSIONER PARK: CUNY will no longer  
22 administer the program.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. How will the  
24 operations and administration of the program change  
25 when they're no longer involved?

2 COMMISSIONER PARK: DSS staff will  
3 directly administer the contracts, but we will  
4 continue to work with the not-for-profits. They will  
5 continue to do the work that they've been doing.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Do you know how  
7 many CBOs are part of the program?

8 COMMISSIONER PARK: I think it's  
9 approximately 36 plus another several doing technical  
10 assistance, yeah.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Do you know  
12 the breakdown by borough?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: Not off the top of my  
14 head, but happy to circle back with you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Can you  
16 confirm that there will be no programmatic impact to  
17 any of the CBOs in the program?

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: There's no  
19 programmatic impact from the PEG. As you may see, the  
20 baseline funding for the program, it does change year  
21 over year. We are currently in negotiations with OMB  
22 to ensure that we hit the right level of CBO funding.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. We've heard  
24 from CBO providers that despite being granted a

2 three-year award, their initial contracts were for  
3 just one year. Do you know the cause of that?

4 COMMISSIONER PARK: The program as  
5 originally structured was set up on a Calendar Year  
6 basis. We really need to be doing our contracts on a  
7 Fiscal Year basis, so we're in the process of  
8 realigning now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. We've  
10 additionally heard from providers when their first-  
11 year contracts ended in December 2023, they were not  
12 automatically given another contract. After some  
13 delay, while many of them continued to provide  
14 services without a contract in place, they were  
15 granted a six-month contract. Do you know why there  
16 was a delay and why the contract term was shortened?  
17 I assume, again, it's based on Fiscal Year.

18 COMMISSIONER PARK: Yeah, we're realigning  
19 to a Fiscal Year. We also ran into some process  
20 hiccups because that was at the point in time at  
21 which OTPS contracts were all under additional levels  
22 of OMB review, but we are moving full steam ahead  
23 now.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, great. Thank  
25 you so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I wanted to  
3 ask a question regarding the New York City Benefits  
4 Program. I saw that it's not funded beyond June 30th  
5 of this year, Fiscal Year '24, but it was intended to  
6 be a multi-year program. Where are we in terms of  
7 conversations ensuring that it's funded for future  
8 years?

9 COMMISSIONER PARK: There is funding in  
10 FY25, it is less than there was in FY24, and then  
11 we're in conversations with OMB about that.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, how much less?

13 COMMISSIONER PARK: FY24 was funded at 9.2  
14 million, FY25 at 7.2 million, so we're in the process  
15 of resolving funding levels with OMB.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right. I  
17 have a question regarding the burial assistance for  
18 undocumented individuals. HRA's Office of Burial  
19 Services provides financial assistance with funeral  
20 expenses for eligible low-income city residents.  
21 During the pandemic, there was funding available to  
22 undocumented individuals who do not qualify for this  
23 program. Does HRA still provide burial assistance to  
24 undocumented individuals?

2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Regarding that  
3 program, we look at things on a case-by-case basis  
4 and, in certain instances, there will be exceptions  
5 where we will pay for it, but I don't know if Chief  
6 Levine has more to add to that.

7 CHIEF LEVINE: That was a pandemic era  
8 addition to the budget. This is a public assistance-  
9 funded program so, as Administrator French stated, we  
10 will on a case-by-case basis be able to provide funds  
11 for undocumented people, but it's not part of the  
12 baseline.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But you don't have to  
14 be on public assistance to qualify for burial  
15 assistance.

16 CHIEF LEVINE: You have to meet the income  
17 and citizenship requirements to get the benefit  
18 generally.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So what allowed  
20 you to make the exception during the pandemic? Was  
21 their waiver?

22 CHIEF LEVINE: It was using a separate pot  
23 of money.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It was using a  
25 separate pot?

2 CHIEF LEVINE: Yeah, a one-time funding  
3 source.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I asked because  
5 I had a situation in my District where we had an  
6 asylum seeker that was murdered at one of the HERRCs,  
7 and we had to, through my office, we worked really  
8 hard to try to identify resources to have this  
9 individual picked up from the morgue and shipped to  
10 Venezuela. It took almost two months for us to be  
11 able to do that, but we did. So we funded the trip to  
12 where we shipped them to, I'm not going to say  
13 because we had to go through a lot of hurdles to get  
14 him there, but we got that privately funded, but the  
15 funeral expenses for New York were denied through the  
16 City and approved through the State so I don't  
17 understand what is the discrepancy. He was a crime  
18 victim, and is it a separate funding?

19 CHIEF LEVINE: We're happy to take a look  
20 at this particular case.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I would  
22 appreciate that because I actually spoke to the  
23 Mayor's Office personally, and I still haven't heard  
24 back about funding, but initially what I was told was  
25 they were looking into it because he was not a

2 citizen, he did not qualify, which I think is  
3 ridiculous. I think that whatever rules exist are  
4 antiquated and need to change because we are a City  
5 of immigrants, whether you came here from Venezuela  
6 the other day or not, we have a lot of really poor  
7 people in New York City, and it's really expensive to  
8 have to view and bury someone, and it's heartbreaking  
9 not to be able to do that because you don't have the  
10 resources.

11 COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely agree on  
12 the heartbreaking piece of it, and it is important  
13 that wherever possible we are leveraging federal  
14 resources and, as Chief Levine said, it is a  
15 requirement using cash assistance that you meet  
16 various immigration status, but also want to make  
17 sure that we are not applying that standard too  
18 closely or too narrowly so I will certainly follow up  
19 with you on that specifically.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Where did the funding  
21 come from that you identified during the pandemic?

22 CHIEF LEVINE: Those were private funds.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Raised through the  
24 Mayor's office, or?

2           COMMISSIONER PARK: I think we're going to  
3 need to get back to you on the specific origin. It  
4 was private, but we don't have all of the details  
5 right with us.

6           CHIEF LEVINE: It came from the Mayor's  
7 fund.

8           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I remember when  
9 we passed this bill to open, I think I was the  
10 Sponsor of the Burial Assistance Office and really  
11 centralizing those resources. On the website, it  
12 doesn't say anything about having to be a citizen in  
13 order to qualify. It says is available to low-income  
14 descendants that do not have resources or assets  
15 available to pay for their funeral, proof of low-  
16 income status may include receipt of social services  
17 benefits or public assistance, da-da-da, a legal  
18 responsible relative.

19           COMMISSIONER PARK: Just to clarify, and I  
20 think the kicker there is that receipt of social  
21 service benefits or eligibility for social service  
22 benefits. If you are a citizen and income eligible,  
23 that's one standard for being eligible for cash  
24 assistance and other benefits. There are other  
25 immigration statuses.



2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But it doesn't say  
3 that, Molly. It doesn't say that you have to have, it  
4 says that that's a form of proof of low-income.

5 COMMISSIONER PARK: Okay, so whether or  
6 not you qualify, and we can certainly look at whether  
7 or not the wording on the website needs to be  
8 clearer, but there's a lot of nuance and I will  
9 freely admit that everything I know about immigration  
10 policy I've learned in the last couple of years, but  
11 there are various immigration statuses that will  
12 allow you to qualify for benefits, even if you're not  
13 a citizen, right, so somebody who is TPS eligible or  
14 who has applied for asylum, they may be eligible for  
15 benefits so it would be inappropriate for us to say  
16 citizenship is a requirement, but if-this-then-that  
17 gets very complicated, but we should look at the  
18 language and make sure that we're being as clear as  
19 possible.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I understand  
21 that a lot of responsibility is put on your  
22 respective agencies to assist a substantial number of  
23 folks that are in New York City that call New York  
24 City home that may be in need, but I think that if  
25 we're providing these services, then we should be

2 providing them to the best of our ability and try to  
3 remove a lot of the nuances, because it just doesn't  
4 seem right to me that through the State Victims  
5 Program, somebody would qualify and that question  
6 wouldn't even come up of citizenship but, yet, when  
7 we're applying for City benefits, it does, and I know  
8 that this was not a DHS site, but I was really  
9 offended, because the family never received a call  
10 for condolences, nobody asked about the body. Had the  
11 family member that reached out to me from another  
12 state not reached out to me, the body would have been  
13 buried in Potter's Field, and I don't understand how  
14 on top of that, to add insult to injury, the City  
15 says we're not going to pay for it either. He died in  
16 a City facility because we don't have adequate  
17 security. That doesn't make sense to me. I have to  
18 say that, and I think that we should really revisit  
19 that because again, this is not even related to the  
20 asylum seekers, but we have quite a number of low-  
21 income migrants that live in the city, and I just  
22 find this draconian to say that they wouldn't qualify  
23 because of their citizenship status so if the State  
24 can figure it out, I'm sure that we can as well.

2 All right. Are there any other questions  
3 from any of the Members? No? Okay.

4 All right. Thank you so much. I know it's  
5 been a long morning, but I think we've all learned a  
6 lot, and I appreciate your willingness to answer our  
7 questions and hopefully it wasn't too bad.

8 COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you very much,  
9 Council Member.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. We're going  
13 to take a five-minute reprieve because some of us  
14 have to go and freshen up and get something to drink  
15 and we'll be right back.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Folks, please grab a  
17 seat. We're going to resume momentarily.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Monsignor, step on up.  
19 Yes, give me one second.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now move on to  
21 public testimony.

22 For those wishing to testify in person,  
23 please see the Sergeant-at-Arms in the back of the  
24 room and fill out a testimony slip. Even if you have  
25

2 registered online, please still fill out a testimony  
3 slip with the Sergeant.

4 All testimony must be on topic. Cursing  
5 is a violation of decorum. The hearing is being live-  
6 streamed and recorded. Witnesses may not use a  
7 recording device to film themselves or the  
8 proceedings while they are testifying.

9 For those wishing to testify and are on  
10 Zoom, after the in-person testimony, we will move on  
11 to virtual testimony. Those on Zoom will be called  
12 and a prompt to unmute yourself will appear on your  
13 computer.

14 All those testifying either in-person or  
15 virtually are encouraged to submit testimony at  
16 [council.nyc.gov/testify](https://council.nyc.gov/testify) or via email at  
17 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I just want to add  
19 that we have a lot of folks that are registered to  
20 testify so we may be very quiet on this end. We want  
21 to just make sure that we have all the information so  
22 if you guys could just try to keep it to the two  
23 minutes, we would really appreciate it. Thank you.

24 MONSIGNOR KEVIN SULLIVAN: Thank you so  
25 much for the opportunity. I do have written testimony

2 but, in the interest of keeping it brief, I'm just  
3 going to talk about three things, food, shelter, and  
4 how we make sure that New Yorkers have those. Food,  
5 let me begin with food. I was up in your District a  
6 few weeks ago on Ash Wednesday and so the line all  
7 the way from the middle of Saint Cecilia's to Park  
8 Avenue and we were able that day to do a little bit  
9 extra. We had fresh produce, and people were  
10 delighted with that, but it's hard to do that because  
11 the numbers are greater, they have less money, and  
12 food costs a lot more so one of the things hopefully  
13 you will consider as you do the budget this year is  
14 maybe some of those programs that we used during the  
15 pandemic where there was an additional amount of  
16 money that could go to small pantries, not huge, but  
17 maybe 15, 20 million, that could go out to those  
18 small pantries, which we have about 30 of them, and I  
19 know other groups that so food is critical, and we  
20 need a little bit of an extra boost this year in  
21 terms of food.

22               Secondly, I know the Council has been  
23 very good in some of the housing rental assistance  
24 programs. I understand some of it is in court, etc.,  
25 but that's critically important too. Whatever can be

2 done to keep New Yorkers in house is critically  
3 important.

4           The final thing which I want to talk  
5 about is the work issue in terms of who is actually  
6 helping people to stay in their apartments, who is  
7 actually delivering the food, and a lot of it is non-  
8 profit organizations like Catholic Charities, like  
9 Mainchance, and I'd like to call a special attention  
10 to bill of which you are one of the sponsors, but  
11 Council Member Hudson is the lead sponsor, Intro.  
12 243, which basically says that non-profit  
13 organizations should be paid for what it costs them  
14 to deliver the services and to fairly get an indirect  
15 rate with regard to that because that's what enables  
16 people to get help when they're facing eviction,  
17 that's what enables them to get the food they need.

18           Those are the three things that I want to  
19 raise up. In my written testimony, there is a lot  
20 more and, personally, since I am in a church on Park  
21 Avenue and 34th Street, I can really speak to the  
22 value of Mainchance because whenever somebody comes  
23 to our door, we can say, hey, just go down the block,  
24 they'll help you and so, again, I thank you. Food,  
25 shelter, supporting the organizations that provide

2 that is critically important. Thank you. I hope I  
3 didn't take too much of your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We wouldn't stop you  
5 anyway.

6 MONSIGNOR KEVIN SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you  
7 so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much,  
9 Monsignor.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, the next panel  
11 will be Gladys Little, Luchy Perez, Tyece Grant, Jake  
12 Greenberg, Allison Robinson, and Corinthia Carter.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, you may begin.  
14 Whichever end wants to start first.

15 JAKE GREENBERG: Good afternoon. My name  
16 is Jake Greenberg. I'm a Case Manager with the Center  
17 for Urban Community Services, where I provide  
18 services to people living in supportive housing. This  
19 involves connecting tenants to everything from food  
20 stamps to social security to medical and psych care  
21 in addition to building relationships with people  
22 often facing severe isolation. Across CUCS, my co-  
23 workers show up every day for people who are  
24 currently homeless and those living in supportive  
25 housing still dealing with extreme poverty. We are

2 here as DC 37 members and are currently in the  
3 process of negotiating our first union contract. We  
4 are City contractor workers facing chronic low wages.  
5 Our work is hard and often overwhelming, and I can  
6 say that every case manager and social worker I've  
7 worked with is here because they care. Across our 20-  
8 plus programs, we lose caring workers all the time  
9 because of our low wages. Our clients feel the brunt  
10 of this turnover. Our work is only as valuable as the  
11 connections we form with the people we serve, and  
12 these relationships are severed every time we lose  
13 another worker due to low pay. Our jobs are designed  
14 to be a part of the solution to homelessness in New  
15 York City. Homelessness is created by poverty. There  
16 can be no progress made towards reducing homelessness  
17 in the city if the thousands of workers across dozens  
18 of contracted agencies are left vulnerable to the  
19 same housing insecurity that our clients are trying  
20 to escape. We need higher wages to do the work that  
21 we love and the City needs us to do. We are committed  
22 to our work and united in the fight for fair  
23 compensation and dignity in our City contracts. We  
24 ask for an increase to the DSS budget to keep the



2 City's homeless services running. Thanks for your  
3 time.

4                   GLADYS LITTLE: Good afternoon, Chair  
5 Ayala and Members of the Committee. I am grateful for  
6 the opportunity to testify today. I am Gladys Little,  
7 an Eligibility Specialist and a Member of AFMI Local  
8 1549, District Council 37 in New York. I've worked in  
9 SNAP for 12 years. Unlike my colleagues who presented  
10 today, I did not testify in September. However, I can  
11 report the challenges that have been described are  
12 real. They persisted in my work since long before the  
13 September hearing. Mandatory overtime is still  
14 happening. On my daily schedule for work Monday  
15 through Friday, I start overtime at 7 a.m. until 8:30  
16 a.m. when the telephone calls began coming in. I face  
17 constant ANGIE system glitches daily. I'm required to  
18 enter each ANGIE problem in the system, which issues  
19 IT tickets and cases throughout the day. This  
20 inflicts significant harm on our clients who do not  
21 receive benefits in a timely manner. In fact, clients  
22 who do not receive benefits on their applications and  
23 recertification cases are in process suffer the  
24 closure of their cases. As a result, they are  
25 reapplying every day while the IT tickets on their

2 former cases lie unprocessed. During my interviews  
3 with these clients, their frustrations overwhelm the  
4 interview. I can hardly ask the pertinent questions  
5 so the interview takes longer. I have not seen any  
6 drastic resolution with the ANGIE system issue, a  
7 resolution which would eliminate repeated errors and  
8 erroneous cases processed repeatedly. Daily, while  
9 I'm working on a case, I have to suspend the same  
10 case several times in order to properly process it. I  
11 also have co-workers forwarding their IT ticket list  
12 to supervisors daily in attempt to get the IT issue  
13 resolved. Despite these frustrations, I am always  
14 assuring clients that they will receive the food  
15 assistance they desperately need. I tell them I  
16 remain hopeful. I have seen very little change in HRA  
17 assisting the adequate improvements that are  
18 necessary. Also, I also have seen, according to my  
19 ANGIE system, as of Friday, March 8th, there are  
20 still 21,000 case backlog. These statistics change  
21 daily. My hope is that HRA will properly address and  
22 fix the ANGIE system soon so I can do my job to  
23 ensure accurate, timely benefit delivery to the most  
24 vulnerable New Yorkers.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. If you have  
3 a longer testimony, you can email it to us. We're  
4 just trying to really keep to the two minutes because  
5 there's a lot of folks behind you that have to  
6 testify as well, but I appreciate your time.

