

COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES, & ADDICTION 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH,
DISABILITIES, AND ADDICTION

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September 28, 2022

Start: 1:39 p.m.

Recess: 3:25 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Linda Lee, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu
Diana Ayala
Erik D. Bottcher
Shahana K. Hanif
Darlene Mealy
Vickie Paladino

A P P E A R A N C E S

Martha Jackson, Assistant Commissioner for
Workforce and Business Development at MOPD
Janine Jones, Assistant Commissioner for
Workforce1 at Small Business Services
Kadian Outar, Citywide Equity and Inclusion
Executive Director at NYC DCAS
Melissa Lent
James Wilson
Eman Rimawi-Doster
German Junior Santos

1
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
3 check. Today's date is September 28, 2022. Committee
4 on Mental Health, Developmental Disability,
5 Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Disability Services.
6 Being recorded by John Biondo. City Hall Committee
7 Room.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: At this time if
9 our Zoom host could please start the webinar.

10 ZOOM HOST: Webinar started.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Good afternoon
12 and welcome to today's hybrid New York City Council
13 hearing for the Committee on Mental Health.

14 To minimize disruptions, please place all
15 electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode.

16 If you'd like to submit testimony, please
17 send via email to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again,
18 that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 Thank you for your cooperation. Chair
20 Lee, we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. [GAVEL]
22 Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Council Member
23 Linda Lee, and I'm the Chair of the Committee on
24 Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, and today
25 I'm very excited about this hearing actually. It's

1 holding a hearing entitled "Oversight: Making New
2 York City Accessible for Individuals and Employees
3 with Disabilities."

4
5 At this time, actually there are no
6 Colleagues. I know they're on their way. There's a
7 lot of hearings going on today so I know folks are
8 floating around so as they come in I'll acknowledge
9 my Colleagues who are on the Committee.

10 Also, today we're going to be hearing two
11 pieces of legislation, both of which I am proud to be
12 a sponsor. The first is Introduction number 681, a
13 Local Law to amend the Administrative Code of the
14 City of New York in relation to workforce development
15 for persons with the disabilities. The second is
16 Introduction number 682, a Local Law in relation to
17 requiring the Mayor's Office for People with
18 Disabilities to collect from each New York City
19 Office, Department, or Agency a comprehensive five-
20 year accessibility plan.

21 Before I begin, I'd just like to
22 acknowledge Speaker Adrienne Adams who I've heard
23 from multiple advocates is the very first City
24 Council Speaker to actually mention the disability
25 community in a State of the City address, and I know

3 that Speaker Adams' passion and vision for the
4 community served as the impetus that sparked
5 discussions with disability advocates that led to the
6 drafting of the two bills that we hear today so we
7 are definitely indebted to the Speaker as well as the
8 advocates for the important work they do every day
9 and we thank them all.

10 Just on a personal note from myself, I
11 have to say it was tremendous just meeting a lot of
12 the advocates in the disabilities community who I've
13 gotten to know, and I just want to thank them because
14 I will be the first to admit that this is an area
15 that I, myself, need to be more educated on as well
16 as I think a lot of my Colleagues as well as a lot of
17 the city agencies and I really wanted to thank the
18 advocates for their warmth in welcoming me to just
19 use this as a learning experience as well and to
20 really teach because I have fumbled on certain
21 things, and I think what's important that I wanted to
22 mention is that I think we have to remember that this
23 community is not a monolith. There are folks and
24 people with disabilities that range greatly, and we
25 have to make sure that we're listening to their
concerns, keeping our ears and eyes on the ground,

1 and really listening to what the advocates are
2 telling us. As a city, I think we need to do better,
3 and one of the things that I will mention later on in
4 my questions is one of the first things I noticed
5 when I was looking through the portfolio when I took
6 office in January, when I saw the budget for MOPD I
7 was like what, it can't be this much, so I know you
8 guys are doing so much with very little, and I want
9 to see how as a City Council where we can make
10 improvements together and so that's really why I'm
11 excited for this hearing because it really is the
12 first one, I don't know if it's the first one ever
13 but definitely in a very long time, where it's
14 specifically dedicated just for the disabilities
15 community so I'm very excited to hear from all of you
16 today for your testimony and just seeing how we can
17 improve things in the city.

18
19 Just really quickly, some things I wanted
20 to highlight for the record is that about 15 percent
21 of the global population experiences some form of
22 disability and, by 2050, the UN projects that
23 approximately 68 percent of the world will reside in
24 urban areas, and it's vitally important that cities
25 such as New York continue to work on increasing

1
2 access for people with disabilities to ensure their
3 full and effective participation in city life. I know
4 that federal, state, and local laws provide
5 protections for individuals with disabilities by
6 attempting to remove barriers to their participation
7 in society, but there is still much more work to do,
8 and New York City, which is home to almost 1 million
9 residents with self-identified disabilities faces a
10 myriad of accessibility challenges, particularly
11 within our subway system and other transit systems.

12 We also know for a fact that addressing
13 accessibility barriers, particularly in employment,
14 has the potential to not only benefit individuals
15 with disabilities directly but the city as a whole.
16 According to a study by the Rockefeller Institute of
17 Government, the economic impact of creating workforce
18 training programs and employment opportunities for
19 people with disabilities resulted in over 5,000
20 workers with disabilities being employed and
21 generated over 400 million in economic output
22 throughout the State. That breaks down to about 108
23 dollars generated for every hour worked by a person
24 with a disability. Individuals with disabilities have
25 long faced entrenched inaccessibility within the

1 employment landscape, and, according to the Center
2 for Urban Future, which we will hear from, if New
3 York City can lower the rate of unemployment for
4 working-age New Yorkers with disabilities it can
5 potentially lead to an increase of 3.4 billion in
6 annual wages. I know the Mayor's Office for People
7 with Disabilities Employment Program, New York City
8 At Work, has connected more than 500 applicants with
9 disabilities to jobs and internships, and these
10 workers make on average an annual salary of over
11 50,000 dollars. Also, according to Center for Urban
12 Future, a 2.5-million-dollar investment could boost
13 New York City At Work's effectiveness by expanding
14 the program's business development capacity and
15 adding new career training programs, but the MOPD's
16 annual budget of a little over 800,000 dollars, which
17 is significantly less than the funding provided to
18 comparable agencies in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los
19 Angeles, Boston, and Houston is just way too low,
20 especially a city of this size. The COVID-19 pandemic
21 reshaped how all individuals approach work and, with
22 remote and hybrid work becoming the norm during the
23 pandemic, it has resulted in greater than ever a
24 window of opportunity for the inclusion of
25

1 individuals with disabilities within the workplace,
2 which is what the folks in the community have been
3 saying for a very long time. Despite this, there is
4 still much more work to be done. This work and how to
5 best accomplish it is what we hope to explore further
6 during this hearing.
7

8 We look forward to hearing from the
9 administration, advocates, and concerned New Yorkers
10 about their thoughts on these bills and on the
11 challenges the disability community faces daily,
12 especially in employment, in hopes that we can find a
13 path forward that allows all New Yorkers who want to
14 work the chance to do so.

15 The point of today's hearing also is as
16 we introduce these bills, we want feedback and to
17 hear from the advocates on what they think will work,
18 what amendments they would like to see and this is
19 the time for that feedback period and for us to take
20 those into consideration so we look forward to
21 hearing from the administration and all the advocates
22 here today.

23 My Colleagues and staff as well as our
24 Committee staff, I want to thank Sara Sucher who's
25 sitting here who's done an amazing job putting all

1
2 this together so I sound somewhat professional,
3 Committee Counsel and Senior Legislative Policy
4 Cristy Dwyer who's sitting right over there, and also
5 I wanted to acknowledge that we are joined by
6 representatives from the administration, Martha
7 Jackson who is the Assistant Commissioner for
8 Workforce and Business Development at the Mayor's
9 Office for People with Disabilities, Janine Jones,
10 Assistant Commissioner for Workforce, which I'm a
11 huge fan of by the way, at Small Business Services,
12 and Kadian Outar, CEI Executive Director at the New
13 York City's Department of Citywide Administrative
14 Services.

15 I will now turn it over to our Committee
16 Counsel to administer the oath to members of the
17 administration testifying today.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Thank you,
19 Chair. We will now hear testimony from members of the
20 administration. Will you please raise your right
21 hand?

22 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
23 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
24 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
25 questions?

3 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I do.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JONES: I do.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Thank you. You
7 may begin when ready.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I would
9 like to thank Chair Lee and Members of the Committee
10 on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addictions for
11 inviting the Mayor's Office for People with
12 Disabilities to provide testimony at today's hearing.

13 My name is Martha Jackson, and I'm the
14 Assistant Commissioner for Employment and Business
15 Development, but I'm also the Director of NYC At
16 Work, MOPD's first public/private workforce program,
17 and I'm pleased to provide testimony today about our
18 Office's approach to connecting New Yorkers with
19 disabilities to jobs and careers and making it easier
20 for employers to hire and support them.

21 A little bit about the Mayor's Office for
22 People with Disabilities. It was conceived of more
23 than 50 years ago, and it's been operating since at
24 least 1973. The Mayor's Office for People with
25 Disabilities is the liaison between New York City
Government and the disability community. In

1 partnership with all city offices and agencies, MOPD
2 consistently ensures that the rights and concerns of
3 the disability community are included in all city
4 initiatives and that city programs and policies
5 address the needs of people with disabilities in the
6 areas of transportation, employment, healthcare,
7 housing, education, access to city services, and
8 financial empowerment for people with disabilities.
9

10 I'd like to talk first about the need. In
11 the field of workforce development, we've talked
12 about two sides of the equation. On one hand, you
13 have the supply of jobseekers looking for new or
14 better jobs, and, on the other hand, you have
15 employers with the demand for finding qualified
16 talent. When I joined MOPD seven years ago, we found
17 a huge need on both sides of this equation among
18 jobseekers with disabilities and among employers. We
19 found that New Yorkers with disabilities need more
20 job opportunities with career pathways. As you said,
21 there are approximately 1 million New Yorkers who
22 have disclosed as having a disability. A much higher
23 proportion of New Yorkers with disabilities are
24 jobless, currently at 66 percent, unemployed, or not
25 even looking for work anymore compared to those with

1 no disabilities at 39 percent. Relatedly, the
2 proportion of New Yorkers with disabilities who live
3 in poverty is nearly double that of the general
4 population, 29 percent versus 17 percent.
5 Additionally, we've found an extensive need among
6 employers to make their workplaces more accessible
7 and to have inclusion of people with disabilities.
8 Disabilities are not often included in organizations'
9 definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and
10 access, and many employers do not know what resources
11 are available to them and their employees on
12 disability awareness and education. Most employers
13 lack dedicated staff to support program specifically
14 for people with disabilities. Even employers
15 interested in hiring people with disabilities do not
16 know where or how to find this talent. I'd like to
17 talk about the solution, NYC At Work. In response,
18 MOPD conceived of and launched a pilot project, NYC
19 At Work, in 2017 to address both sides of this
20 equation, the supply of jobseekers with disabilities
21 and the demand of employers for qualified talent. NYC
22 At Work is an employment program that recruits,
23 prescreens, and connects New Yorkers with
24 disabilities to jobs and internships with our
25

1 established employer partners in public, private, and
2 non-profit sectors. We empower our participants by
3 offering them guidance to improve their chances of
4 being hired, but it is up to them to implement our
5 tips and proactively look for opportunities.
6

7 For partnerships and coalitions. We also
8 build partnerships and coalitions on the supply and
9 demand side of NYC's labor market, and we act as an
10 intermediary for them. On the demand side, we
11 established the Business Development Council that
12 includes nearly 100 employers to date from a diverse
13 mix of sectors, including finance and business
14 services, retail, hospitality, health and wellness,
15 technology, human services, non-profits, and
16 government. This Council has been the anchor for
17 connecting our participants to jobs and internships
18 and helping us to understand the need for talent
19 among these employers. On the supply side, as part of
20 our outreach strategy, we built a talent coalition
21 comprised of a diverse array of community-based
22 organizations, state vocational rehabilitation
23 agencies, public and private colleges and other
24 organizations and through this coalition of more than
25

60 members we have access to an extensive set of
jobseekers across the five boroughs.

In terms of direct technical assistance,
we also provide direct technical assistance and
services to both stakeholders' groups. For
businesses, this includes business-to-business
meetings, disability awareness training, direct
support building and implementing disability
employment initiatives, and dissemination of best
practices.

Disability is diversity. Businesses lack
education and awareness on disability ability
etiquette, reasonable accommodation, and disclosure.
We have developed a disability etiquette and
awareness training and delivered it virtually and in
person, reaching over 4,000 city, state, and private
employees. This training has been presented by MOPD
staff with lived experience and covers physical,
cognitive, visual, deaf, and hard of hearing
disabilities, provides a brief overview of the
Americans with Disabilities Act, appropriate and
inclusive terminology, reasonable accommodation, and
resources.