7 GLADYS LITTLE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Please make sure that  
9 your mic is on.

10 TYECE GRANT: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala  
11 and Members of the Committee. I am grateful for the  
12 opportunity to testify today. My name is Tyece Grant  
13 and I am a SNAP Eligibility Specialist and a member  
14 of ASME Local 1549 District Council 37. I have worked  
15 in SNAP for 11 years. I testified before this  
16 committee in September of 2023 about the daily  
17 challenges I confront in my work. I can report to you  
18 that nothing in my work has changed since we last  
19 spoke because there is still a huge snap backlog,  
20 over 18,000 cases as of last Thursday. This far  
21 exceeds the backlog of 411 cases reported by the City  
22 last week. The program, ANGIE's case process system,  
23 is still a significant barrier in my work, and it  
24 contributes to the persistent backlog in SNAP. As I  
25 stated in September, this flawed case system was

2 intended to decrease the workload; however, I have  
3 found that it instead increases my workload and  
4 contributes to the backlog of SNAP cases. Basically  
5 ANGIE was designed so that supervisors, from any SNAP  
6 center, can approve your case. However, this is  
7 ineffective because supervisors can sign off a case  
8 which causes errors and you don't know who's signing  
9 off your cases, and you don't get that case back.  
10 Another worker gets the case, and this delays timely  
11 benefit delivery for our clients who need life-saving  
12 food assistance. Basically, just working in ANGIE, it  
13 has significantly decreased the processing of cases.  
14 Myself and coworkers have reported that we used to  
15 process up to 10 cases per day, but now due to the  
16 frequently glitches in ANGIE, we can only process  
17 seven cases. This all results to the system glitches  
18 in ANGIE, and we put in IT tickets, but there is  
19 still no resolution. I do have a lot more but, due to  
20 time, I just want to mention that at my site, we're  
21 not mandated overtime, however, we do have voluntary  
22 overtime, which has been extended from the hours to  
23 10 p.m. on weekdays and to 9 p.m. on Saturdays. I  
24 just want to conclude the City has stated that they  
25 hired new staff. If they have hired new staff, then

2 why is overtime still in high demand and we're not  
3 benefiting from the overtime with the ANGIE system.  
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Appreciate it.

6 ALLISON ROBINSON: Hi. My name is Allison  
7 Robinson. I'm a Case Manager at Center for Urban  
8 Community Services. I'm here today, not just as the  
9 case manager for supportive housing, but as a voice  
10 for countless individuals and families who depend on  
11 our services for stability, dignity, and hope. Our  
12 mission is not just to provide shelter, but to  
13 empower those in need to reclaim their lives and  
14 thrive in their communities. Yet, in our pursuit of  
15 this noble goal, we face an ongoing struggle, a  
16 struggle that hinges on the availability of  
17 resources. HRA and DSS agencies are entrusted with  
18 providing crucial support to most vulnerable members  
19 of our society. It stands at a crossroads. It's a  
20 crossroads where decisions impact lives, where every  
21 budget allocation echoes in the daily realities of  
22 those we serve. Today, I urge us all to recognize the  
23 vital importance of increasing resources for HRA and  
24 DSS. Supportive housing is not merely about putting a  
25 roof over someone's head. It's about addressing the

2 challenges that accompany homelessness, mental  
3 illness, addiction, and poverty. It's about providing  
4 wraparound services that enable individuals to regain  
5 their footing and become active participants in their  
6 communities once more but, to achieve this, we need  
7 adequate e funding. Increasing resources for HRA and  
8 DSS is not just about numbers on a balance sheet.  
9 It's about investing in human potential, in the worth  
10 of every individual. It's about recognizing that when  
11 we lift the most marginalized among us, we create a  
12 ripple effect of positive change that benefits  
13 society as a whole. By bolstering the resources to  
14 HRA and DSS, we can expand access to supportive  
15 housing, ensuring that no one falls through the  
16 cracks. We can enhance mental health services,  
17 substance abuse treatment, and job training programs,  
18 providing pathways to stability and self-sufficiency.  
19 We can invest in preventative measures tackling the  
20 root causes of homelessness and poverty before they  
21 spiral out of control.

22 CORINTHIA CARTER: Good afternoon.

23 Chairperson Ayala and Members of the Committee. My  
24 name is Corinthia A. Carter. I am a worker and the  
25 President of LSSA 2320, which represents 110

2 unionized workers of mobilization for justice that  
3 are currently on strike. We was just in the Bronx. We  
4 were striking in front of Bronx Housing Court this  
5 morning, and we also represent over 500 workers at  
6 Legal Services NYC that are currently preparing to  
7 enter into their contract negotiations very soon. My  
8 testimony today doesn't include metrics, though I  
9 will highlight the important stuff. As you know,  
10 across the city, because New York is a union town,  
11 there are many workers on strike, including New  
12 School, and we support them and their demand for  
13 working conditions, which MFJ members want and LSNY  
14 members want, thriving wages and a sustainable future  
15 for our city. I'll send this in because I don't have  
16 much time, but one of the things that I want to make  
17 clear that is very important to MFJ members and LSNY  
18 members is that the union embraces and joins all  
19 calls of increasing and funding in LSNY, MFJ and  
20 other organizations engaged in the critical work of  
21 maintaining the social safety network of our  
22 communities and our city, and I am a born-and-raised  
23 New Yorker so it's close to my heart. There can never  
24 be too much investment into our communities. Second,  
25 the union calls upon management everywhere to put the

2 funding increases to the work by improving the wages  
3 and benefits for those doing the work rather than  
4 investing in creating new jobs for positions that  
5 never existed but to actually give it to those people  
6 who are actually on the ground doing the work,  
7 meeting with clients, doing home visits, and making  
8 sure people are able to stay in their houses and  
9 other issues instead of increasing executive wages,  
10 which is currently happening and why we don't have a  
11 contract. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you all very  
13 much. The next panel will be Valentina Vidal, Brady  
14 Crain, William Kornblum (phonetic), Jacqueline  
15 Connor, Reverend Terry Troia, and Gabriela Sandoval  
16 Requena. Thank you.

17 You can all get started.

18 VALENTINA VIDAL: Thank you, Speaker  
19 Ayala, Members of the General Welfare Committee. My  
20 name is Valentina Vidal, and I'm the Bilingual Case  
21 Manager for the Workforce Development at GMHC. I'm  
22 here today to ask the Council's support for HRA to  
23 restore funding in the FY25 City Budget for our  
24 Realizing Through Independence Through Support and  
25 Employment Rights Workforce Development Program. I'm



2 a Case Manager at GHMC because of the RISE Program,  
3 and I'm also a HASA client. If the funding is not  
4 restored, seven GHMC staff will lose their jobs and  
5 GHMC clients will lose out on the specialized  
6 services we can provide. Founded in 1982 as a health  
7 crisis, the world's first HIV/AIDS service  
8 organization, GHMC has helped 674 HASA clients find  
9 employment by providing culturally competent and  
10 individualized assistance, including resume building,  
11 vocational training, internship, employment and  
12 benefit counseling, job placement and retention  
13 assistance for unemployed and undeployed workers of  
14 all stages of career readiness. Yet, due to the  
15 Administration budget cuts, as of July 1, 2024, HRA  
16 will eliminate RISE to satisfy the 283,000 PEG in the  
17 January Plan by cutting a 400,000 annual contract  
18 with GHMC. GHMC serves client's population with a  
19 long history of distrust in government as well as  
20 healthcare-related services delivered. We have built  
21 relationships and reputation with these communities  
22 over 42 years, which is critical to our ability to be  
23 successfully manage the RISE contract. GHMC has a  
24 SUNY Advanced Technology Training And Information  
25 Networking, ATTAIN, computer lab at our facility.

2 Recently, our lab was completely refurnished with new  
3 computers and related technology. ATTAIN enables  
4 clients to receive practical skills, training, and  
5 certification to succeed in the digital world. Please  
6 stand with GHMC and HASA clients by advocating for  
7 full restoration of the RISE program. Thank you.

8 TERRY TROIA: Good afternoon and thank  
9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Make sure your mic is  
11 on.

12 TERRY TROIA: Good afternoon. Good  
13 afternoon and thank you, Deputy Council Speaker and  
14 esteemed Staff and Council Members. I'm Terry Troia.  
15 I'm a local pastor and President of Project  
16 Hospitality, serving homeless people on Staten  
17 Island. I have been working with homeless people on  
18 the streets of Staten Island for 40 years. I have  
19 watched and held on to fragile bodies as their lives  
20 slipped away on the streets of our borough. I've had  
21 dinner with homeless people in sewer pipe rooms, in  
22 abandoned train cars, in huts underneath the  
23 abandoned North Shore line, and on the headstones of  
24 cemeteries, and tomorrow morning at five a.m. I will  
25 lead a team of six clergy people from Concerned

2 Clergy of New York City to Washington D.C. to  
3 advocate for that additional federal funds come to  
4 our city for the way that we are handling the crisis  
5 of the new immigrants. But our interfaith effort is  
6 dying and not a slow death either. We sponsored two  
7 of the new immigrant shelters on Staten Island since  
8 October of 2022. We've only gotten two months  
9 advance. We're floating two hotels with all of our  
10 saved money, and we can't do it much longer. We are  
11 owed 7 million dollars, nearly 7 million dollars, 6.9  
12 million from DHS, 2.3 million from DYCD, and a half a  
13 million from HRA. We are owed monies from DHS back to  
14 '22, '23, and now '24 Fiscal Year. 10 million dollars  
15 we are owed. We really advocate for some strategy of  
16 some kind of rapid response team that is able to cut  
17 through the red tape and assist agencies getting the  
18 PASSPort process in place and getting the back monies  
19 owed. We are not able to do this alone, and PASSPort  
20 did not input all of the budget figures. They are  
21 missing in the budget breakout. The City didn't  
22 transfer the full budget details from Accelerator to  
23 PASSPort, and we are stuck in the process and  
24 continue to be owed 10 million. We have exhausted all  
25 of our lines of credit. Beyond the concern of

1 ourselves, even more so is the concern for the  
2 homeless people who fill our streets and who need  
3 supportive housing in order to survive. For us, it is  
4 very crucial that people with severe mental health  
5 issues and behavioral health issues have the  
6 supportive housing because that is the answer to  
7 their unhoused status so we advocate for additional  
8 congregate and additional scatter site units, more  
9 than the 7,500 congregate units that are currently  
10 targeted by the City. We need to have parity between  
11 the services provided by New York 15/15 in scatter  
12 site as well as in congregate so that we're able to  
13 provide the wraparound services to keep people  
14 housed. We need to provide all different supportive  
15 housing models in order to get people off the street,  
16 and we advocate that we expand the qualifications for  
17 15/15 to include survivors of domestic violence. We  
18 urge the City to fully fund and staff all of the City  
19 agencies serving homeless people, hungry New Yorkers,  
20 and building and filling affordable and supportive  
21 housing and, finally, we urge a 5 percent COLA across  
22 all human service contracts in FY25 for 150 million  
23 set-aside. We need the people to care for the people  
24 so the people don't die on our streets. Thank you.  
25

BRADY CRAIN: Good afternoon. My name is Brady Crain, the confused CEO of Grand Central Labor Social Services, which operates the Mainchance drop-in center. About three months ago, I enjoyed a meeting with DHS leadership discussing the positive attributes of the drop-in center and how necessary they are. About two months ago, I was told by DHS that Mainchance contract would not be renewed after 06/30/2024. This is the source of my confusion. After 35 years of providing a dynamic community emphasis, a client-centered approach working with over 6,000 individuals towards permanent and transitional housing, serving over 750,000 males and over 600 individuals receiving services 24 hours a day, seven days a week for 35 years, I think we have something to say regarding homelessness. Mainchance is now being told to close its doors. The need for these services will not end on 06/30/2024. The experience and expertise of Mainchance will. Mainchance is requesting to maintain its current contract and to continue to offer homeless services under any name. I would like to thank the Council for giving me this opportunity.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. As you  
3 know, I'm very supportive of Mainchance. My question  
4 to you, Brady Crain, is if you were to continue,  
5 would you change some of your services, are there  
6 things that you think the City could help you do,  
7 what do you think would be the best for your clients?

8 BRADY CRAIN: Yes. We would like to go  
9 towards having beds, and we've done that working with  
10 our respite bed providers. Before the virus, we were  
11 working over 50 providers and have had over 100 beds.  
12 Currently without funding from the City, we're  
13 working with an agency, what's the agency Jackie?

14 JACKIE: Brotherhood.

15 BRADY CRAIN: Brotherhood, and they have  
16 developed their own funding, Brotherhood Temple, and  
17 they have developed their own funding and they  
18 service eight people out of the drop-in center. We  
19 are working with other providers to follow that same  
20 model if they have to fund their own situations so  
21 we're right there and, also, we're looking at Safe  
22 Haven contracts. I'm waiting for our second  
23 feasibility study, and we look forward to being a  
24 hybrid center, whether it's Mainchance, a drop-in  
25

2 center, and a Safe Haven. We look forward to the  
3 opportunity.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madam  
5 Chair. This is a location that is perfect in the  
6 middle of Manhattan. Lots of people are there. Mr.  
7 Crain has an art program and has galleries and food,  
8 and I feel very strongly that the 3.5 million that  
9 has been cut would be restored either as a current or  
10 Safe Haven or whatever is appropriate. Thank you for  
11 giving me the chance.

12 BRADY CRAIN: Thank you. Can I just say  
13 one thing?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's up to the  
15 Chair, Brady, up to the Chair.