3 On the service provider side, this
4 includes facilitated connections to businesses,
5 support for customizing programming, facilitated
6 collaborations to design business training and
7 awareness modules, opportunities to partner on
8 business-related events and intermediation
9 activities, connecting businesses to the provider
10 communities to effectively match our jobseekers to
11 internships and full- or part-time jobs.

12 For the program outcomes. Over the first
13 three years of this program, we exceeded our original
14 goals, engaging nearly 2,800 New Yorkers with
15 disabilities and enrolled more than 1,500 into the
16 program. In addition, we hit 90 percent of our job
17 placement goal by connecting nearly 600 New Yorkers
18 to jobs and 79 to internships. Among jobseekers who
19 found full-time employment, their average salary is
20 nearly 53,000 dollars at present. This is the first
21 public/private workforce development program for New
22 Yorkers with disabilities. We raised funds for the
23 first three years through a mix of state and private
24 foundation sources such as the Kessler Foundation,
25 the Poses Family Foundation, and the Charles H.
Neilsen (phonetic) Foundation.

1
2 The effects of COVID-19 and pandemic.
3 There was a real need for this program, and that need
4 has grown over the past two and a half years due to
5 the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for remote or hybrid
6 opportunities, the need for new trainings and
7 competitive jobs with sustainable wages that will be
8 part of our economic recovery.

9 Expanding the impact of NYC At Work. With
10 that in mind, in partnership with the Department of
11 Small Business Services, we now plan to take NYC At
12 Work to the next level. Our goal over time is to
13 increase the accessibility of the Workforce1 Centers
14 and to attract an increasing volume of New Yorkers
15 with disabilities to seek services through
16 Workforce1, either virtually or in person. To that
17 effect, SBS and MOPD obtained a grant from New York
18 State, the SCION Initiative, which stands for Systems
19 Change, Innovation, and Opportunity Network, of over
20 1.1 million dollars over three years. This grant
21 provides the resources to hire three Disability
22 Resource Coordinators, or DRCs, to collaborate on
23 improving the participation of individuals with
24 disabilities including those with intellectual and
25 development disabilities in workforce systems and

1
2 improve their employment outcomes via a sustainable,
3 job-drive, inclusive model that involves businesses
4 and workforce demand. To improve real systems change
5 within the Workforce1 Career Centers, we're exploring
6 which Centers will receive NYC At Work teams to
7 support these Disability Resource Coordinators and to
8 assist the Workforce1 staff in accessibility and
9 inclusion for the uses of the Center who disclose as
10 having a disability or request assistance in programs
11 and services.

12 I'd like to talk about leading by example
13 in the city as employer. City is lead. Acting as a
14 recruitment resource, NYC At Work has assisted DCAS,
15 the Department of Citywide Administrative Services,
16 to expand its recruitment and gain access to talent-
17 seeking opportunities in city government. The city is
18 poised to lead by example for other employers and
19 hire qualified people with disabilities by use of its
20 55-a program and this Mayor's commitment. MOPD has
21 further enhanced its outreach and recruitment efforts
22 by collaborating with DCAS' Office of Citywide
23 Recruitment, or OCR, in promoting the 55-a program.
24 The 55-a program derives from the New York Civil
25 Service Law to allow qualified persons with

1 disabilities to be appointed to competitive Civil
2 Service positions without having to take a Civil
3 Service exam for the position. OCR provides crucial
4 support in the following ways: Sets guidance and best
5 practices for the city agencies' use of the program.
6 OCR trains agency's 55-a Coordinators on the
7 application process and the effective use of the
8 program to recruit and diversify their workforce.
9 After agencies interview and select a candidate for
10 their competitive position, OCR processes the 55
11 applications by referring them to the New York State
12 Adult Career and Continuing Education Services,
13 ACCES-VR, the State Location and Rehabilitation
14 Agency, or the New York State Commission for the
15 Blind to certify that the candidate has a disability
16 and can perform the duties of the position with or
17 without accommodations. MOPD and OCR also conduct
18 robust marketing of the 55-a program both to internal
19 city agencies and to external jobseekers about how
20 the program can be used as their conduit into city
21 government. Through our collaboration, we educate
22 hiring managers, EEO officers, human resources
23 professionals, and those involved in the recruitment
24
25

1 and hiring process so that all city agencies can
2 build a more diverse and inclusive environment.

3
4 The administration has doubled down on
5 this approach when in August Mayor Adams announced
6 the following two steps: Renewed commitment to fully
7 utilize the 55-a program by educating and encouraging
8 city agencies in its use to employ more qualified
9 people with disabilities in the city's workforce,
10 taking steps to ensure that city employees receive
11 disability etiquette and awareness training produced
12 by DCAS in collaboration with MOPD so that hiring
13 officials and city staff are familiar with our fellow
14 New Yorkers and all that they may have to offer to
15 this workforce.

16 In our forthcoming plan, March of 2022,
17 Mayor Adams' Blueprint for Economic Recovery tasked
18 the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and
19 the Mayor's Office for Talent and Workforce
20 Development to deliver a comprehensive plan to
21 include increasing the accessibility of career
22 training and employment opportunities. MOPD and
23 Mayor's Office for Talent and Workforce Development
24 are currently developing that comprehensive plan to
25 address these issues. Once we have finalized the

1 plan, we would be happy to share it with Members of
2 this Council.
3

4 In conclusion, I am grateful really to
5 have been given the opportunity over these past seven
6 years to be part of a systems and culture change for
7 New Yorkers with disabilities and their families. In
8 building NYC At Work, we have seen the potential, the
9 progress, and the resiliency of our remarkable staff,
10 our jobseekers, and all our partners through the past
11 two and a half years during the pandemic. Under the
12 leadership of Mayor Adams and our new Commissioner,
13 Christina Curry, I am optimistic that our next steps
14 and future plans will continue to prove that at work,
15 it's what you can do that matters. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Before we move on, I
17 just want to acknowledge my Colleagues, Council
18 Member Shahana Hanif as well as Deputy Speaker Diana
19 Ayala to the hearing.

20 I'm just going to ask a few questions and
21 then open it up to my Colleagues also if they have
22 any questions as well. I know that just on the
23 current work and plans, can you elaborate briefly on
24 the progress and current status of MOPD's existing
25 programs that are intended to increase accessibility

1
2 for New Yorkers with disabilities and just to go
3 through really quickly, I know that the following on
4 the website, the few that I wanted to focus on, the
5 first one was the ASL Direct as well as Empowered NYC
6 and the Inclusive Design Guidelines. If there's any
7 updates for that or how things are going or any
8 challenges that you see as well.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I can
10 start with the ASL Direct. The program has handled
11 more than 3,500 calls, emails, and in-person visits
12 since 2018. Through August 31, 2022, the program has
13 handled more than 500 cases and HRA has handled more
14 than 675. Since January, MOPD has handled 267 cases
15 and HRA has handled I believe over 600.

16 I can tell you that at this point we had
17 two staff at ASL Direct at MOPD. One of them just
18 resigned last week, and we are bringing on another
19 person at the end of the month at the end of the
20 month. That person actually had the job of Disability
21 Service Facilitator which is a different role. This
22 is the same person at ASL, and she had just resigned
23 to take care of her little one so that role will be
24 filled by someone from my staff.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I
3 apologize for that.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh no.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm happy
6 to talk about Empowered NYC.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, go ahead, please,
8 and if you could just briefly explain, because I know
9 it's financial support, right, and counseling?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: It's free
11 financial counseling for New Yorkers with districts
12 and their families. We received funding. It didn't go
13 to MOPD. It actually went to Department of Consumer
14 and Worker Protection and the National Disability
15 Institute to collaborate with us on Empowered NYC. It
16 was a pilot program to provide training and financial
17 empowerment for New Yorkers with disabilities and
18 their families. Through additional funding, we were
19 able to keep a bridge going through COVID to be able
20 to support our community. The pilot has helped more
21 than 1,000 families and reduced their debt by more
22 than 442,000 dollars from 2019 to 2022.

23 I'm also really pleased to say that DCWP,
24 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, is
25 going to be adding additional training to all of

1 their financial empowerment counselors. They have a
2 contract with Cornell Yang-Tan Institute to provide
3 that training which is going to begin in January of
4 2023. The training that was provided by National
5 Disability Institute was really the first of its
6 kind. It wasn't just about Social Security and SSDI.
7 It was about budgeting. It was about understanding
8 what to do before you go to work so that your
9 benefits possibly will not be impacted if you choose
10 to either go to work or return to work. One of the
11 reasons that this is so important, I can't stress
12 this enough, is that many folks stay on disability
13 because of their healthcare benefits, and, if they
14 don't have a job that pays a decent wage and provides
15 benefits, it's going to be very difficult for them to
16 change that. SSI goes to the family, it goes to
17 housing, it goes to food, it's a part of a family's
18 budget, and so if you're going to give that up you
19 have to give it up for something that's going to give
20 you something better than, and so this is a huge
21 issue. Historically, it's a generational issue, it's
22 a lack of information, it's antiquated information,
23 and the reason we started Empowered NYC is because of
24 the folks that were coming to us through NYC At Work.
25

1 We knew that they had information that was totally
2 inadequate, that was wrong, that made them afraid to
3 think about going to work, and the truth of the
4 matter is that we were concerned at the beginning
5 that maybe most of the people coming to NYC At Work
6 would be people who wanted to stay on benefits, but
7 the truth of the matter is that that's not the case
8 at all. Our average salary is 53,000 dollars, and
9 most of the folks have full-time employment. For
10 those that have significant physical disabilities,
11 that's another issue which I think maybe we could
12 talk about at another time. Oftentimes, they stay on
13 their benefits, and the downside of that is that
14 there's a salary cap for them as well.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Just out of curiosity,
17 what's the main mode, because I know that you had
18 mentioned that there's a lot of misinformation or old
19 information so what has been the main mode of
20 outreach for the Empowered NYC program?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: When we
22 started the pilot, we did community sessions. We went
23 to probably I think about 80 partners over the course
24 of the two years. We actually had counseling sites at
25 different non-profits where people who were going for

1
2 services could actually get that as part of their
3 services at their non-profit organization. We
4 actually had them, before COVID, we would have
5 counselors come to MOPD, oftentimes in the evenings,
6 to be able to give seminars, and then throughout the
7 course of COVID, we had virtual presentations on a
8 regular basis. Everything can be done virtually still
9 at this point, but the wonderful thing is that when
10 this training is completed, that any family member,
11 anyone with a disability can walk into any Financial
12 Empowerment Center and should be able to get correct
13 information, timely information, and one of the
14 things that has been a huge help has been being able
15 to help people with their Social Security
16 overpayments because that's something most
17 organizations did not know how to deal with.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Just really quickly on
19 the Inclusive Design Guidelines, so in March 2021, I
20 know New York City Department of Housing Preservation
21 and Development, HPD, released newly revised design
22 guidelines to promote equity, health, and
23 sustainability for affordable housing. The plans call
24 for the city's investments to combat disparities and
25 barriers to various opportunities, but, just out of

1
2 curiosity, was MOPD also involved or consulted by HPD
3 in developing the guidelines at the time?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm
5 sorry. I'm actually thinking about Inclusive Design
6 Guidelines that are part of MOPD, but we were not
7 part of this I don't believe.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Are you familiar
9 with the accessibility guidelines on the HPD side
10 that came out?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm
12 sorry. I'm having a little trouble hearing you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sorry. Are you
14 familiar with the accessibility guidelines that was
15 released by HPD?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I just wanted to
18 make sure or see if they had consulted with MOPD when
19 designing or developing the guidelines, and, if not,
20 I was just curious how it's been working with HPD on
21 that.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm going
23 to say I don't think that I can respond to that, but
24 I'd like to be able to and get back to you on that.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Also, can you
4 speak to any other work MOPD has done that relates to
5 ensuring improving accessibility in New York City's
6 affordable housing stock, whether independently or in
7 conjunction with other city agencies or departments
8 or offices?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm
10 actually here on testimony on employment so if
11 there's anything else that I can respond to and get
12 back to you, I'm happy to do that.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Moving slightly to
14 the budget, I think there's definitely a clear lack
15 of public investment for supporting New Yorkers with
16 disabilities. For example, MOPD's current annual
17 budget is only 820,000, which is significantly less
18 than per capita funding for disability agencies in
19 other cities across the U.S., major cities like
20 Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston. The current funding for
21 MOPD breaks down to approximately less than a dollar
22 per capita in New York City, and I think I know the
23 answer to this question but do you believe this
24 annual budget is sufficient to accomplish all of
25 MOPD's goals?