16 BRADY CRAIN: Excuse me.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead.

18 BRADY CRAIN: I'm sorry. We have in a  
19 pantry feeding over 75 families this Wednesday. I  
20 need volunteers, so if you're available, please come.  
21 Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be  
23 Lauren Schuster, Judith Rosenfeld, Kristin Miller,  
24 and Doreen Thomann-Howe.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

2 KRISTIN MILLER: Okay. Good afternoon. My  
3 name is Kristin Miller, and I serve as the Executive  
4 Director of Homeless Services United. Thank you,  
5 Deputy Speaker Ayala and Members of the General  
6 Welfare Committee, for allowing me to testify today.  
7 I appreciated very much the earlier questioning of  
8 the Council Members to DSS regarding the contracting  
9 and payment issues. I'm here today to talk about a  
10 massive issue facing our non-profits, and that is the  
11 delay, problems, lateness of hard-working, mission-  
12 driven organizations just not getting paid for the  
13 work that they do. The Commissioner mentioned that  
14 there was so far this Fiscal Year only one late  
15 contract registration. While we've seen an  
16 improvement in the rate of contract registrations  
17 timing, that is only step one of a very long process.  
18 We continue to have problems with budget amendments,  
19 problems with invoicing, problems with PASSPort  
20 information that you've been hearing about already  
21 and processing backlogs in this Form 65-A process  
22 which allows us to pay our subcontracted vendors. I  
23 think what's important to understand is that the  
24 members of HSU are telling me that they are owed  
25 anywhere in the range of 700,000 to 31 million



2 dollars from the City of New York. They are at a  
3 breaking point. They have a hard time meeting payroll  
4 in some instances because they are owed so much money  
5 from the City, and the repercussions come down to the  
6 workers in the field. A lot of our organizations have  
7 not had their WEI money put into the paychecks of the  
8 individuals, because it's a multi, multi, complex,  
9 stepped process. This impacts small vendors that  
10 might be doing maintenance work and other efforts on  
11 the sites. Everyone is frustrated from clients to  
12 executive directors. There's not one solution, but  
13 there are many. We're calling for a rapid response  
14 team to clean up the backlog. We cannot have it be  
15 done on a one-by-one basis but, secondly, we need  
16 systemic reforms. We need streamlining. We need to  
17 ease up the burden on non-profits to get this  
18 paperwork processed. We need the City to staff up.  
19 There are not enough people back at the ranch to  
20 process all of this paperwork. Lastly, we do need to  
21 look at the cost of doing business. The City of New  
22 York is not keeping up with the state and feds when  
23 it comes to paying for the actual amount of cost that  
24 the expenses that it takes to run shelters and  
25 homeless service programs. Lastly, our mission-driven

2 organizations are really having a tough choice on  
3 deciding whether they should continue contracting  
4 with the City of New York or go to state and federal  
5 contracts where it's much easier to get the contracts  
6 approved and budget and payments approved and same  
7 with the federal government. They don't want to, but  
8 they must protect their organizations. With that,  
9 I'll turn it to my colleague.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

11 JUDITH ROSENFELD: Good afternoon. My name  
12 is Judith Rosenfeld, and I serve as Vice President of  
13 Special Projects for Breaking Ground, the largest  
14 developer and operator of supportive housing for low-  
15 income and chronically homeless New Yorkers. We  
16 operate more than 4,500 units of permanent and  
17 transitional housing with 2,000 more in various  
18 stages of development. We also operate the Street  
19 Outreach Program in Brooklyn, Queens, and Midtown  
20 Manhattan, which connects the most entrenched long-  
21 term homeless individuals with housing and other  
22 services. There's a lot to discuss, but I'm mainly  
23 here today on behalf of Breaking Ground to discuss  
24 how contracting and payment delays are impacting our  
25 cashflow and day-to-day operations. As of today, we

2 are owed approximately 30 million on our government  
3 contracts. This amount increases 5 million each  
4 month. Of that amount, our receivables from the  
5 Department of Homeless Services is 28 million and  
6 includes 7.5 million in invoices pending 65-A form  
7 approval. During 2023, we paid 830,000 in interest  
8 expense on our lines of credit and have paid 200,000  
9 in the first two months of 2024. At the end of 2023,  
10 the weighted average of our receivables outstanding  
11 was 325 days and, like others, the biggest issue is  
12 with PASSPort. We are owed millions of dollars  
13 because of glitches and not being able to process our  
14 invoices and documents. Based on our current  
15 forecast, our available lines of credit will be fully  
16 exhausted by the end of April. At that point, we will  
17 not be able to make payroll. I just want to make the  
18 point that even if we do receive all the money, which  
19 we hope we do, just as we were saying before, just  
20 even the amount of funding, let's just say if we even  
21 got it all, it's just not keeping up with the true  
22 cost of operating our programs, and we're just  
23 scrambling day to day to find additional funds and be  
24 able to pay our staff. Thank you so much for the  
25 opportunity to testify.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We're taking notes so  
3 don't freak out.

4 DOREEN THOMANN-HOWE: Good afternoon. My  
5 name is Doreen Thomann-Howe, and I am the Chief  
6 Operating Officer for Project Renewal, a New York  
7 City homeless services non-profit agency. Thank you,  
8 Chair Ayala and the City Council, for convening this  
9 hearing. For over 55 years, Project Renewal has  
10 provided shelter, housing, healthcare, and employment  
11 services to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers  
12 experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to the  
13 City Council for supporting our programs. We are  
14 proud to have partnered with the City to address some  
15 of the biggest challenges including the homelessness,  
16 mental health, and overdose crises. A significant  
17 portion of the Preliminary Budget aims to treat the  
18 symptoms of these challenges, but this approach comes  
19 at the expense of addressing the root causes. To make  
20 meaningful progress, we must improve stability for  
21 individuals and entire communities in the first place  
22 in part by expanding access to supportive, affordable  
23 housing, and employment opportunities. Access to  
24 affordable housing creates safe, stable, nurturing  
25 environments for children and families and can reduce

1 the risk of negative outcomes later in life. A recent  
2 report from the Comptroller reveals that  
3 understaffing in City agencies is causing delays in  
4 affordable housing development. Fully funding and  
5 staffing City agencies in addition to investing  
6 broadly in supportive and affordable housing will go  
7 a long way to addressing our housing crisis. We also  
8 need more employment opportunities for New Yorkers to  
9 support themselves. Our workforce development  
10 programs have become a vital resource for thousands.  
11 Our culinary arts training program provides New  
12 Yorkers facing barriers to employment, including  
13 veterans, with a world-class culinary education and a  
14 pathway to a fulfilling career. Graduates go on to  
15 work in settings like corporate kitchens, local  
16 restaurants, and Project Renewal's own social purpose  
17 enterprise, City Beat Kitchens, which prepares food  
18 for other New Yorkers in need. To continue critical  
19 programs like this, we rely on nearly 400,000 dollars  
20 in citywide initiative and Speaker funding. Investing  
21 in workforce development programs generates a strong  
22 return on investment for all New York City by  
23 creating conditions for entire families to thrive.  
24 Providing these services and, most importantly,  
25

2 requires the commitment of frontline staff to do the  
3 work day-in and day-out. At Project Renewal, our  
4 housing, workforce training, healthcare, substance  
5 use disorder treatment, and mental health support  
6 services are not only life-changing but often life-  
7 saving. Unfortunately, the workers delivering for our  
8 clients under City contracts earn poverty wages.  
9 That's why we stand with our sector colleagues to  
10 support the Just Pay campaign and give them a long  
11 overdue cost of living adjustment. During the  
12 pandemic, these workers were called essential.  
13 Unfortunately, the City Contract Benefit Schedule  
14 treats them as dispensable. It is time to give human  
15 service workers their fair due and just pay them. We  
16 know the Council is a true partner to the non-profit  
17 sector, and in the final budget we urge the Council  
18 to increase investment in supportive and affordable  
19 housing and workforce development programs and to pay  
20 our heroic human service workers a living wage. Thank  
21 you for the opportunity.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Lauren, can  
23 you hear us? I think you're still muted. You're  
24 muted. You're muted. We can't hear you. Lauren? Okay,

2 we'll get back to you, Lauren. We're going to move  
3 on. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL:

5 The next panel will be Catherine Trapani,  
6 Alison Wilkey, Arturo Brito, and Pernell Brice.

7 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Good afternoon. Thank  
8 you for the opportunity to testify. My name is  
9 Catherine Trapani. I am the AVP of Public Policy at  
10 Volunteers of America Greater New York, a 128-year-  
11 old anti-poverty organization working to end  
12 homelessness. Our staff is our best asset. The  
13 dedicated professionals at VOA across the city are  
14 delivering critical services to help people  
15 experiencing homelessness link to and maintain  
16 housing. Thank you for all of the discussion about  
17 payment delays. I know that we're not alone. You've  
18 already heard about it, but we absolutely need a  
19 solution. We would also really welcome your support  
20 on reversing the PEGs. The Commissioner testified  
21 earlier the notion that they were going to cut money  
22 but then allow us to reallocate to pay our staff more  
23 just doesn't make sense to me. The cuts actually  
24 wound up rolling back the investments that the  
25 Council put in to pay workers a fair wage so we

2 desperately need those PEGs to be reversed so that we  
3 can have the resources that we need to pay our  
4 workers to do the life-saving work that they're doing  
5 across the city every single day. To that end, I want  
6 to echo my colleague's call for the Just Pay  
7 campaign. We need a meaningful COLA and one that is  
8 not going to be rolled back with some other mid-year  
9 cuts. The forecast that I've seen show much rosier  
10 tax revenues and other things so we believe that the  
11 City should have the resources to reverse some of the  
12 harmful cuts and deliver the pay increases that our  
13 workers desperately need. We also need to make sure  
14 that our staff has the tools that they need to help  
15 clients transition into permanent housing so we would  
16 very much welcome the implementation of the Council's  
17 bills to improve access to CityFHEPS. Currently,  
18 about 60 percent of our families in shelter and 85  
19 percent of the single adults that we serve cannot  
20 meet the work requirements, even though they've been  
21 scaled back and, of course, the Council's bills would  
22 address that, and we know that there is a tremendous  
23 crush in our city and need for shelter capacity but,  
24 because of these stringent work requirements that the  
25 Administration has refused to roll back, our clients



2 are not able to qualify for the main way that they  
3 would exit. I just wanted to point out that statistic  
4 because I think it's really startling. I have got  
5 other stuff in here about the need to prioritize  
6 restoring headcount and continue to meet the need of  
7 the agencies, but I'll submit some of this in  
8 writing, but I'm just really grateful to you, Deputy  
9 Speaker Ayala, and to all of your Colleagues here at  
10 the Council for being a true ally to helping us in  
11 our work to end homelessness in New York City.

12                   ARTURO BRITO: Good afternoon, Deputy  
13 Speaker, Council Members. Thank you for your time.  
14 I'm particularly sensitive to how valuable your time  
15 is. I've worked in government before so I'm very  
16 sensitive to that. I'm going to give a brief overview  
17 first about our organization, Children's Health Fund,  
18 and then I'll talk about some concerns we have with  
19 the Preliminary Budget then I'm going to give an  
20 overview of Healthy and Ready to Learn and turn it  
21 over to our Vice President, Pernell Brice of Policy  
22 and Advocacy, to give more details in the two minutes  
23 allotted to him.

24                   I'm Arturo Brito, President and Chief  
25 Executive Officer of the Children's Health Fund. I'm

2 also a community pediatrician with Population Health  
3 Focus. The Children's Health Fund has been in New  
4 York City since 1987, and we continue to provide  
5 services throughout the city to homeless shelters,  
6 bringing comprehensive healthcare services, medical,  
7 mental, dental, and meeting social drivers of health  
8 for children and families in those homeless shelters.  
9 Our flagship program also has a state-of-the-art  
10 clinic in the South Bronx. We are focused on children  
11 and families, not only in New York City, but because  
12 of the model programs that we developed through  
13 mobile clinics, school-based clinics, telehealth, and  
14 others, we have a national network of 24 programs in  
15 15 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Again, our flagship  
16 program is here in New York City, and we're looking  
17 to expand to other sites throughout New York over the  
18 coming years. In terms of the Preliminary Budget for  
19 Mayor Adams, we understand the challenging time this  
20 is. Nonetheless, we're concerned about some of the  
21 proposed changes and reductions in the budget that  
22 are going to impact our children in the city. A 221-  
23 million-dollar reduction from early child care and  
24 education, for instance, a 50-million-dollar  
25 reduction in Fiscal Year '24 for outyears for early

2 childhood efficiencies, 9.5 million reduction for  
3 childcare claiming in ACS, and others that you have  
4 details of. I'm going to turn over now to Mr. Brice  
5 to talk about our Healthy and Ready to Learn program,  
6 which we have through your support, thank you very  
7 much, since 2014 have had in the city. Pernell.

8           PERNELL BRICE: Good afternoon, Committee.  
9 Councilwoman, it's great seeing you.

10           Again, my name is Pernell Brice, and I'm  
11 the Vice President for Policy and Advocacy for  
12 Children's Health Fund. As Arturo said, since 2014,  
13 we've been funded by the New York City Council for  
14 our Healthy and Ready to Learn program. This program  
15 complements our overall services to provide  
16 comprehensive healthcare to children by also creating  
17 a program that really ensures that children stay in  
18 school. The focus is to address many issues that keep  
19 children out of school, many that are rooted in  
20 social, economic, racial issues. Our focus is really  
21 trying to meet kids where they are. We want to make  
22 sure that they have the resources to see so we  
23 provide services. We want to make sure that they  
24 don't miss school because of dental issues. We do  
25 dental days at schools like PS49 and in your

2 District, Councilwoman, and so our goal with HRL is  
3 also to, and I know it's important to you,  
4 Councilwoman, is address barriers like asthma that  
5 prevents students from being in school so that is our  
6 focus as well as addressing trauma, whether it's  
7 childhood trauma or trauma in the community, gun  
8 violence as well, and so we've been very thankful for  
9 the amount of funding that we received in the tune of  
10 750,000 dollars. Again, we'll be reapplying for that,  
11 but we also stand on support of many of our other  
12 non-profits that have spoken today about the  
13 challenges of receiving funding. We've had  
14 challenges. It's been a little bit quicker this year,  
15 but we want to just say we're thankful for the  
16 funding and we hope that you'll continue to support  
17 our other non-profit brethren who are doing great  
18 work in this movement.

19 ALISON WILEY: Good afternoon. My name is  
20 Alison Wilkey, and I'm the Director of Government  
21 Affairs and Strategic Campaigns with the Coalition  
22 for the Homeless. Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for the  
23 opportunity to testify.

24 As the court and City-appointed  
25 independent monitor of the DHS shelter system, along

2 with our partners at the Legal Aid Society, we're  
3 uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact  
4 of proposed funding for the shelter system and  
5 related programs serving all unhoused New Yorkers. We  
6 will submit full written testimony, but I'd like to  
7 focus today on five priorities. First, the City needs  
8 to invest more in low-barrier shelter settings,  
9 including single occupancy, Safe Havens, and  
10 stabilization beds. The Mayor has often stated the  
11 need for creating more Safe Haven beds, but the City  
12 and State instead are doubling down on policing  
13 homelessness, which we know does not work. The  
14 coalition has called for at least 3,000 additional  
15 Safe Haven beds but, so far in FY24, according to the  
16 PMMR, the City has created only 120 new beds. Second,  
17 the City needs expanded Intensive Mobile Treatment  
18 teams and more funding for Assertive Community  
19 Treatment teams. Both ACT and IMT are a critical part  
20 of addressing the needs of unsheltered people with  
21 serious mental illness but, just a few days ago, we  
22 had an internal meeting about a client of the  
23 Coalition for the Homeless who has been waiting a  
24 year and a half to be connected with an IMT team. No  
25 one should wait that long, and our experience is in

2 no way unique. Third, we're very concerned with the  
3 City's attack on the Right to Shelter and with the  
4 day-to-day problems we're seeing as our clients are  
5 trying to avail themselves of that life-saving right.  
6 While we acknowledge that the City has managed a  
7 significant influx of new arrivals, it doesn't  
8 relieve the City of its legal and moral  
9 responsibility to provide safe, decent, and  
10 accessible shelter to those who need it. In the past  
11 month, the coalition has received a surge of  
12 complaints from homeless longer-term New Yorkers who  
13 either transferred from their existing placement or  
14 who are newly entering the shelter system and were  
15 directed to a placement, only to learn when they  
16 arrived that the shelter didn't have a bed available  
17 or that they were sent to the wrong shelter site so  
18 this has resulted in people sleeping in chairs for  
19 days or being back out on the street, both of which  
20 are unacceptable. We're also seeing significant  
21 delays in the processing and fulfilling of requests  
22 for reasonable accommodations for homeless  
23 individuals with disabilities so whether the cause  
24 here is insufficient budgets, too few staff, lack of  
25 training, or mismanagement, the result is the same,

1 that people's rights are being denied. Fourth, I know  
2 we've already covered a lot in questioning about the  
3 CityFHEPS program and that expansion and the chronic  
4 underfunding, but I do just want to note that the  
5 City's Preliminary Budget doesn't include any  
6 increases based on increased eligibility from the law  
7 that the City Council passed in the fall. I'd just  
8 like to note that the successful expansion of  
9 CityFHEPS really is dependent on the City fixing the  
10 delays and the hurdles that plague every step of the  
11 process and that our clients experience constantly.  
12 Finally, to end homelessness, the City must create  
13 more affordable housing for homeless and extremely  
14 low-income New Yorkers. We're calling on the City to  
15 allocate 2.5 billion dollars in new construction  
16 financing each year for the next five years for  
17 apartments to be specifically built for homeless and  
18 extremely low-income New Yorkers. That funding would  
19 support doubling the set-aside in new affordable  
20 housing developments for homeless households to 30  
21 percent, building an additional 6,000 apartments per  
22 year for extremely low-income households, and  
23 accelerating the creation of 15,000 City-funded  
24 supportive housing units by scheduling their  
25

2 completion by 2025 instead of 2013. We look forward  
3 to working with the Council on the budget and other  
4 legislation to address the needs who are unhoused or  
5 precariously housed throughout New York City.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.

7 Just a reminder that we're calling all of  
8 the in-person panels first so, if we call you and  
9 you're on Zoom, you'll have an opportunity after we  
10 finish the in-person panels.

11 Next, we'll have Raun Rasmussen, Adriene  
12 Holder, Abby Biberman, and Cathy Cramer.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

14 ABBY BIBERMAN: Thank you. My name is Abby  
15 Biberman. I'm Associate Director of the Public  
16 Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group.  
17 I've worked with individuals and families who are  
18 attempting to apply or recertify for public  
19 assistance and SNAP and families facing eviction and  
20 seeking rental assistance, and I appreciate the  
21 opportunity to offer the following comments. As part  
22 of the lawsuit that my office filed with the Legal  
23 Aid Society against the City for failing to process  
24 applications and recertifications and issue benefits  
25 timely and for failure to maintain systems and to



2 complete these applications, the agency was ordered  
3 to come into compliance with federal and state  
4 processing requirements by March 31, 2024 and, last  
5 week, the Mayor announced that the City had reduced  
6 its backlog significantly from over 50,000 to just  
7 over 1,500 although that number has been called into  
8 question by staff who testified earlier today so we  
9 will look into that. A reduced backlog sounds like  
10 good news, and it could be, but it does not tell the  
11 full story. We have concerns that clients are still  
12 unable to get through on the phone line to complete  
13 their phone interviews, which would result in the  
14 City processing applications in a timely manner,  
15 perhaps, but ultimately denying a large number of  
16 cases, and we've seen this in Local Law data where  
17 there was an increase in the number of denials due to  
18 failure to complete the interview, but you would not  
19 know that from the numbers the Administration  
20 provided last week. We're continuing to explore the  
21 phone interview and other barriers to accessing  
22 benefits as we litigate our case against the City. My  
23 written testimony includes stories of multiple  
24 clients and a NYLAG attorney who reported waiting  
25 over an hour on multiple occasions and sent us

2 screenshots to get through on the phone interview  
3 line. Some clients were denied for failure to  
4 complete their interview, and others fortunately  
5 contacted our office in time for us to intervene and  
6 conduct advocacy, but we also know that clients have  
7 submitted documents online and in\*person and are  
8 still being denied and discontinued. I'm almost done.  
9 These are all clients in need who have taken repeated  
10 steps to complete their applications. They're being  
11 wrongfully denied benefits to which they're entitled.  
12 We are glad that the City is working to expeditiously  
13 process benefits, but it must simultaneously maintain  
14 functional systems for clients to complete their  
15 applications and recertifications. Please refer to my  
16 written testimony for NYLAG's initiative requests,  
17 for which we are asking for renewed funding. Thank  
18 you.

19 RAUN RASMUSSEN: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is Raun Rasmussen, and I'm the Executive Director of  
21 Legal Services NYC. Our staff of nearly 700 fights  
22 for justice for low-income New Yorkers by providing  
23 free civil legal services to more than 110,000 New  
24 Yorkers every year. Matt Desmond, the Harvard  
25 sociologist who wrote *Evicted*, stated without

2 shelter, everything falls apart, but we know that  
3 it's also true that without safety from domestic  
4 violence, without a sufficient stable income, and  
5 without a high-quality education and access to  
6 healthcare, everything else falls apart. Your funding  
7 for legal services for low-income New Yorkers allows  
8 us to help our clients hold their lives together in  
9 all the ways that are so critical. We ask that you  
10 increase that funding in Fiscal Year '25 to 7 million  
11 dollars for the organizations that provide those  
12 services. We also ask that you restore funding for  
13 Legal Services NYC's Veterans Justice Project to  
14 150,000 dollars, a return to Fiscal Year 2020  
15 funding. That project began in November 2011 and,  
16 since that time, we've helped thousands of veterans  
17 and their families stabilize their homes and incomes.  
18 New York City's children were hit hardest by the  
19 pandemic, and we ask you to provide 500,000 dollars  
20 to support our Access to Education project, which  
21 will help kids with special needs and disabilities,  
22 provide language access for students and their  
23 parents, and will work with the schools to implement  
24 restorative healing programs so that children who are  
25 victims of sexual harassment or violence in the

2 schools can be responded to with measures that are  
3 supportive and not punitive. Finally, as we testified  
4 last year, both the State and the City are  
5 dramatically underfunding the work that we do by tens  
6 of millions of dollars annually. Legal Services NYC,  
7 for example, gets roughly 30 million to provide  
8 eviction prevention services to the City but, because  
9 the case rate is so low, we need to raise an  
10 additional 10 to 15 million every year to hire  
11 sufficient staff to do the work that the contracts  
12 require, and that's just one underfunded contract. We  
13 can't keep up. You've been our partner for decades in  
14 working to meet the needs of all New Yorkers. Thanks  
15 for your help now to make sure that we're fairly paid  
16 for the work that we do to help low-income New  
17 Yorkers get and keep the benefits and services they  
18 need and deserve, and I just want to echo all of the  
19 stories that you heard about PASSPort and the  
20 challenges that we have had as well in trying to make  
21 payroll. Thank you for your support in helping to get  
22 those issues resolved.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

24 ADRIENE HOLDER: Good afternoon. Adriene  
25 Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice for the

2 Legal Aid Society. I want to first thank you, Deputy  
3 Speaker and so many folks on this Committee, for  
4 holding this hearing and also being very engaged and  
5 active supporters of what is most dire and what's  
6 most needed right now for low-income New Yorkers is  
7 stability in subsistence benefits or in their  
8 housing. You will receive our written testimony, we  
9 have it here today to be submitted, that outlines all  
10 the restorations and issues around discretionary  
11 funding, but what I wanted to talk to you today just  
12 about was just how essential our housing justice work  
13 and shelter work exemplifies our integrated and  
14 multi-pronged approach to addressing the civil legal  
15 challenges that low-income New Yorkers face. Our  
16 Housing Justice Foreclosure Prevention and Homeless  
17 Rights Units are on the ground and have helped  
18 hundreds of thousands of people remain in their homes  
19 or find a path to stable, extremely affordable  
20 housing. Our Housing Justice Helpline advises callers  
21 in crisis and provides advice on a wide range of  
22 housing matters including rental assistance  
23 eligibility and, for those who obtain rental  
24 assistance vouchers, we provide rights education and  
25 legal assistance to ensure that they use that

2 assistance as intended and overcome any remaining  
3 barriers to housing, such as source-of-income  
4 discrimination, which we were able to pass with the  
5 help of this Council. Importantly, the Legal Aid  
6 Society was instrumental in the creation of State-  
7 administered Family Homelessness and Eviction  
8 Prevention Supplement, FHEPS and CityFHEPS, through  
9 our *Jiggetts v. Grinker* litigation. In addition, we  
10 collaborated with housing justice advocates to  
11 maximize our collective reach and mobilize community  
12 members. In turn, we leverage this deep knowledge and  
13 the needs and challenges of our client communities in  
14 our policy advocacy. The landmark reforms of the  
15 CityFHEPS rental assistance program that the City  
16 Council passed last year are just one example of the  
17 positive impact that our strong partnership creates  
18 for low-income New Yorkers. This important expansion  
19 has the potential to dramatically improve the lives  
20 of many of our clients, including tenants, whose  
21 income fall in the gap between 50 percent of the  
22 median income and 200 percent of the federal poverty  
23 line. This advocacy, along with representing, you  
24 heard previously, our client, the Coalition for the  
25 Homeless, in working on subsistence benefits issues

2 with NYLAG could not be done without the support of  
3 so much of the funding we receive and, particularly,  
4 the pot that is described here as discretionary,  
5 which is legal services for low-income New Yorkers, a  
6 pot that we are in with a number of other providers  
7 that we're asking for an increase this year. Again,  
8 you'll see all the other discretionary requests that  
9 are in our written testimony, but it is essential for  
10 us in the moment that we are here experiencing the  
11 crisis of shelter as well as the affordability crisis  
12 with housing that we are able to maintain the support  
13 that we receive from the City Council and, to echo  
14 what Raun is saying, we definitely need the Council  
15 to continue to stay with the City and making sure  
16 that the Right-to-Counsel funding is enhanced so that  
17 we can actually afford to sustain that program, and  
18 we look forward to more support from you all as we  
19 move forward. Thank you.

20 CATHY CRAMER: Good afternoon. So nice to  
21 see you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and thank you for  
22 letting me have the opportunity to testify. My name  
23 is Cathy Cramer, and I am the CEO of Family Legal  
24 Care, which is formerly LIFT. I'd like to thank the  
25 New York City Council for its long-term support of

2 us, without which we could not do our vital work to  
3 assist unrepresented litigants and families and  
4 caregivers who are confronting issues in New York  
5 City Family Court at the heart of their well-being,  
6 including child support, custody, visitation,  
7 domestic violence, guardianship, and parentage. The  
8 New York City Family Courts have been under-resourced  
9 and overburdened for decades, and 80 percent of  
10 litigants come to Family Court without a lawyer.  
11 Unrepresented litigants are disproportionately low-  
12 income, from communities of color, and are often  
13 undocumented or speak monolingual Spanish. The  
14 underinvestment in the Family Courts, and  
15 particularly in its failure to prioritize child  
16 support services, has significant effects for the  
17 families in New York City. Child support can be a  
18 literal lifeline for many families, but it is not  
19 uncommon for custodial parents to receive none of the  
20 money that they are entitled to. Family Legal Care is  
21 the only organization in New York City doing this  
22 work. We reach almost 30,000 families every year. We  
23 have attorneys that give legal advice and  
24 consultations and provide legal information in the  
25 courthouses and on our helplines, through our library



2 of over 60 legal resource guides in nine languages,  
3 and our innovative digital justice tools but, despite  
4 the pivotal role we play to increase access to  
5 justice in Family Court, Family Legal Care is now  
6 facing a potential significant loss of critical  
7 funding from the Mayor's office due to a transition  
8 of our contract from the Mayor's Office of Criminal  
9 Justice to the Mayor's Office to End Gender-Based  
10 Violence. We urge the Council to increase  
11 discretionary funding in the upcoming budget cycle to  
12 ensure that we can continue to serve the thousands of  
13 families who rely on us. We wrote much more about  
14 that in our written testimony. Strong families are  
15 essential building blocks for a thriving city and,  
16 with your increased support, Family Legal Care can  
17 continue to be part of the solution. You've always  
18 been very generous to us, and we so appreciate that  
19 and look forward to working with you in the future.  
20 Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.

22 Our next panel will be McGregor Smyth,  
23 Omarax Rosa, Antonia House, and Anna Arkin-Gallagher.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

2 MCGREGOR SMYTH: Afternoon. My name is  
3 McGregor Smyth, and I'm the Executive Director of New  
4 York Lawyers for the Public Interest. I just wanted  
5 to open by thanking Deputy Speaker Ayala and this  
6 Committee and the Council for really being a champion  
7 for the critical legal services, civil legal services  
8 in particular, for New Yorkers in need including  
9 NYLPI's, which combines law organizing and the power  
10 of pro bono legal services as well as medical  
11 services to help New Yorkers achieve justice. We are  
12 a proud part of the New York City Council's Immigrant  
13 Health Initiative which serves both recent migrants  
14 as well as immigrant communities across the city and,  
15 through the Council's leadership, NYLPI advocates  
16 have both saved lives and improved healthcare across  
17 the city. Instead of talking about numbers, which  
18 we'll do in our written testimony, I really wanted to  
19 spend the short time together lifting up the people  
20 who really benefit from the Council's leadership. One  
21 of our recent clients from Elmhurst is Mrs. G., who  
22 came to NYLPI after her diagnosis with end-stage  
23 renal disease. She had lost her ability to work as a  
24 nanny and to earn a livelihood and was enduring this  
25 just really horribly depleting dialysis regimen. She

2 was undocumented and uninsured and unable to access  
3 the healthcare that she needed for a longer-term  
4 solution, which was a kidney transplant. After a  
5 legal assessment in our office, our staff found a  
6 pathway to gain her access to health insurance and to  
7 change her status, filed an immigration application,  
8 got her on health insurance and also through advocacy  
9 got her on a kidney transplant list, and I'm  
10 incredibly happy to report that just this past  
11 December, she received a successful kidney transplant  
12 and is now living happily at home with her family and  
13 feeling a lot more healthy. This is just one story  
14 among many from NYLPI and our Initiative partners,  
15 and we're asking for an enhancement to support this  
16 really important work. I also just wanted to echo our  
17 other partners who just testified about the critical  
18 need for funding fairness to support the advocacy and  
19 incredible work of our staff. Thank you.

20 ANNA ARKIN-GALLAGHER: Hi, good afternoon.  
21 My name is Anna Arkin-Gallagher. I'm a Supervising  
22 Attorney and Policy Counsel in the Civil Justice  
23 Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. Thank you to  
24 the Committee and Deputy Speaker Ayala for the  
25 opportunity to testify today. BDS is a public defense

2 office representing people in criminal, family, and  
3 immigration matters. Our Civil Justice Practice  
4 provides legal and social work services to our  
5 clients to minimize or prevent collateral  
6 consequences and ensure that the people we represent  
7 can keep their jobs, stay in their homes, and support  
8 their families. We echo our colleagues request that  
9 the City increase support for civil legal services,  
10 but urge the City to also invest in opportunities to  
11 fund organizations in ways that allow providers to  
12 intervene to resolve issues before the need for  
13 litigation arises. As an example, we routinely  
14 address public benefits issues for our family defense  
15 clients whose children are temporarily removed from  
16 their care, ensuring their public assistance budget  
17 for rental assistance and housing vouchers remains  
18 unaffected despite a temporary change in household  
19 size. Without intervention, children are removed from  
20 their parents' budgets without notice, resulting in  
21 rent not being paid and eventually in non-payment  
22 proceedings being filed, often before the family is  
23 even made aware of this issue. We believe full  
24 representation is essential, but tying access to  
25 legal representation only to court appearances misses

2 opportunities for earlier, more efficient resolution  
3 of issues that can avoid future court proceedings  
4 entirely. We're grateful to Speaker Adams and the  
5 Council for the generous Speaker's Initiative funding  
6 to support our clients, allowing us to provide  
7 interdisciplinary representation, including the early  
8 intervention assistance referenced above. We ask that  
9 this funding be renewed. BDS also receives  
10 discretionary IOI funding in support of our  
11 immigration practice. We continue to expand services  
12 to meet our clients' needs, including focusing on  
13 enforcing low-wage immigrant workers' rights and also  
14 seeking deferred action for workers who are  
15 experiencing labor exploitation. We've seen dozens of  
16 clients whose employment claims have also led to  
17 meaningful immigration relief, including obtaining  
18 work authorization as well as the administrative  
19 closure of their removal proceedings where it would  
20 otherwise not be possible. We ask that the Council  
21 increase this funding to allow us to expand this  
22 work. We thank the City Council for the opportunity  
23 to testify today and for your continued support of  
24 the people, family, and communities we represent. Our  
25 written testimony further elaborates on the critical

2 interventions we provide to clients with criminal,  
3 ACS, and immigration matters. Thank you.