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I can
3 tell you that we have been in regular and constant
4 conversations with OMB and with our leadership, and I
5 believe that the commitment of this Mayor is true,
6 and so as we figure out what it is we're going to do
7 in this new administration and under Commissioner
8 Curry as well, I think these conversations will be
9 ongoing and fruitful. I think we all know we need to
10 focus on this, and I believe that's the intent.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: In your opinion, in
12 order to really sort of see the vision of MOPD come
13 to fruition, is there a budget amount that you think
14 would be sufficient or what would you at least like
15 to see it increase to?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Because
17 we have a brand new Commissioner and she's only been
18 in the office about four weeks and three days, I
19 think we really need to give her the time to see what
20 her vision might be and where she wants to take this
21 office. At the point that we've been able to also
22 deliver updates on our program, the comprehensive
23 plan, I think at that time we'd be in the position to
24 really talk honestly about where we are and what we
25 need.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, awesome. Four weeks and two days, that's very short.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: She's out every day.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: If possible, would you be able to provide the Committee with workforce management information such as MOPD's headcount, payroll cost for permanent staff and contractors as well to this Committee?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I will check with our Chief of Staff who also does our budget. She's actually out with COVID (INAUDIBLE) I will check with her, and we'll get back to you on that as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it. One of my favorite topics to talk about is transit deserts because I'm in a District that is a transit desert. We have no railways in my District. I think I'm one of only a couple of City Council Districts that has no railways, so we do rely heavily on cars and other modes of transportation, buses for sure, MTA so as we know the MTA not only desperately needs to make basic much-needed to the subway system but also put work into making the entire system more accessible and

1 equitable for the city as a whole. In June, the MTA
2 said that it would add elevators and ramps to 95
3 percent of subway stations by 2055 as part of a
4 settlement agreement in two class action lawsuits.
5 Although the MTA is a public benefit corporation that
6 falls under State control, does MOPD, a local office
7 that is likely more tuned into the accessibility
8 issues that affects the transit system, do you work
9 in conjunction regularly with MTA. For example, is
10 MOPD ever consulted by MTA to provide recommendations
11 for increasing accessibility within the New York City
12 transit system?
13

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Up until
15 March, or actually I think it was June, the previous
16 Commissioner, Victor Calise, was actually on the MTA
17 board and I believe was one of the first Board
18 Members who was disclosed as having a physical
19 disability and so that information, his both personal
20 and professional experiences were a huge part of
21 that. I'm hoping that at some point we can go back to
22 having a representative as well, but we'll see where
23 that goes.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, definitely. I think
25 having folks on the board with that lived experience

1 is very, very important. Does MOPD track the issues
2 related to accessibility in transit deserts where
3 residents have at least a 15-minute walk to the
4 nearest subway or rail station, and what, if
5 anything, is MOPD doing to boost accessible transit
6 in these deserts or what more could be done from your
7 perspective?
8

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Because I
10 was here to talk about workforce, I don't want to
11 misspeak, but, because we do have new leadership, I
12 think it's fair that we come back to you with some of
13 these answers when the Commissioner has had a little
14 bit more time to get settled and understand and also
15 really to meet with the community. She hasn't even
16 really had much of a chance to do that at all, and I
17 know that's one of the most important things that she
18 wants to do so I think after those consistent
19 community sessions, I think we'll have more to share.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, or even in the
21 past, in your experiences at MOPD, have there ever
22 been conversations around the, I'm assuming there
23 have been conversations but I guess just as a note if
24 there are recommendations that MOPD has on transit
25 desert issues and accessibility in New York City to

1 just keep us in the loop if you ever need our help
2 with that is all.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON:

5 Absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I just want to

7 acknowledge my Colleagues, Council Member Mealy as
8 well as Council Member Bottcher, who have joined us
9 as well.

10 Going back to the At Work initiative and
11 55-a hiring goals. The New York City 55-a program
12 allows a qualified person with a certified disability
13 to be hired into competitive Civil Service positions
14 without taking an exam. Can you describe how
15 effective this program has been in recent years? I
16 know you kind of went over it briefly during the
17 testimony. Is there any data on the number of
18 qualified persons hired as a result?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: For that
20 part, I think I'm going to turn that over to Kadian
21 Outar because she has that.

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: Thank you so
23 much. I appreciate the slight delay as I read the
24 caption to catch up on the question.

1
2 I'd like to give a little bit of a
3 background on the 55-a program. Generally, the
4 program was used for mostly individuals who have
5 already been employed with city government, and so
6 maybe later on developed a disability throughout
7 their career or through education that we've been
8 doing learned about the program. With MOPD and DCAS'
9 partnership starting 2018, we've taken several
10 different approaches to ensure that the program is
11 used as an entry point for individuals with
12 disabilities to get into city government. Some of the
13 approaches that we took were first to make sure that
14 we updated the documentation that provides guidance
15 to agencies on what the program is that was our
16 Personal Services bulletin. We looked at it, which
17 hadn't been updated in years before, and we updated
18 the policies, we clarified the types of positions
19 that were eligible, only competitive, we clarified
20 what agencies were eligible under the program, and
21 the general application process. The next step that
22 we took was that we then held a 55-a symposium where
23 we invited individuals that were serving in the
24 recruitment capacity or HR, EEO officers, and our 55-
25 a coordinators. Those are the staff within the staff

1 within the agency that handles the internal agency
2 application, and we provided them with the updates
3 that we made to the PSB but also it was an
4 opportunity to discuss what we wanted to do with the
5 program, how we wanted to utilize the program as a
6 recruitment tool. Following that conversation, we
7 then had a series of disability etiquette training,
8 which is really important in getting people to see
9 the best ways to engage and communicate with
10 individuals with disability and that also led to the
11 very first citywide Diversity Career Fair and also a
12 series of agency-specific career fairs specifically
13 for individuals with disability. Through these
14 different approaches, we saw a really robust increase
15 in the number of individuals that were coming into
16 city government, new to city government through that
17 program, and it's really through that education that
18 was helpful in making sure that people were being
19 hired in the program.