4           OMARAX ROSA: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala  
5 and esteemed Members of the General Welfare  
6 Committee. My name is Omarax Rosa, and I am the  
7 Director of Housing Justice at the Harlem Community  
8 Justice Center, a program of the Center for Justice  
9 Innovation. Economic justice is a crucial component  
10 of what allows a community to thrive. Housing  
11 instability and poverty impact individuals greatly.  
12 While many programs have been made available to  
13 support low-income families, the provisions of such  
14 have been diminished by a myriad of issues. By  
15 addressing issues early, we keep people safely housed  
16 and avoid the legal system involvement. The Center  
17 serves as a bridge between the system and the  
18 communities, developing strategies to advance access  
19 to justice and improve economic housing security.  
20 Today, I will be discussing the main issues that the  
21 Center staff see residents seeking to resolve,  
22 housing voucher program, the One-Shot Deal, SNAP  
23 replacement, and also the dearth of affordable  
24 housing. We ask that the Council ensures that non-  
25 profits like the Center for Justice Innovation and

2 City agencies doing this valuable and meaningful work  
3 are adequately supported in this year's budget. New  
4 York City is in a housing crisis. Less than 1 percent  
5 of apartments are priced below 2,400 dollars a month,  
6 making it only affordable to those who make 60,000 a  
7 year or more. The Harlem Community Justice Center and  
8 the Center for Justice Innovation, after years of  
9 tackling our clients' housing concerns at every  
10 level, the Center stands ready to enhance its  
11 partnership with this Council to better address the  
12 housing issues for New York. It is critical to ensure  
13 housing courts and resource centers are accessible,  
14 fair, and are able to have the much-needed assistance  
15 and resources available to the community. The Center  
16 for Justice Innovation looks forward to continuing to  
17 partner with the Council to ensure that New Yorkers  
18 can live safely and securely in their homes. Thank  
19 you for the opportunity to testify.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much.

21 Our next panel will be Greg Silverman,  
22 Kim Moscaritolo, Nicholas Buess, Jerome Nathaniel,  
23 and Paula Inhargue.

24 GREG SILVERMAN: Thank you to the General  
25 Welfare Committee and Chair Ayala for holding the

2 budget hearing and the opportunity to submit  
3 testimony. My name is Greg Silverman, I'm the CEO of  
4 the Westside Campaign Against Hunger, been working in  
5 New York City for 45 years, our organization, now we  
6 feed about 80,000 New Yorkers in need, over 2.2  
7 million pounds of fresh produce, which is 50 percent  
8 of what we give out, because we know that healthy  
9 food is important to our customers and our community.  
10 We're focused not just on a choice of apples or  
11 bananas, but on the location of service, delivery  
12 models, and the time spent securing food, and this  
13 choice isn't just an economic win for everyone, it's  
14 also a health win. We did a recent study with  
15 Columbia University, and the findings are showing an  
16 improvement in food security is linked to increased  
17 frequency of fresh vegetables and fruit consumption,  
18 supports the idea that food security outcomes in  
19 future interventions to reduce diet-related chronic  
20 diseases, investing directly in nutritious food for  
21 and with direct service providers can lead to  
22 improved well-being for New Yorkers in need. We work  
23 as a network as well as part of the round table with  
24 seven of the other largest emergency food providers  
25 in the city, such as New York Common Pantry, Met



2 Council, POTS, Project Hospitalities, and others, and  
3 we all track pricing to push for better product  
4 across the network, and it's really important, but we  
5 collaborate well, we do great research, we're feeding  
6 people, but the truth of the matter is we're all  
7 struggling. In Westside Campaign Against Hunger  
8 alone, this summer we served 42 percent more people  
9 than we did the previous year, which was nearly  
10 double what we served before the pandemic. The  
11 numbers are not going in a positive direction. You  
12 heard it earlier today. The CFC program, Community  
13 Food Connections, is an essential program. Any  
14 thoughts that it will be cut or adapted based on  
15 Trusting words like the commitment from the City or  
16 adequate levels, like we know that the 50-odd million  
17 that we have right now is still not enough. We need  
18 at least 60 million to keep it where it should be.  
19 Further, we want to make sure there's no cuts to  
20 school food, the 60 million cuts. Those have been  
21 huge wins. Thirdly, just HRA, as you've heard, we  
22 want to see more support to HRA staff members because  
23 truth of the matter is just clearing up the backlog  
24 is not nearly enough. The truth is we should be best  
25 practice at this, and that's because our customers

2 deserve it so we have to get more staff to provide  
3 more supports to customers in need. Thank you.

4           NICK BUESS: Hi, Chair Ayala. Thanks so  
5 much for giving me a moment. I'm Nick Buess. I'm the  
6 Director of Government Relations at the Food Bank for  
7 New York City. Thanks to your great Staff for all of  
8 their hard work on these really important issues.  
9 I'll say just very briefly, Food Bank serves about  
10 800 food pantries and soup kitchens across the five  
11 boroughs. Those food programs are seeing an 80  
12 percent increase in visits from before the pandemic  
13 still today, and the sad reality is that the food  
14 supply that we have available across the city has  
15 decreased which is why it pains me to say that we  
16 don't onboard new members. There are about 200  
17 organizations that have reached out to us and said,  
18 hey, we're distributing food, we have community need,  
19 and we say we don't have the food for you right now.  
20 Like Greg says, investing in Community Food  
21 Connection is essential. I want to thank you for your  
22 questions to HRA about NYC benefits as well. That's  
23 an essential program. We believe that community-based  
24 organizations are the front door to the community  
25 and, when organizations are serving food, that's a

2 great way to get people in the door so thank you for  
3 continuing to advocate for that. We support a 10-  
4 million-dollar investment in that and ensuring that  
5 the current organizations that are doing that work  
6 can continue to do that work. I'll stop there.

7 Thanks.

8           JEROME NATHANIEL: Good afternoon. Thank  
9 you so much for having us here today to testify on  
10 the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. My name is Jerome  
11 Nathaniel. I'm the Director of Policy and Government  
12 Relations at City Harvest. City Harvest is one of New  
13 York City's largest food rescue organizations. This  
14 year, we're on pace to rescue over 77 million pounds  
15 of food, perfectly edible food, mostly fresh produce  
16 and delivering that to a network of over 400  
17 emergency food programs across the five boroughs.  
18 Unfortunately, even as we're ramping up our services  
19 to be 20 percent higher than it was before COVID, we  
20 know that's simply not enough. It's not fair nor is  
21 it possible for emergency food providers and  
22 community-based organizations to make up the gap in  
23 place of effective, efficient, and equitable public  
24 policy, and we think there are a number of ways that  
25 the budget can invest in the fight against hunger.

2 It's written in depth in my testimony and you  
3 presented a lot of strong, important questions to HRA  
4 about it earlier today, but I do want to go through  
5 some of them. First and foremost, we're very  
6 concerned about staffing at HRA. We think that is  
7 critically important that they go above and beyond  
8 the backlog and really makes sure that is well-  
9 staffed and they're recruiting and retaining staff  
10 because the fact of matter is for every meal that we  
11 provide, SNAP provides access to nine meals so it's  
12 really important that the City is doing its part to  
13 really invest in enrolling people into the SNAP  
14 program. Secondly, this might sound familiar, we're  
15 all in the same anti-hunger community, but we're  
16 asking for Community Food Connections to go up to 60  
17 million dollars. Even while pantry visits have  
18 increased by 80 percent, we're not asking the City to  
19 increase CFC funded by 80 percent. We're simply  
20 asking for a really modest 5-million-dollar increase  
21 or so to meet the increased cost of operating the  
22 program and also to the increased demand for  
23 emergency food across our city. We're also asking for  
24 the City to really do its best to leverage state,  
25 federal funding, any funding to really support the

2 response to new arrivals. Many of our program  
3 partners are seeing a huge increase in demand at zip  
4 codes that are near shelters and HERRC sites so it's  
5 really important that the City really reimburses or  
6 supports them in that response. Finally, I do also  
7 want to make an ask in solidarity with No Kids  
8 Hungry. We're asking for the City to restore 60  
9 million that was proposed to be cut from OFNS. School  
10 meals are important, child hunger is up, and a lot of  
11 those same families are going to City Harvest pantry  
12 programs. Thank you again for this time.

13 KIM MOSCARITOLO: Thank you so much to  
14 Chair Ayala for having this hearing. My name is Kim  
15 Moscaritolo. I'm the Director of Communications and  
16 Advocacy for Hunger Free America, and I am grateful  
17 to be here to submit this testimony on behalf of the  
18 estimated 1.28 million city residents who now  
19 struggle against hunger. Our message is very simple.  
20 New Yorkers are facing massive hunger and food  
21 insecurity crises citywide, and we need a massive  
22 response from the City, especially one that focuses  
23 on increasing participation in the federally funded  
24 SNAP, WIC, school breakfast, and summer EBT programs.  
25 According to the most recent USDA data, one out of

2 every five children in New York City experiences food  
3 insecurity, while more than one quarter of children  
4 in the Bronx are food-insecure. Food insecurity among  
5 employed adults increased in nearly every borough  
6 compared to three years ago. By far the most  
7 impactful and cost-effective way for the City to  
8 fight hunger is to increase participation in the SNAP  
9 program, formerly known as food stamps. Doing so  
10 would dwarf any other effort. If current caseloads  
11 and benefits levels stay the same, federal SNAP  
12 spending in New York City over the next year would be  
13 4.9 billion dollars, which dwarfs City and private  
14 spending on charitable food. In our submitted  
15 testimony, we offer lots of facts and figures about  
16 hunger in New York City but, to close out, I want to  
17 focus on our recommendations for how the City can  
18 best fight hunger. First, increase funding to non-  
19 profit groups that increase access to government food  
20 benefits through the NYC Benefits Program and direct  
21 City Council funding. Accelerate the City's promised  
22 work to create a MyCity portal to allow application  
23 for multiple benefits at the same time online. We  
24 urge you to urge the State to end the sub-minimum  
25 wage for tipped food service workers, to enact and

2 fund a SNAP-like program to be funded by the City to  
3 give extra grocery funds to immigrants who may not be  
4 eligible for federal SNAP benefits, to ensure that  
5 all classes in New York City public schools provide  
6 either in-classroom school breakfast or grab and go  
7 breakfast in the hallways, and finally work with non-  
8 profit groups to launch a comprehensive outreach and  
9 enrollment campaign to ensure robust participation in  
10 the new summer EBT program. Thank you very much

11 PAULA INHARGUE: Thank you, Chair Ayala  
12 and Members of the Committee, for having this hearing  
13 My name is Paula Inhargue. I'm a Policy Analyst at  
14 United Neighborhood Houses. United Neighborhood  
15 Houses is a policy and social change organization  
16 that represents neighborhood settlement houses that  
17 reach 770,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. Our  
18 members provide a wide variety of services to their  
19 communities, such as providing support to access  
20 benefits and case management for HRA programs,  
21 including those that address food insecurity. My  
22 testimony will focus on the New York City Benefits  
23 program, and my written testimony goes into more  
24 detail and includes additional recommendations  
25 regarding food assistance and benefits access.

2 Settlement houses and community-based organizations  
3 play a vital role in bridging the gap between the  
4 government and the community and New York City  
5 Benefits is a program that formalizes that  
6 relationship. It supports community outreach and  
7 benefits enrollment in neighborhoods across the city.  
8 Through these programs, CBOs deploy dedicated staff  
9 members to help their community access benefits such  
10 as SNAP, cash assistance, and affordable housing  
11 among others with a holistic approach that addresses  
12 various areas of need. Having in-person and one-to-  
13 one support for an individual navigating benefits  
14 applications results in fewer errors and more  
15 successfully completed applications as well as  
16 greater outreach in communities, thus increasing the  
17 number of people receiving the benefits to which they  
18 are entitled. New York City Benefits providers have  
19 cited the promise and early results of this program  
20 and cite the collaborative nature with HRA as a great  
21 strength and potential model for other human services  
22 programs moving forward. In late December of 2023,  
23 HRA made a significant announcement regarding the  
24 freezing of funding for year two of the New York City  
25 Benefits program due to the City's Fiscal challenges.



2 This decision posed both financial and operational  
3 risks for settlement houses and other CBO providers,  
4 placing them in a precarious and uncertain position.  
5 A month later, HRA issued a new notice stating that  
6 funds would be unfrozen only through June 30th  
7 without a guarantee of sustained funding beyond that  
8 date. It is crucial that all 36 grantees have their  
9 contracts funded after June 30th, recognizing the  
10 ongoing need for the program. This current list of  
11 contracted CBOs has proven that having a wide pool of  
12 providers gives the program a broader geographical  
13 reach, helps support specific populations with  
14 specific language and cultural needs, and provides  
15 several touch points throughout the city. That is why  
16 the City must maintain 10 million dollars for the New  
17 York City Benefits Program in FY25 and ensure all 36  
18 CBO providers are able to continue their essential  
19 work. They must provide clarity and end the  
20 uncertainty that CBOs and staff have been grappling  
21 with for the last couple of months, allowing programs  
22 to plan ahead for the new Fiscal Year with sufficient  
23 time and certainty. Thank you for your time.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much. Our  
25 next panel will be Cathy Vargas, Anna Kaganova

2 (phonetic), Nafisa Rahman, Meredith Levine, and  
3 Michelle Berney.

4 CATHLEEN VARGAS: Good afternoon,  
5 Chairperson Ayala. My name is Cathleen Vargas, and  
6 I'm speaking on behalf of Center for Family Life in  
7 Sunset Park. We're a neighborhood-based organization  
8 and settlement house that has been the principal  
9 provider of integrated social and human services in  
10 Sunset Park, Brooklyn for over 45 years. CFL provides  
11 a comprehensive range of wraparound family and social  
12 services to meet the needs of the low-income  
13 communities serving more than 15,000 people yearly.  
14 Sunset Park is home to large Latino and Chinese  
15 populations, which make up the majority of our  
16 clientele. 23 percent of residents and 25 percent of  
17 our neighborhood children live below the poverty  
18 line. 30 percent of our households receive SNAP and  
19 other public benefits. The New York City Benefits  
20 program has been instrumental in enhancing the well-  
21 being and quality of life of low-income families in  
22 Sunset Park. Our holistic and compassionate approach  
23 is something that our clients simply cannot find  
24 through online applications or self-service kiosks,  
25 which often present language and technical barriers.

2 The proposed cuts to the New York City Benefits  
3 program threatens to exacerbate disparities among our  
4 community's most vulnerable members. This is why we  
5 implore the City to continue to support, not just for  
6 CFL, but for all 36 agencies involved in this  
7 critical program with a commitment of 10 million  
8 dollars in funding. CFL's wraparound support  
9 addresses multiple areas of needs, is grounded in  
10 respect for cultural nuances and language  
11 accessibility, and is essential for the thriving  
12 future of Sunset Park's residents. Continued  
13 investment in the New York City Benefits program will  
14 ensure us to further our mission in decreasing  
15 disparities and enhancing the stability and well-  
16 being of the families we serve. We stand ready to  
17 continue our work to foster a community where every  
18 member has the opportunity to live a life of dignity  
19 and full potential. Your support is not just a  
20 funding decision. It is a commitment to the health,  
21 stability, and prosperity of our community. Thank you

22 NAFISA RAHMAN: Good afternoon. My name is  
23 Nafisa Rahman, and I'm a student at Hunter College. I  
24 am currently enrolled in the Welfare Rights  
25 Initiative Community Leadership Training Program and,

2 on behalf of WRI, we thank you for your work for our  
3 city. WRI's mission is to sustain the economic  
4 security of families and reduce income inequality to  
5 level the playing field. We believe NYC, NYS, CUNY,  
6 and WRI have a collective purpose to review policy  
7 implementation barriers, serve as viable solutions,  
8 and create a plan of action that immediately  
9 stabilizes and supports low-income students in danger  
10 of dropping out of CUNY due to misinformation and the  
11 current political climate. This poignant and dynamic  
12 and troubling time offers a unique opportunity to put  
13 forth economic and education policies that uphold our  
14 shared values and beliefs and protect families  
15 enduring financial crises. WRI's Community Leadership  
16 class has taught me many lessons about connecting  
17 with the community. For example, on November 29 last  
18 year, my classmates and I organized the Day of Action  
19 at Hunter College. The number one supportive service  
20 that the students shared is the need for free  
21 MetroCards for all CUNY students. WRI believes that  
22 together we can secure positive welfare policy  
23 changes and showcase the self-determination and  
24 dignity of all families, regardless of their  
25 socioeconomic status. Some recommendations are

1 mentioned in my written testimony, but I do want to  
2 emphasize that HRA must provide clear language in all  
3 written and verbal communication with welfare  
4 participants, clear, concise, and consistent  
5 communication of education opportunities and the  
6 supportive services needed to continue college  
7 matriculation is a lifeline for low-income and  
8 welfare-eligible families. Thank you for your time.