21 Unfortunately, with the pandemic like
22 everything we kind of lost the momentum that was
23 there, but one thing that we've done is to reconvene
24 and say how can we make sure that we are utilizing
25 the program again so we once again started doing

1 training, this time in inclusive and diverse
2 recruitment training for anyone that's involved in
3 the recruitment process. We hosted another symposium
4 because we knew that there were new staff with a new
5 administration and we needed to make sure that they
6 were educated on that program and then in a month
7 we're having another citywide Diversity Career Fair
8 so we wanted to make sure that we were educating our
9 internal city agencies on the process, what to
10 expect, but another part that we did is focus on the
11 external promotion to all of the jobseekers. The
12 first thing is most people are not familiar with jobs
13 within the city or the process for getting that so we
14 wanted to start with just that overall education
15 piece to let them know the city's here, you can get
16 opportunities, and here's how you can do so through
17 the 55-a program and so with that and the
18 administration's commitment to increasing diversity
19 and utilizing the disability etiquette and the 55-a
20 program, I think we are really on our way to using
21 the program as robustly as we can.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think it's, like you
24 said, it's proven in the numbers because just from
25 what we've seen in the data, I think the city hired

1
2 four employees per year through this program in 2016
3 and 2017 but then in 2018 and 2019, 73 individuals
4 were hired, mainly as a result of the support from
5 New York City At Work so I think it's definitely
6 shown an increase and hopefully we can continue to
7 help promote that as well.

8 What's your opinion of Intro 681 which
9 would codify New York City At Work and require SBS to
10 collaborate with MOPD to deploy a public awareness
11 campaign to increase employer awareness of the
12 resources available to facilitate employment of
13 people with disabilities so what are your thoughts on
14 the Intro?

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: We are
16 definitely in agreement with the intent of the bill
17 because it's definitely something that we're doing
18 and we're educating the public and we're definitely
19 on target with that. I know there's definitely
20 additional conversation that could be held with that,
21 and we're open to that. I'll pass it over MOPD.

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I agree
23 with Kadian. We are definitely interested in the
24 intent of the bill and support the intent of the
25 bill. We'd love to be able to look at the language.

1 As you can see, this is a really remarkable
2 collaborative between two city agencies, and we'd
3 love to make sure that we can keep this going as well
4 as even the off-the-list and the noncompetitive.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. Thank you. Just
7 before I move on to my next question, just wanted to
8 acknowledge Council Member Palladino also who has
9 also joined us.

10 Have you guys had a chance to read the
11 CUF Report? In response to the COVID pandemic, the
12 broad acceptance of a remote and hybrid work model
13 has resulted in a greater window of opportunity for
14 the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in
15 workplaces. However, recent research by CUF, Center
16 for an Urban Future, has found government initiatives
17 to be limited in scope and underfunded. Going
18 forward, what has or is the city doing to reverse
19 this trend and eliminate the gaps in funding and
20 support?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I think
22 there's a few thing just that we've done at MOPD.
23 I'll go back a little bit right before COVID really.
24 If people want to work remotely, they have to have
25 the skills and the tools to be able to do that,

1 that's the most important thing, and working remotely
2 just doesn't mean staying at home and answering the
3 phone call. There's whole career options there. What
4 we've found is that a lot of folks, they either had
5 little computer skills or technology skills or their
6 skills had atrophied or they'd had a different job
7 and due to the nature of their disability they needed
8 to find something else so one of the things that we
9 did is we partnered with a non-profit partner,
10 Institute for Career Development. We created a
11 training academy, AbilITy Training Academy for Cisco
12 CCNT, it's still in operation. We use that model
13 because of COVID and with the interactions that we're
14 having, the webinars, the meetings, everything that
15 we're had during COVID because everything went
16 remote. We saw that about 54 percent of the
17 participants were using their phones so, if they're
18 using their phones to join a webinar, they're using
19 their phones to apply for a job, they're using their
20 phones to do a resume, etc. One of the things that we
21 did is we were able to get a grant from the Mayor's
22 Fund, and we were able to purchase laptops with any
23 accessible technology that was required, and we
24 started to train people, skill people up during this
25

1 particular time. It was very hard to find a training
2 partner that understood how to teach to different
3 learning styles, that understood that not everybody
4 learns the same way, and we tried for I'd say about a
5 year in order to do that. Some of the folks were able
6 to actually connect to the Manhattan Employment
7 Opportunity Center and get training there, and that
8 was successful for them, but now what we are doing is
9 we are partnering with STRIVE, I don't know if you're
10 familiar with the organization STRIVE from Harlem,
11 but they have a history of excellent training, paid
12 internships and placement rate. The CUF report also
13 mentions that so many of the provider agencies, their
14 participants are people with disabilities, either
15 undisclosed or undocumented, and a lot of the
16 providers just don't know how to support them so
17 we're taking this opportunity and we're trying to
18 figure out how to really create an inclusive training
19 program. We received some funds from Wells Fargo.
20 It's an administrative assistant training program
21 that we're doing together, and we hope it's going to
22 be a pilot project that we can actually share with
23 many more non-profits. It's expected to launch at the
24 end of October, and, for the first time, we're
25

1
2 actually going to be starting to write the playbook
3 on how to create an inclusive and accessible training
4 program that providers who do not necessarily "serve"
5 the disability community even though they know they
6 do will have access to that. Again, we see an issue,
7 and we try to respond and that's the way we've been
8 working, especially through the training. Because we
9 really have struggled to find a partner, we kind of
10 said okay, then we're just going to build our own and
11 figure this out in order to be able to share best
12 practices.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you for that. I
14 know on the federal government side, they've included
15 a 7 percent hiring target for this (INAUDIBLE) in its
16 federal jobs contracts, and, as a result, I think
17 they recently reported that the hiring of individuals
18 with disabilities in federal agencies has actually
19 exceeded that benchmark and is now at 8.6 percent.
20 Has there been any discussion of including a similar
21 hiring target for jobs in New York City?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Yes,
23 actually there has been, and we've been working very
24 closely with our Office of the Counsel on this. It's
25 not going to be an easy process, but everyone is

1 really trying to look at if it can be done, how it
2 can be done, but this is the first time this
3 conversation is even happening so it's a good thing.