10 MICHELLE BERNEY: Good afternoon, Deputy  
11 Speaker Ayala and Members of the New York City  
12 Council Committee on General Welfare. My name is  
13 Michelle Berney, and I'm the Director of the Benefits  
14 Plus Learning Center at the Community Service Society  
15 of New York. The Benefits Plus Learning Center at CSS  
16 has been at the forefront of benefits access work for  
17 30 years, training social service providers and  
18 public benefits and housing programs through  
19 workshops, publications, and case consultation. Thank  
20 you, Deputy Speaker Ayala and Council Member Hudson,  
21 for highlighting the NYC Benefits Initiative today.  
22 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the  
23 importance of continued funding for this initiative  
24 for the duration of the three-year period that was  
25 originally envisioned. This project is

groundbreaking. It's an expansive, first-of-its-kind partnership between the City, three dozen CBOs across the city, and technical assistance providers with benefits, legal, and policy expertise. As a TA provider, we work closely with our cohort of 12 CBOs, including Center for Family Life, DSS staff, and the other two TA providers. The nature of this initiative is consistent with the work that BPLC has been doing since its inception, working closely with social service providers so they can assist their clients with public benefits access and advocacy. The training curriculum spans all public benefits and all of their complexities as well as housing programs, the Access HRA portal, trauma-informed care, and more. The case consultation that we provide allows us to often assist the social service providers prior to requiring any escalation with our DSS partners and, when escalation is required, our DSS partners are caring, compassionate, and tremendously responsive, and for that, we are grateful. When we are doing case consultation, that really enables us to spot any emerging trends, and also it allows us the opportunity to brainstorm on possible systemic changes. This project has the potential to

2 significantly expand New Yorkers' access to urgently  
3 needed benefits, and continued investment is  
4 essential. We commend the Adams Administration's  
5 commitment to benefits access and its understanding  
6 that a longer-term project such as NYC Benefits is  
7 needed to realize systemic change for the benefit of  
8 all New Yorkers. CSS is honored to have the  
9 opportunity to work on the citywide initiative to  
10 bring about strategic improvements to the benefits  
11 system at all levels. Thank you.

12                   MEREDITH LEVINE: Good afternoon, Chair  
13 Ayala and Members of the Committee. My name is  
14 Meredith Levine, and I'm the Senior Director of  
15 Information and Case Assistance and oversee the NYC  
16 Benefits Program at JASA. JASA is a not-for-profit  
17 agency that honors older New Yorkers as vital members  
18 of society, providing services that support aging  
19 with purpose and partnering to build strong  
20 communities. For over 50 years, JASA has served as  
21 one of New York's largest and most trusted agencies,  
22 serving older adults in the Bronx, Brooklyn,  
23 Manhattan, and Queens. Last year, JASA was fortunate  
24 to be one of 36 grantees awarded the NYC Benefits  
25 contract through HRA. NYC Benefits' mission is to

2 eliminate any barriers getting in the way of New  
3 Yorkers accessing benefits and entitlements and works  
4 to help all who are eligible obtain and maintain  
5 their benefits over time. Our work at JASA  
6 specifically focuses on the older adult community,  
7 and we specifically target the plethora of barriers  
8 facing the older adult community when trying to  
9 access and sustain their benefits, whether that means  
10 providing home visits to home bound seniors in an  
11 effort to obtain documents and signatures for  
12 applications or simply setting up email accounts and  
13 Access HRA accounts for older New Yorkers who are not  
14 so tech savvy, whether they have a lack of wi-fi or a  
15 lack of knowledge, or simply because they still use a  
16 landline and a flip phone. Older New Yorkers, when it  
17 comes down to it, are simply more comfortable talking  
18 to a live person than uploading documents through an  
19 app. Our NYC Benefits program at JASA has touched the  
20 lives of over 400 older New Yorkers in our first year  
21 of operation, educating them about public benefits  
22 and entitlements, screening them for eligibility,  
23 assisting with documentation retrieval and  
24 application submission, and advocating on their  
25 behalf to address incorrect denials or inaccurate



2 budgeting decisions. This work was done in the homes  
3 of dozens of older New Yorkers, over the phone and  
4 virtually when a caregiver was available to assist,  
5 texting us pictures and tracking down documents, and  
6 on site at JASA's network of older adult centers,  
7 NORCs, and subsidized senior housing buildings, all  
8 to bring these services to where seniors naturally  
9 congregate. Because of this funding, JASA's NYC  
10 Benefits program ensured that older New Yorkers  
11 benefited from SNAP, Medicaid, SCRIE, one-shot deals,  
12 transportation benefits, utility benefits, Social  
13 Security benefits, and the Medicare Savings Program,  
14 and we did this with the expertise and cultural  
15 sensitivity required to successfully gain the trust  
16 and confidence of older New Yorkers. We are here  
17 today to ensure that the NYC Benefits program  
18 continues in its present form to ensure New Yorkers  
19 receive skilled, person-centered assistance to access  
20 and maintain life-sustaining public benefits. We ask  
21 that HRA continue to receive the 10 million to  
22 preserve the NYC Benefits program and continue  
23 funding of the current 36 grantees. Thank you for the  
24 opportunity to provide this testimony today.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great. We have one  
3 more in-person panel so, if there's anyone who is  
4 here in person that would like to testify before we  
5 move on to virtual, please get a slip filled out from  
6 the Sergeants in the back.

7 Otherwise, our last in-person panel is  
8 Towaki Komatsa.

9 TOWAKI KOMATSA: Hi, I'm Towaki Komatsa.  
10 I'm sitting in the seat that Scott French of HRA was  
11 sitting in earlier today after he sent an email on  
12 October 25th of 2017 at 8:54 a.m. to other City of  
13 New York personnel to collude and conspire with them  
14 to illegally keep me out of a public meeting in  
15 Brooklyn. That email reads, Hi, Rachel, Molly, and  
16 Commissioner Carrion. I just wanted to make you aware  
17 that Mr. Komatsa, who has attended several events  
18 where the Mayor and Commissioner Banks are in  
19 attendance, indicated at a Access to Council team  
20 last night that Commissioner Levine and Commissioner  
21 Perkins held that he was planning on attending  
22 today's resource fair and expected that he wouldn't  
23 be allowed to the fair. Wanted to flag for you so you  
24 could let Redmond know, who is very familiar with Mr.

2 Komatsa. He may ultimately not show up, but wanted to  
3 flag as a possibility.

4 I was in this room 10 days ago. I talked  
5 to you, Ms. Ayala yesterday. I sent you an email  
6 earlier today, I got assaulted in a MICA shelter 10  
7 days ago, what did I talk to you about? I talked to  
8 you about being in a MICA shelter. I told you weren't  
9 doing anything about that problem. I got a really  
10 nasty punch to my head yesterday. I was bleeding all  
11 over the floor. You had what's her name, the  
12 Commissioner of DSS here today, lied straight to your  
13 face. I've had Fair hearings. She complimented OTDA.  
14 The Fair hearings are with OTDA. OTDA currently  
15 employs DSS's former General Counsel Martha Calhoun.  
16 I also talked to Ann Marie Scalia, the current  
17 General Counsel. She basically BS'd me today in this  
18 room. So this is a budget hearing and, in terms of a  
19 quorum, this is a public meeting, a public forum,  
20 where are your co-workers? Empty seats all around so  
21 one of the prerequisites for having a public meeting  
22 is having a quorum. Your co-workers are nowhere to be  
23 found. The woman over there, she was just having a  
24 side chat with, I think Rita Joseph over here not  
25 paying any attention to someone's testimony. With

2 regards to the shelter that I'm currently in, it has  
3 a 38-million-dollar contract. It's run by VIP. I  
4 don't know what that stands for, but they regularly  
5 don't have toilet paper in the bathrooms, they don't  
6 have soap in the soap dispensers, the meals are  
7 minimal so where the heck are they spending the  
8 money? When I got assaulted, no first aid kit, blood  
9 was dripping all over the freaking floor. I asked for  
10 an ice pack. Sorry. So what exactly are you going to  
11 do and when to prevent people who don't have mental  
12 illness, don't have a drug abuse problem, don't have  
13 any criminal background from being coerced to reside  
14 in MICA facilities that are basically a freaking time  
15 bomb. I talked to Ms. Holder, Agent Holder, who is  
16 here. I specifically asked her, what can you do,  
17 maybe commence litigation against DHS. She basically  
18 stonewalled me and referred me to Coalition for the  
19 Homeless, Josh Goldfein of Legal Aid referred me to  
20 Coalition for the Homeless. They didn't follow up.  
21 That was like a week ago, and then I got a swift  
22 punch in my head yesterday so what are you going to  
23 do?

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry to hear  
3 about your incident yesterday, and I hope that you  
4 got that checked out and your time is over.

5 TOWAKI KOMATSA: Even though you let other  
6 people go past their time limit.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I let you go over your  
8 time.

9 TOWAKI KOMATSA: So New York State Supreme  
10 Court Judge Lyle Frank, please void today's hearing.  
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

13 TOWAKI KOMATSA: By the way, see this,  
14 that's blood from the freaking assault

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now we have Gabriela  
16 Sandoval Requena. Thank you.

17 GABRIELA SANDOVAL REQUENA: Good  
18 afternoon, Committee Chair Ayala and Committee Staff,  
19 thank you for holding this hearing and for the  
20 opportunity to testify on behalf of New Destiny  
21 Housing. My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena, and I  
22 am the Director of Policy and Communications at New  
23 Destiny. Our mission is to end the double trauma of  
24 abuse and homelessness among domestic violence  
25 survivors. We do this by developing supportive

housing for survivors in shelter, assisting those who are fleeing abuse, obtaining subsidies, and find safe new homes, and advocating for new housing resources.

New Destiny is also a co-convener of the Family Homelessness Coalition as well as a member of the Supportive Housing Network of New York. But why do we do this work? Because despite the fact that only 50 percent of domestic violence cases are reported, the NYPD filed one domestic violence incident report every two minutes in 2022. In other words, since this hearing started, more than 150 survivors called the police to file a situation of abuse and countless others went silent. Because of domestic violence, thousands continue to enter shelter system in New York City. We know that access to safe and affordable permanent housing will determine whether survivors leave their abuser and rebuild their lives. We will submit extended written testimony, so I just wanted to use this time to highlight our five key takeaways. First, we're deeply concerned with HRA's limited capacity, which has delayed check processing times, slowed moves from shelter to permanent housing, and impacted the success of rental assistance programs. Second, we call on the Administration and the Council

2 to please fund the Housing Stability Program for  
3 Survivors of Domestic Violence, also known as the  
4 Micro-Grant Program, at 6 million dollars in Fiscal  
5 Year 2025. Additionally, we want to call attention to  
6 two administrative solutions that will improve timely  
7 access to affordable housing and not cost the City  
8 anything. One is to allow survivors of domestic  
9 violence to access HPD homeless set-aside units as  
10 the Mayor promised on the Housing Our Neighbors  
11 Blueprint back in 2022 and open City-funded  
12 supportive housing to domestic violence survivors and  
13 their children who are not currently eligible for NYC  
14 15/15. Last but not least, New Destiny also supports  
15 the network's recommendation to improve NYC 15/15.  
16 With the housing vacancy rate at 1.4 percent, the  
17 City must develop additional congregate units above  
18 the original commitment of 7,500 homes. Thank you so  
19 much for your time.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now  
21 be moving over to virtual testimony.

22 Just a reminder to please identify  
23 yourself before you bring in your testimony for the  
24 record.

2 Our first virtual panel will be Union  
3 Strong, Gloria Kim, Antonia House, Tierra Labrada,  
4 and James Dill.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

6 TARA JOY: Good afternoon, Chairwoman  
7 Ayala. My name is Tara Joy. I'm a member of the  
8 unionized staff at Mobilization for Justice. Our  
9 union comprises 110 members from front desk staff to  
10 senior attorneys who work in a number of different  
11 practice areas with four major focuses being housing,  
12 economic justice, disability and aging rights, and  
13 children's rights. Last year alone, we served 15,000  
14 households citywide. With that said, I'm not just  
15 here today to talk about the work the MFJ handles  
16 fighting evictions, helping asylees gain permanent  
17 residency, helping families stay together, and  
18 shining light on deplorable conditions in adult  
19 homes. I'm also here to talk about why myself and 109  
20 of my colleagues have not set foot in our offices nor  
21 spoken to any clients since February 23rd. I'm here  
22 today to talk about our strike. While we are  
23 incredibly proud of the work we do, our staff is at a  
24 breaking point. In the past year, MFJ lost 23  
25 employees and currently has 17 open positions, many



2 of which have gone unfilled for months, and yet the  
3 contractual offers made by our management would do  
4 nothing to alleviate this constant turnover as we all  
5 know that 2 percent salary increases are not  
6 sufficient to keep up with the cost of living in New  
7 York City nor to attract and retain the workers we so  
8 desperately need. The irony of having to fight for  
9 fair and equitable wages from an employer whose  
10 mission statement claims to envision a society in  
11 which there is equal justice for all is not lost on  
12 us. Having witnessed it firsthand, I really want to  
13 hammer in the impact of staff attrition to an  
14 organization like ours. When an attorney quits, in  
15 the short-term, their colleagues have to stretch  
16 themselves thinner by absorbing their caseload, in  
17 the medium-term, while that position remains empty,  
18 our capacity to take on new clients is reduced by  
19 that much more, and in the long-term, the faster  
20 staff burn out and leave, the harder it is to  
21 cultivate the kind of legal skills and knowledge that  
22 produce truly life changing advocacy for New Yorkers,  
23 skills that only really come with years of  
24 experience. In closing, I'd like to clarify that the  
25 union knows that MFJ's management has asked the City

2 for funding increases, and we fully support these  
3 asks. The reason for our presence here is to remind  
4 the City, the Council, and our management that any  
5 increases in funding should go to the workers  
6 fighting for your constituents and not to the  
7 executives who caused this strike. We'd like to give  
8 a special thank you to Council Members Banks and  
9 Restler for joining us on the picket line and extend  
10 an invitation to all those who have yet to join us.  
11 Thank you for your time.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next virtual  
13 witness will be Gloria Kim.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 GLORIA KIM: Good afternoon, Deputy  
16 Speaker Ayala and Members of the New York City  
17 Council, General Welfare Committee. My name is Gloria  
18 Kim, and I'm the Director of Policy Research and  
19 Impact of the Human Services Council, a membership  
20 organization representing over 170 human services  
21 providers in New York City. We thank the City Council  
22 for the 100-million-dollar workforce investment in  
23 the last two years and the commitment to an  
24 additional 50 million in the Fiscal Year 25 budget,  
25 which is a step forward in fairly compensating

2 frontline workers providing services to the millions  
3 of New Yorkers. However, the workforce investment is  
4 not a true cost of living adjustment with a  
5 guaranteed percentage increase for all contracted  
6 human services workers. A COLA is a significant step  
7 to address the historic underfunding and lack of  
8 investment in the human services sector as these  
9 workers do some of the most important jobs in our  
10 communities yet are underpaid and undervalued. As the  
11 government is a predominant funder of human services  
12 through government contracts, this has resulted in  
13 nearly 25 percent of all human services workers  
14 qualifying for food stamps in 2016 to 2018. Low wages  
15 also have a sweeping effect on workplace conditions  
16 and the outcome of programs with high staff turnover  
17 and vacancy rates resulting in heavy and  
18 unsustainable workloads. Government contracting  
19 practices have resulted in an intolerable situation  
20 of extreme pay disparities where human services  
21 workers make an average 71 percent of what government  
22 employees make and 82 percent of what private sector  
23 employees receive. With a threat to sustainability  
24 and deficiency of resources, the sector faces  
25 recruitment and retention issues impacting the

2 overall viability of organizations and program  
3 services so a 5 percent COLA in this year's budget  
4 and a 3 percent COLA each year for the next two years  
5 on the personal services line of all City-funded  
6 human services contracts are needed to ensure this  
7 vital workforce does not slip further into poverty.  
8 The lack of COLAs and livable wages for workers not  
9 only disadvantages communities who rely on these  
10 workers for life-saving services...

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Time  
12 expired.

13 GLORIA KIM: Okay, thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Antonia  
15 House.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

17 ANTONIA HOUSE: Hi. My name is Antonia  
18 House. I coordinate CILEC, which is a collaborative  
19 of 13 legal service providers and CBOs that work  
20 together to strengthen low-income immigrant  
21 communities in the city through employment and  
22 immigration legal services, outreach, education, and  
23 advocacy. Our work is funded by the Immigrant  
24 Opportunities Initiative, the baseline contract  
25 that's administered by DSS's Office of Civil Justice.

2 It has been a successful contract serving thousands  
3 of New Yorkers over the last eight years and is now  
4 scheduled to be put through an open bidding process.  
5 This open bidding process creates an opportunity to  
6 respond to the challenges that the contract has faced  
7 and the new social and economic landscape we're  
8 dealing with now and to reverse the funding  
9 stagnation and the disinvestment of 2 million dollars  
10 from employment-related legal services. Providers  
11 funded by this contract have issued a series of  
12 recommendations to DSS, and we would like to share  
13 those with the Committee now and also in my written  
14 testimony. First, baselined IOI must be funded at a  
15 level that allows legal service providers to pay  
16 staff fairly and to provide adequate funding for  
17 supervision, language, and administrative support, as  
18 well as community outreach, education, and advocacy.  
19 Second, DSS must reinvest in baseline employment-  
20 specific legal services as part of this contract.  
21 These services are necessary to fight wage theft in  
22 the city, an enormous strain on our economy, and an  
23 obstacle to the economic stability of new immigrants  
24 in particular. Finally, while the contract must  
25 credit pro se assistance, it must continue to

2 prioritize full legal representation because while  
3 pro se assistance can help us meet urgent deadlines,  
4 it won't ultimately stop the creation of a new  
5 generation of undocumented New Yorkers because most  
6 unrepresented people in removal proceedings will  
7 ultimately be ordered removed but not actually  
8 deported from the United States. This means that  
9 they'll remain here with removal orders, lose their  
10 employment authorization and a clear path to lawful  
11 status, and face an incredibly precarious future. In  
12 contrast, people who are...

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
14 has expired.

15 ANTONIA HOUSE: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next we  
17 have Tierra Labrada.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

19 TIERRA LABRADA: Good afternoon,  
20 Chairperson Ayala and Members of the New York City  
21 Council on General Welfare. My name is Tierra  
22 Labrada. I'm the Associate Director of Advocacy at  
23 the Supportive Housing Network of New York, a non-  
24 profit organization representing the developers and  
25 operators of supportive housing, and we are concerned

2 that the NYC 15/15, the City's primary mechanism for  
3 supportive housing development, is falling short of  
4 its goal to create 15,000 units by 2030. 15/15 relies  
5 on the scattered site model where non-profits rent  
6 units on the private market and bring services to  
7 tenants. Yet the private market units just aren't  
8 there as evidenced by the recent housing and vacancy  
9 report that show that rental vacancies in New York  
10 City are at just 1.4 percent. This, along with  
11 inadequate service rates, has resulted in only 17  
12 percent of scattered site units awarded after 8 years  
13 when the City should be above 50 percent. This is  
14 not just about slow production. It's a racial equity  
15 issue. Black people are over-represented in  
16 supportive housing applicants and make up the  
17 majority of tenants. Failing to cover the true cost  
18 of operating these programs means failing those that  
19 the City has promised to support, but the network has  
20 developed a comprehensive reallocation plan that  
21 would improve 15/15 and ensure that the City reaches  
22 its target to reaches its target. We are seeking to  
23 reallocate the unawarded scattered site units as  
24 follows. Develop additional congregate units above  
25 the original 7,500, which would add to the City's

2 supportive and affordable housing stock, develop only  
3 a limited number of scattered site units to be rented  
4 on the private market, accounting for the low vacancy  
5 rate and the instability of the model, as I  
6 mentioned, using 15/15 services and (INAUDIBLE)  
7 develop a dedicated supportive housing preservation  
8 program at HPD, and investigate an affordable housing  
9 overlay model where scattered site contracts can be  
10 paired with City-funded homeless set-asides. We are  
11 also seeking to increase and align all NYC 15/15  
12 service and operating rates to ensure parity across  
13 the program and all housing models and expand the  
14 eligibility of 15/15 to include individuals exiting  
15 jail or prison and survivors of domestic violence.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
17 has expired.

18 TIERRA LABRADA: Our predominantly black  
19 and brown workforce deserve fair compensation. We are  
20 calling with our colleagues for a 5 percent COLA for  
21 City-contracted human service workers in FY25. Thank  
22 you so much.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we'll have James  
24 Dill.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.



2 JAMES DILL: I'm Jim Dill, Executive  
3 Director of Housing and Services, Inc. We are a  
4 permanent supportive housing provider with 625  
5 congregate units and 100 scattered site units.  
6 Permanent supportive housing is a time-tested, most  
7 cost-effective, and (INAUDIBLE) way of ending chronic  
8 homelessness. We are members of the Supportive  
9 Housing Network of New York, and we support all the  
10 Network's advocacy points for this hearing. I urge  
11 the Committee to support the proposed reallocation of  
12 NY 15/15 housing units and resources. The City's  
13 15/15 initiative to create 15,000 supportive housing  
14 units within 15 years is both a (INAUDIBLE) necessary  
15 step to end homelessness. However, it's 50/50  
16 allocation to congregate and scattered site housing  
17 is not sustainable as the current market does not  
18 provide acceptable housing units to support the  
19 7,500-scattered-site unit allocation. We constantly  
20 struggle with our current scattered site program to  
21 find and maintain acceptable housing units. We  
22 constantly fear that market conditions could  
23 ultimately make us a provider of substandard housing.  
24 In that event, we would be part of the problem and  
25 not part of the solution. We have no intention in

2 applying for 15/15 scattered site units. We applaud  
3 the 15/15 congregate program, which is fundamental  
4 for the development of our newest 170-unit project.  
5 We are seeking to apply again with the new congregate  
6 project. The 15/15 program is crucial. It should not  
7 fail due to the broad 50/50 allocation. We urge the  
8 Committee to support the reallocation of 15/15  
9 scattered site resources to new congregate units and  
10 to provide for the preservation of our first  
11 generated supportive housing and desperately needs  
12 additional funding to comply with Local Law 97. I  
13 thank you for your time. We will submit written  
14 testimony.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be  
16 Lauren Schuster, Melony Samuels, Nathalie Pierre-  
17 Louis, Judith Secon, and Rachel Briant.

18 Lauren Schuster will be first.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

20 LAUREN SCHUSTER: Good afternoon. I'm  
21 Lauren Schuster, the Vice President of Government  
22 Affairs at Urban Resource Institute. Thank you,  
23 Deputy Speaker Ayala, Committee Staff, and Members of  
24 the General Welfare Committee, for the opportunity to  
25 testify today.

2           URI is the largest provider of domestic  
3 violence shelter services in the country, and we're  
4 also a leading provider of transitional housing to  
5 families experiencing homelessness. We are committed  
6 to ending the cycles of violence and homelessness,  
7 and we help families to achieve economic wellness. We  
8 work with youth and in communities to interrupt  
9 cycles of violence, and we are committed to engaging  
10 people who have caused harm in the solutions to end  
11 violence. The rates of homicide and felony assaults  
12 related to domestic violence have increased between  
13 2021 and 2022. DV homicides increased 29 percent  
14 citywide and 225 percent in Brooklyn and 57 percent  
15 in the Bronx. Homelessness is also on the rise. There  
16 were 86,184 people in the DHS shelter system as of  
17 March 8th, and DV is a leading driver of family  
18 homelessness. 41 percent of families in the DHS  
19 family shelter system have experienced domestic  
20 violence. This increase demands a significant  
21 mobilization of resources. We've submitted detailed  
22 testimony into the record, and so I just want to  
23 highlight some of the most important pieces of our  
24 testimony today. We are pleased by the Adams  
25 Administration's commitments to reduce domestic

2 violence outlined in the Women Forward Initiative.  
3 The Administration, however, must identify new  
4 sources of funding and not simply shift around  
5 existing funding for youth violence prevention and  
6 healthy relationship education, trauma-informed  
7 accountability, work with people who have caused  
8 harm, and financial empowerment advocacy for  
9 survivors and their families. We believe that DOVE  
10 funding should be increased to Council Districts that  
11 have been hardest hit by domestic violence without  
12 reducing the total amount of overall funding  
13 available to the Council as a whole. Along with our  
14 partners, we are advocating for 6 million dollars for  
15 NGBV's Housing Stability to support Micro-Grants  
16 program to help survivors of violence access, safety,  
17 the human services workforce..

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
19 has expired.

20 LAUREN SCHUSTER: Is predominantly by  
21 women of color, and we are advocating for a 5 percent  
22 COLA in FY25 along with a 3 percent COLA in '26 and  
23 '27. Lastly, I will just add that we are urging the  
24 Council to continue partnering with us to ensure that  
25 our contracts are paid on time. As you know,

2 reimbursements for services already performed often  
3 take up to a year or more to be made and in any given  
4 time, organizations like URI are owed millions of  
5 dollars. Any change in revenue has the potential to  
6 be catastrophic for us and so we really appreciate  
7 your partnership and your advocacy and look forward  
8 to working with you all in the future. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Melony  
10 Samuels.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

12 RACQUEL GRANT: Good afternoon, Deputy  
13 Chair Ayala. Thank you for allowing the Campaign  
14 Against Hunger to testify. My name is Racquel Grant.  
15 I'm the Chief Development Officer, and I'm testifying  
16 in Dr. Melony Samuels' stead. The Campaign Against  
17 Hunger is a 25-year-old organization. We serve 1.4  
18 million struggling New Yorkers every year in 145 zip  
19 codes and 14 million meals. There are three areas of  
20 concern for the organization. Firstly, we'd like to  
21 address food and contract reimbursement, which has  
22 been echoed by a lot of our colleagues. We're  
23 supporting 205 organizations and advocates who are  
24 working day and night to ensure families can access  
25 food as we know food inflation is a serious problem.

2 We're seeing more families on the line including  
3 migrants, and we're being asked to front out-of-  
4 pocket thousands of dollars to purchase food and do  
5 critical work but have to go through the arduous  
6 contract process that can take years for  
7 reimbursement. We currently have an operational  
8 deficit, which most is tied to contract reimbursement  
9 and we are at risk. There are also anticipated budget  
10 cuts, but no cuts on the food lines. They keep  
11 growing. The Campaign Against Hunger joins our  
12 colleagues in food to echo that funding needs to be  
13 maintained and increased for these programs. We also  
14 want to echo what Speaker Adams mentioned earlier,  
15 that agencies must prioritize backlogs so that  
16 organizations can get the funding needed to execute  
17 critical programs and services. Secondly, we want to  
18 implore DSS to assess the scale and scope of our  
19 benefits work for underrepresented families,  
20 including SNAP screening, Fair Fares, Medicaid, child  
21 tax credit, and other services. Lastly, we're  
22 advocating for increased support for workforce  
23 development programs, which are a crucial interface  
24 to providing families with financial stability and to  
25 lift them out of poverty. We have submitted written

2 testimony. We thank the agencies and the City Council  
3 for their continued support. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Nathalie  
5 Pierre-Louis.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

7 NATHALIE PIERRE-LOUIS: Good afternoon.

8 Thank you to Chair Ayala and the Members of the  
9 Committee for the opportunity to testify. I am  
10 Nathalie Pierre-Louis, Assistant Program Director at  
11 the Resource Center Program of Goddard Riverside.

12 Goddard is a settlement house working with New  
13 Yorkers from early childhood through older adulthood  
14 to strive towards a fair and just society. Our  
15 resource center connects people to the services they  
16 need, food stamps, legal assistance and healthcare.

17 We provide benefits screening, financial counseling,  
18 legal consultation, and support services. A

19 significant portion of our funding to provide these  
20 essential services come from the NYC Benefits program  
21 administered by the Department of Social Services. I  
22 ask that the Council please prioritize preserving the  
23 NYC Benefits program at its current level of

24 approximately 9 to 10 million dollars, funding 36  
25 providers. Since becoming an NYC Benefits grantee

2 last year, we have served a total of 472 individuals,  
3 submitted 301 applications for benefits on their  
4 behalf, managed 1,017 cases including SNAP, rent  
5 freeze, one-shot deal, Social Security, Medicaid  
6 benefits, and the like. We advocated directly to  
7 providers and government agencies on behalf of 122  
8 individuals to assist in moving the applications  
9 forward. I would like to share a few stories that  
10 particularly demonstrate the value of the intensive  
11 support the Resource Center can provide in  
12 partnership with DSS-HRA and our technical assistance  
13 from Public Health Solutions. With the help of our  
14 DHS-HRA assistance, we were able to advocate for the  
15 delivery of a new SNAP card to a homebound female  
16 adult living in East Harlem, a female Pakistani  
17 client from the Bronx who has a disabled adult son  
18 received help with a record number of six  
19 applications for benefits for one household. The  
20 client was recertified for reduced Fare, Access-A-  
21 Ride, ACP, NYCHA Public Housing Section 8. She  
22 successfully applied for so much.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
24 time has expired.



2 NATHALIE PIERRE-LOUIS: And reclaimed 760  
3 dollars in stolen food stamps. Finally, we assisted a  
4 single mother who had been living in a shelter for  
5 seven years with her 7-year-old son to move into a  
6 new home at Savoy Park in Harlem. We advocated on her  
7 behalf to HRA because of this program, because of the  
8 linkage that it gives us in order for us to get the  
9 help we need. We need your help to keep this program  
10 fully funded and assisting you New Yorkers. Thank you  
11 for your attention.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Judith Secon.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 JUDITH SECON: Hi. I'm Judy Secon, Deputy  
15 Executive Director at New York Common Pantry. I would  
16 like to express my gratitude to Deputy Speaker Ayala  
17 for hosting today's budget hearing for allowing us to  
18 have the opportunity to present this testimony. New  
19 York Common Pantry is dedicated to addressing hunger  
20 and promoting dignity, health, and self-sufficiency  
21 for food-insecure families and individuals, and we've  
22 been doing so for over 40 years. In the past year,  
23 our programs have provided almost 10.2 million meals,  
24 up from 6 million meals prior to the pandemic, and  
25 this year we are on track to serve over 11 million

2 meals. We provided over 10 million pounds of food and  
3 assisted in accessing over 7 million dollars in  
4 benefit dollars and served nearly 700,000 visitors.

5 We understand how devastating food insecurity is to  
6 the mental and physical health of those experiencing  
7 it and how much it impacts the quality of life in the  
8 communities it impacts. The pandemic, inflation and  
9 SNAP cuts have left overwhelming numbers of families  
10 struggling to make ends meet. In addition, this  
11 year's asylum seeker crisis has greatly affected the  
12 City and our agency. We've seen over a 400 percent  
13 increase in the past year in asylum seekers who come  
14 for food and also for hygiene services, healthcare  
15 insurance, and referrals to other services. We did  
16 receive some Welcome NYC funding this year, which was  
17 expended in the first few months of our Fiscal Year.  
18 We absolutely need this funding to be increased, and,  
19 we want people to recognize that the food pantries  
20 are often unrecognized and unsung heroes of this  
21 crisis. We continue to serve all who come to our  
22 doors. We also want to talk a little bit about the  
23 CFC funding. We are happy to see the amount up this  
24 year. We are worried about subsequent years. We also  
25 would like to encourage transparency in determining

2 food funding allocations and to provide the  
3 information in a timely manner. We don't get our  
4 funding amounts until well into the Fiscal Year. We  
5 do get around July, but then we don't get the second  
6 allocation notice until December. It makes it really  
7 hard to plan and for us...