4
5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, so not a specific
6 number yet, but you guys are having conversations
7 about it.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Yes, we
9 are.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. Okay. I
11 actually just wanted to quickly open it up to my
12 Colleagues if you guys had any questions that you
13 wanted to ask. Council Member Hanif.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Hi. Good afternoon.
15 Thank you so much for testifying. I'll first start
16 off with some questions about remote work. The City
17 of New York needs to be an employer that welcomes New
18 Yorkers with disabilities which we both agree about,
19 and I want to say on the record that the Mayor's
20 insistence on mandating in-person work five days a
21 week across city agencies with minimal, if any,
22 exceptions is a policy that discriminates against New
23 Yorkers with disabilities. When I was a staffer in my
24 predecessor's Council office, the ability to have a
25 flexible schedule that allowed for remote work was

1 critical to me managing my lupus and being the most
2 productive employee I could be. Coming off the
3 pandemic, we know that work can be done effectively
4 remotely. My first question is why is the
5 administration prohibiting work arrangements that New
6 Yorkers with disabilities need?
7

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: Really in the
9 capacity that we're in right now, I'm unable to
10 provide information on that, but I would be able to
11 check in with our colleagues and get back to you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I'll ask
13 the following questions that I have, and, if need be,
14 I can reach out separately for the best points of
15 contact in the agency. What proactive steps are
16 agencies taking to make their workplaces welcoming
17 and accessible places to work for people with
18 disabilities aside from basic compliance with the
19 ADA?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: Thank you. I
21 appreciate the delay. One of the things that we're
22 doing to ensure that the workforce is accessible, as
23 MOPD mentioned, we are first of all doing the
24 disability etiquette training because there's one
25 piece to hire individuals with disability but we also

1 want to make sure that our workforce is prepared and
2 we're having different conversations on what that
3 looks like, but we know that starting with training,
4 not just hiring managers but everyone on the best way
5 to engage and interact with individuals with district
6 is one, and I know there are other trainings on
7 making sure that our meetings are accessible, making
8 sure that we're using the most accessible platforms
9 in how we communicate and engage, having other ways
10 of meeting when we are engaging in the workforce, and
11 I'm sure MOPD can speak to some additional guidance
12 that agencies are provided that will make sure that
13 at the end of it that we are creating a diverse and
14 inclusive workforce.
15

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How frequently do
17 these trainings happen? Are they once or quarterly or
18 how do you conduct them?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: For our
20 disability etiquette training, we actually just
21 worked this year to put it as a computer-based
22 training. Previously, it was in partnership. We would
23 go to the agencies or we would have training at our
24 Learning and Development Center, but now through the
25 partnership with MOPD we were able to make this a

1 computer-based training that is open to anyone that
2 has access to a city network. We are also working
3 with individual agencies who have reached out to us
4 and said we have an interest in hiring individuals
5 with disability, we have an interest in training our
6 staff, and we're coordinating individual trainings
7 with those agencies and planning, within my team, to
8 offer different training on a regular basis to
9 agencies so we're attacking it from a few different
10 avenues where we're hoping to get the most
11 involvement. I'll definitely turn it over to MOPD.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: One of
14 the things that our office does is provide guides on
15 our website, and I think it's really important to
16 know that in the staff that we do have someone who
17 does focus on digital accessibility. A lot of people
18 reach out to our agency to get the support that they
19 need so we started putting together actual trainings
20 on how to make things accessible because reading a
21 guide just kind of doesn't cut it a lot of times, and
22 it's very hands-on, and all of our staff has been
23 trained in that so that we know how to make
24 everything accessible, our documents, our PDFs, our
25 PowerPoints. We also provide social media and event

1 guide, how to make things accessible that way because
2 you want to be welcoming and respectful to all. Those
3 guides will be updated. Again, under this new
4 Commissioner, we are looking at other things that we
5 need to focus on or things that we need to update
6 primarily, and those will all be posted on our
7 website. In terms of the trainings, when people ask
8 us, whether it's a city agency or we have outside of
9 the city multiple businesses that reach out to us all
10 the time to provide that training, showing that the
11 city is an employer taking the lead here, and over
12 4,000 folks have been trained by our in-person and
13 now virtual, just the staff at MOPD with lived
14 experience providing that training.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. May I
17 have permission to wrap up? Do you also provide
18 support to individuals with disabilities who may need
19 a wellness planning, and, from experience, when I was
20 a young kind of organizer figuring out that it was
21 impossible for me to go into our office every single
22 day and I then understood that I needed to work from
23 home once or twice a week and I had no prior guidance
24 outside of just sort of searching for others who have
25 had this experience and needed to bring it up to

1 their employer, and I created a wellness plan with
2 the support of other people with disabilities who had
3 done this, but it's been on an individual basis. Is
4 that something that the agency provides support with?
5 Has that come up?

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: We don't
8 do it ourselves, but, because of the strong coalition
9 of agencies that we work with, well over 64, whenever
10 anyone has an issue like that we are able to reach
11 out to our partners. There are partners that have
12 specific experience in very specific disabilities.
13 I'm thinking of ICS, I'm thinking of Job Path. This
14 is a part of the services that they provide and so,
15 while we don't do that, we also don't give a cold
16 handoff. We make a direct referral, we connect with
17 the individual that we are referring them to, and we
18 also do the followup to make sure that that has been
19 done and if there are any issues or anything else
20 that needs to be addressed with that plan they can
21 always reach back out to us, but that's one of the
22 great reasons about having this great coalition of
23 partnerships.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's really
25 wonderful to know. My final question is can you share

1
2 the amount of New Yorkers with disabilities who have
3 left municipal jobs since March 2020, and can you
4 share if that number is disproportionate in relation
5 to municipal employees who don't have disabilities?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: As it relates
7 to getting those specific numbers, I would definitely
8 have to check in with my colleagues and get back to
9 you, but it's really important to note that the city
10 only tracks individuals with disabilities through the
11 55-a program. This is because there is a specific
12 need and the individual has to have a qualifying
13 disability to participate in that program. Outside of
14 that, it is not legal for us to collect that
15 information because we cannot make any kind of
16 employment decision based on the person's disability
17 so we will be able to get back to you on the number
18 of individuals that have left the 55-a program, but
19 as city employees who have disability, that is not
20 something that we currently track.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much.
22 Thank you, Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Next, I'll
24 have our Deputy Speaker Ayala ask her questions.
25

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Good afternoon. Can you tell me what the number of staffers assigned to MOPD is?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Assigned to MOPD? On MOPD, I believe it's seven and the others are partner agencies.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. Is MOPD currently working with DCAS at all to try to identify positions that may be available that could be set aside for individuals with disabilities that are looking to work remotely?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: For the city, remotely? I guess it depends on the job description.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: Exactly. Actually, as it relates to general remote work, right now that is not something that I can speak to in terms of what the city is doing regarding that. As it relates to positions for individuals with disabilities and reasonable accommodations that may be needed, the city does evaluate individuals on a case-by-case basis, but there has been a lot of increases since the pandemic that allows for

1 individuals to work internal within a city agency so
2 we can definitely get back to you on that question.