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
9 time has expired.

10 JUDITH SECON: to create sustainable  
11 programs. Thank you

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Finally for this panel  
13 we have Rachel Briant.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 RACHEL BRIANT: Thank you so much. My name  
16 is Rachel Briant, and I'm an attorney at the Met  
17 Council, one of the largest emergency food providers  
18 in the city, and I'm here today to talk about the  
19 Community Food Connections Program. Met Council is  
20 one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated  
21 to fighting poverty. We operate 10 departments,  
22 ranging from 100 percent affordable housing to our  
23 award-winning Family Violence Program to  
24 Comprehensive Holocaust Survivor Assistance, Senior  
25 Programming, etc. In total, we provide a wide array

of support to over 320,000 clients a year, mostly in New York City. Met Council plays a unique role in the emergency food space by offering exclusively kosher and halal emergency food, but we are committed to serving any New Yorker in need, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. Jewish and Muslim communities face significant barriers to food access. A recent study found that over 80 percent of Muslim Americans observe a halal diet and that food insufficiency within these communities was more than double the rate of all other respondents. New York is home to nearly one quarter of all American Muslims, suggesting that Muslim New Yorkers struggle with food insufficiency at a similar and pronounced rate. While the rate of kosher observance in Jewish communities is lower, the sheer size of the Jewish population makes the kosher observant population roughly the same size as the halal observant one, and poverty rates are significant in more observant communities. During the height of the pandemic, over 20 percent of emergency meals, nearly 27 million meals, provided through the City's Get Food NYC program were either for kosher or halal food. Many New Yorkers are still struggling to get back on their feet post pandemic.

2 Studies published last week by the New York Times,  
3 the Robin Hood Foundation, and Columbia University  
4 reported that the poverty rate and life expectancies  
5 have not recovered in New York and that one in four  
6 children in New York City now lives in poverty. We  
7 continue to serve more New Yorkers than at any point  
8 in the history of our organization, and emergency  
9 food is one of the most powerful tools we have to  
10 address these issues. Though we have immense  
11 gratitude for CFC, we must also note two flaws.  
12 First, though, there are many kosher-certified  
13 products available, CFC offers a more limited number  
14 of halal certified products. Halal...

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
16 time has expired.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our last  
18 panel will be Jesenia Ponce, Elise Benusa, Peggy  
19 Herrera, Jay Eddidin, and Juan Diaz.

20 Jesenia Ponce will be first.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

22 JESENIA PONCE: Good afternoon, Committee  
23 Chair Ayala and Council Members. My name is Jesenia  
24 Ponce. I am the Coordinating Attorney for Policy and  
25 Advocacy at Northern Manhattan Improvement

2 Corporation, also known as NMIC. We are a multi-  
3 service agency offering legal and social services  
4 addressing housing, immigration, education, and  
5 benefits. We are one of five members of the Legal  
6 Services for the Working Poor Coalition that also  
7 includes CAMBA Legal Services, Mobilization for  
8 Justice, Housing Conservation Coordinators, and Take  
9 Root Justice. We have many points written in our  
10 testimony, but I will summarize here two key points  
11 that reflect the importance of funding Legal Services  
12 for the Working Poor, also known as LSWP. One is the  
13 wide range of services we are able to provide due to  
14 the flexibility in funding. As my colleagues in this  
15 room and many know that not one client walks through  
16 our doors with a single issue. We are able to provide  
17 wraparound services with LSWP that include  
18 immigration, benefits, and other areas of civil  
19 practice. Second, LSWP funding opens doors for  
20 services that the working poor may not otherwise be  
21 eligible for. As you know, working people with earned  
22 income do not qualify for many low-income services,  
23 but nonetheless are one paycheck away from becoming  
24 homeless. LSWP allows us to offer assistance to keep  
25 working poor communities stable. For these reasons

2 and the reasons listed in our testimony, it is  
3 crucial that the Council not only continue support  
4 for this flexible funding stream, but we ask  
5 respectfully that the Council increase funding to  
6 600,000 for each coalition member so that legal  
7 service organizations are able to meet the needs of  
8 their clients by providing a diverse array of civil  
9 legal services for working poor New Yorkers. Thank  
10 you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we have Elise  
12 Benusa.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 ELISE BENUSA: Good afternoon. My name is  
15 Elise Benusa, and I'm the Government Relations  
16 Manager at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York. I  
17 would like to thank Chair Ayala and all the Committee  
18 Members for the opportunity to discuss Planned  
19 Parenthood of Greater New York's programs, services,  
20 and funding requests. For over 100 years, PBGNY has  
21 been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive  
22 healthcare and education programs for communities  
23 throughout New York City. In 2023, our New York City  
24 Health Centers conducted almost 70,000 patient  
25 visits, providing care to all those in need

2 regardless of immigration status, identity, or  
3 ability to pay for services. This is why today we  
4 respectfully request support from the Speakers  
5 Initiative for our Youth Health Promoters Program and  
6 Youth Serving Programs. The YHPs are highly trained  
7 peer educators who engage other young people and  
8 conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about  
9 their rights and access to care. The YHP program is  
10 unique in that it taps into credible peer youth  
11 messaging to advance sexual and reproductive health  
12 outcomes for young people throughout New York City.  
13 In 2023, the youth health promoters reached over  
14 1,000 youth at schools and in the community. Funding  
15 from the City Council will allow the YHPs to expand  
16 their peer engagement work to ensure more young  
17 people have access to the care they need. With the  
18 ever-changing national landscape and continued  
19 attempts to restrict access to care, New York is seen  
20 as a haven for critical healthcare services. We ask  
21 the Council to continue to fund PBGNY through the  
22 Reproductive and Sexual and Health Initiative to  
23 allow us to continue to provide sexual and  
24 reproductive healthcare services and educational  
25 programs throughout New York City. PBGNY provides a



2 full range of sexual and reproductive healthcare  
3 services that includes gynecological care, STI  
4 treatment and testing, contraceptive care, cancer  
5 screenings, and LGBTQ plus healthcare at all five of  
6 our health centers in New York City. Another program  
7 that allows us to continue serving vulnerable New  
8 Yorkers, including our immigrant populations, is  
9 Project Street Beat. We ask for continued funding  
10 support from the Ending the Epidemic Speakers and the  
11 HIV/AIDS Faith-Based Initiative to support Project  
12 Street Beat. Project Street Beat provides targeted  
13 outreach and services to communities.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
15 time has expired.

16 ELISE BENUSA: Just one more sentence.  
17 Through our Mobile Health Centers and our PSB offices  
18 in the Bronx and Brooklyn. PBGNY continues to be  
19 committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers, no matter  
20 their background, get the care they need. Thank you  
21 so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Peggy Herrera.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

24 PEGGY HERRERA: Hi. Good afternoon. Do you  
25 hear me? Can you hear me?

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can.

3 PEGGY HERRERA: Okay. Good afternoon,  
4 Deputy Speaker Ayala and Committee Members. My name  
5 is Peggy Herrera. I am a leader and a member with  
6 Freedom Agenda and the Campaign to Close Rikers. I am  
7 also a mother who tragically lost my son to gun  
8 violence. As a mother, as a youth counselor, and as a  
9 New Yorker, I know that our communities are  
10 struggling. People are in survival mode, and yet  
11 Mayor Adams still seems committed to the same failed  
12 approach of throwing us crumbs for everything that's  
13 important or cutting the things that will truly  
14 benefit our communities. Our Mayor and the Governor,  
15 along with her, talk about safety, but they don't  
16 seem to get that it's an investment in our  
17 communities and mental health that will bring crime  
18 down, not more policing and incarceration. The  
19 Department of Social Services is responsible for  
20 delivering the kinds of support that our community  
21 desperately needs. They need to be able to do their  
22 job, to get people their food stamps, to issue  
23 housing vouchers, to run job training programs, to  
24 connect people with supportive housing, and so much  
25 more so why is DSS facing funding cuts but not the

2 Department of Correction? Why is the Mayor cutting  
3 their staff, but not DOC's headcount? We know what  
4 the impact will be. People who are already struggling  
5 will be waiting longer and longer for the help they  
6 need. The stress of poverty will impact their mental  
7 health. While they wait and wait for followup from  
8 the agency that is supposed to help them, they'll  
9 probably come into contact with the only agency that  
10 seems to have enough resources to be everywhere all  
11 the time, the NYPD. After the NYPD targets them, they  
12 get funneled to the Department of Correction to be  
13 abused on Rikers, the most expensive jail system in  
14 the country. It makes no sense morally or  
15 financially. I know that the safest communities are  
16 the ones with the most resources, and I think that  
17 the City Council knows that, too. That's why the  
18 Council voted to close Rikers and has stayed  
19 committed to that goal. To make that goal a reality,  
20 we need a budget that moves...

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
22 time has expired.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jay Edidin.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

2 JAY EDIDIN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker  
3 Ayala, Members of the General Welfare Committee, both  
4 for the opportunity to testify today and for your  
5 fierce ongoing advocacy on behalf of the most  
6 vulnerable New Yorkers. My name is Jay Edidin, I'm  
7 the Director of Advocacy at the Women's Community  
8 Justice Association. As of last week, at least one in  
9 five of the women and gender-expansive people  
10 currently incarcerated at the Rose M. Singer Center  
11 on Rikers Island is unhoused. One in five, and the  
12 charges that population faces are overwhelmingly for  
13 non-violent survival crimes. Crimes they would not  
14 have needed to even consider if they had access to  
15 resources to which every New Yorker, every human  
16 being, has a fundamental right. 80 percent, that's  
17 four of every five of the people at RMSC, have some  
18 sort of mental health concern. Nearly that many are  
19 primary caregivers. Many of them have struggled to  
20 access adequate care in the community and would have  
21 been far better served by community-based  
22 alternatives to detention and incarceration than by  
23 their current situation. Mayor Adams discusses mass  
24 incarceration as if it were an inevitability, a  
25 matter of simple math beyond his control, and then in

2 the same breath makes catastrophic cuts to community  
3 services and to alternatives to incarceration and  
4 detention. As some of you already know, the Adams  
5 Administration's plan for the upcoming Queensboro  
6 jail more than tripled the agreed upon number of beds  
7 for women and gender-expansive people from 126 to  
8 450. This is happening at a time when mass  
9 incarceration of women is rising at an alarming rate,  
10 disproportionate to either the incarceration of men  
11 or, and this is the part that should make all of us  
12 especially angry, rate of criminal offense. I call on  
13 this Committee to continue to resist that  
14 fearmongering, to look at the actual crime statistics  
15 and the price, human and financial, of the City's  
16 embrace of mass incarceration, the destruction of  
17 lives and families, the waste of taxpayer dollars,  
18 and, for what? A bloated, inhumane, and ultimately  
19 ineffective system. Look at the Women's Community  
20 Justice Association and Lipman Conditions Path to 100  
21 report, which offered simple, direct, and effective  
22 interventions to lower the population of women and  
23 gender-expansive people caged by the City. Look at  
24 the data on re-offense and how it differs between  
25 incarceration and ATIs. Mayor Adams...

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
3 time has expired.

4 JAY EDIDIN: I call on the Committee to  
5 prioritize community resources and alternatives to  
6 incarceration and to resist the sprawl of borough  
7 jails.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Before I  
9 call the last virtual witness, if there's anyone on  
10 Zoom that has not had the chance to testify and has  
11 not been called, can you please use the raise hand  
12 function?

13 I don't see anyone. I'll call our last  
14 virtual witness who will be Juan Diaz.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

16 JUAN DIAZ: Thank you. My name is Juan  
17 Diaz. Thank you, Chair Ayala and all Members of the  
18 Committee on General Welfare for holding today's  
19 hearing. My name is Juan Diaz, and I'm a Policy  
20 Associate at Citizens Committee for Children, a  
21 multi-issue children's advocacy organization. CCC is  
22 a co-convener of the Family Homeless Coalition.  
23 Today, I will focus mainly on our recommendations to  
24 combat family homelessness, but our written testimony  
25 will contain additional recommendations related to

2 child welfare, due justice, and food insecurity. New  
3 Yorkers are experiencing serious delays in essential  
4 housing and public benefit service applications as  
5 well as severe vacancy rates at social services  
6 organizations and delays in payments to community-  
7 based organizations that provide essential services  
8 to vulnerable New Yorkers. We urge the City to invest  
9 in programs and strategies that will prevent family  
10 homelessness. We therefore urge you to take the  
11 following steps. Implement the CityFHEPS expansion,  
12 which will significantly expedite the housing support  
13 for families in the community and in shelters.  
14 Improve public benefit access and retention by  
15 removing red tape, and implement the technology  
16 solutions to ensure that housing subsidies, payments  
17 and renewals, and public benefits are secured.  
18 Prioritize access to home-based services by providing  
19 funding to support community-based organizations who  
20 administer homeless prevention programs to keep up  
21 with the ever-increasing demand of services. Resolve  
22 contracting issues and payment delays to community-  
23 based organizations providers that impede workforce  
24 and service stability. Baseline funding for  
25 community-based community coordinators to help

2 children to get to school every day and to access  
3 much-needed educational support. We urge the City  
4 Administration to implement meaningful COLA for  
5 homeless services staff. Finally, we urge the City  
6 Administration to invest in streamlining the approval  
7 process of vacant affordable housing units by  
8 reducing repetitive paperwork and hiring the  
9 necessary staff. Thank you for the opportunity to  
10 testify.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We have  
12 finally Jeanine Costley.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 JEANINE COSTLEY: Thank you. Good morning,  
15 Chair Ayala and Members of the Committee on General  
16 Welfare. Thank you for this opportunity to testify  
17 today. My name is Dr. Jeanine Costley. I'm the Senior  
18 Vice President of Transitional Services at the  
19 Institute for Community Living, ICL. We are one of  
20 the city's largest providers of housing and  
21 behavioral health services for children, adults, and  
22 families. We serve over 13,000 people annually in 140  
23 programs across five boroughs, including clinics,  
24 shelters, residences, and community-based programs.  
25 I'm here to talk about the city's concurrent mental



2 health crisis and homeless crisis and what must be  
3 done for non-profits like ours to survive, to help  
4 people who we support. Non-profits face significant  
5 challenges in retaining quality staff. We can't begin  
6 to address the mental health and homeless crisis  
7 without substantial investment in our woefully  
8 underpaid workforce. ICL faces exceptionally high  
9 turnover rates and vacancy rates with turnover rates  
10 of 32 percent across our programs and a massive 70  
11 percent in our shelters that we operate. We need more  
12 funding to achieve pay parity with State-funded  
13 programs that jeopardize our City-funded workforce by  
14 offering more generous compensation. There must be a  
15 cost-of-living-adjustment so our workers'  
16 compensation can keep up with inflation and so  
17 they're fairly compensated for our challenging work.  
18 Now is the time for meaningful transformation of our  
19 shelter system. We thank the City Council for your  
20 leadership and advocacy in preserving the Right to  
21 Shelter law, but that's not enough. Shelters are  
22 often too large and under-resourced and located in  
23 buildings with bad layouts and other unfavorable  
24 conditions. There have been no increases or  
25 adjustments to the funding to reflect the growing

2 food costs, the insurance costs, or operational  
3 expenses. This threatens the viability of non-profit  
4 organizations like ours. The City's delays in  
5 payments are also...

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
7 time has expired.

8 JEANINE COSTLEY: We must regularly borrow  
9 money to provide our contracted services. The bottom  
10 line is that we need a broader investment in funding  
11 for our shelter services and the workforce that  
12 ensures our operations. Thank you so much for this  
13 time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much  
15 for your testimony and for the great work of ICL. We  
16 really appreciate everything you do.

17 With that, after a long day, this hearing  
18 is adjourned. Thank you all. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 25, 2024