3
4 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I think we have a
5 demand for a workforce that doesn't exist right now.
6 Every city agency is understaffed at this point, and
7 there are individuals sitting at home right now who
8 are quite capable of doing those jobs if they were
9 provided the tools, but I think that they also
10 unfortunately require that we all play a hand in not
11 only encouraging but demanding that they be seen and
12 heard and included in these conversations because I
13 don't think that that happens, unfortunately, for
14 people with different abilities organically. I find
15 that even being a Member of even this Committee and
16 when I Chaired it that the disability community is
17 often very disenfranchised and I think we allow the
18 State to take kind of over a lot of the jurisdiction
19 because they have a lot of jurisdiction over some of
20 these matters, but, in this case when we're talking
21 about workforce development, we have jobs that are
22 readily available and I am confident that we have a
23 workforce that is also quite capable. I get the whole
24 people have to come into work and there are certain
25 positions that really require that. I run a

1
2 Constituent Services Office. I need people there to
3 interface with the community who may not have access
4 to computers and cannot do Zoom and don't know how to
5 operate a smartphone. That's necessary so I
6 understand the logic behind that, but I also have a
7 Budget Director and a Legislative Director. They
8 don't have to necessarily be in the office. They
9 could work easily from home and still be able to do
10 that work. I encourage MOPD to try, and I know that
11 with a very limited staff which is why I asked
12 initially how many staffers are assigned to MOPD that
13 that can become difficult, but I really would
14 encourage there to be a more intentional level of
15 communication with DCAS to see if there was a way to
16 incorporate some of those opportunities into the work
17 that MOPD is already doing.

18 How does MOPD, because I think you
19 referenced a few times where the ability of certain
20 folks with different abilities to be able to do these
21 jobs, that they may not be computer literate, they
22 may have not exercised that skillset in a long time,
23 how does MOPD survey individuals to determine that?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Through
25 our NYC At Work program, when someone calls, whether

1
2 it's 311 or through the website or, before COVID,
3 they would come to the office, we also have referrals
4 from our partner agencies across all disabilities,
5 cognitive, blind, vision, hearing, physical, across
6 all disabilities so when someone's interested in
7 work, the first thing we do is we would provide a
8 screening. It used to be in person. Now it's kind of
9 on the phone or via Zoom depending on the request of
10 the individual, and we try to understand what the
11 challenges have been, what experience, what
12 education, where are they with their technical needs.
13 Then we have an orientation on NYC At Work so that
14 the individuals can understand exactly sort of what
15 this program is like. If they are looking for a job
16 that requires any kind of technical skill, this is
17 one of the reasons why we partner with the State
18 Vocation and Rehabilitation Agencies. We will refer
19 them to one of the agencies or we will refer them to
20 one of our partners. As I mentioned earlier before to
21 Council Member Lee, we've actually started looking at
22 creating accessible integrated training because of
23 this kind of approach so we're partnering with
24 workforce training programs that are really good at
25 that, that know that they have people with

1 disabilities that are struggling as well, and now
2 we're trying to create an inclusive program. It's the
3 skill, this is at the bottom and the heart of it all.
4 the level of skill for many people is where it was
5 when they left school, and that's because, as I
6 mentioned, before, there's really been little to no
7 accessible training, in all of the trainings that
8 happened, there's been little to no training which is
9 why we've just in our own little way started our own,
10 but we also have other partners..

12 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I don't want to
13 interrupt you. I appreciate you saying that. However,
14 my reluctance is that if there's no formal surveying
15 process and we're evaluating folks as we're
16 interacting with them through the course of the work
17 of MOPD or relying on referrals that that's not an
18 accurate reflection of the actual census of
19 individuals that may require a specific accommodation
20 and so I wonder is that something that has come up?
21 Is it something that MOPD is considering or would
22 consider to the larger network of New Yorkers that
23 can help inform how MOPD is prioritizing policy, what
24 type of jobs individuals are looking for?

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: The way
3 that we do it is we actually have a job board. People
4 can go to the job board and they can be referred to
5 the job board. They can apply...

6 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: But how would I
7 know about the job board if I'm sitting at home and
8 I'm already over the age of 22, which disconnects me
9 from a lot of government services, how would I know?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I will
11 say that in one of the programs that we're looking at
12 in the very near future PR campaigns are crucial,
13 social media is crucial, and we understand that, and
14 we actually will be working in partnership with SBS...

15 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I'm not trying to
16 put you on the spot. I want to encourage this
17 conversation because I think it's necessary, but I
18 think that we also in 2022 have to kind of start
19 thinking outside of the box and understanding that
20 not everybody that has a different ability is
21 incapable of functioning in the workforce and I think
22 that there is no real quantifiable evidence that I've
23 seen that tells me one thing or the other. I don't
24 know that we're serving the larger network of New
25 Yorkers that have special needs. I took more than

1 enough time. I just want to leave you with a
2 suggestion. A couple of years ago under the Bloomberg
3 administration, one of the only good things that he
4 did, was that he did come up with what was called the
5 Age-Friendly NYC initiative, and I found that that
6 that initiative was actually really helpful in
7 enforcing all of the city agencies to really look at
8 ways that they could become more age-friendly, and I
9 don't see why we wouldn't or shouldn't be doing
10 something similar for MOPD and your network of
11 families and different agency groups that you're
12 working with. It's just a proposal, but I think that
13 I like to have data so that I know that I'm moving in
14 the direction that best meets the needs of the
15 population I'm trying to help, and I think a lot of
16 times with the disabilities community we make a lot
17 of assumptions because we don't have that data. Thank
18 you for being here today and for all the work that
19 you do. I don't know how you do it with seven people.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Let me
22 just clarify. We have other people in the office, but
23 they are agency partners so that's how we're able to
24 get things done so we have OEM, we have DoIT or OIT
25 now, we have Law, we have other partners in order for

1 us to be able to get the work done. As a matter of
2 fact, when I first got there, I was the eighth person
3 so in seven years we've been able to build it out
4 with partners and we're in partnership also with SBS.

5 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. It's
7 funny because my next question was about the
8 accessibility of reports because I'm also a big fan
9 of data as well. Just wanted to know is MOPD planning
10 on releasing a 2022 Accessibility NYC Report, and, if
11 so, do you know when we could expect to see that
12 report?
13

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Yes, we
15 are, but it probably won't be until sometime next
16 year.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: Perhaps
19 mid to latter part of the year.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, so 2023
21 Accessibility NYC (INAUDIBLE) Okay. To the extent
22 that you're able, can you briefly summarize the
23 initiatives that MOPD will be discussing in the
24 report, like are there any reports in there
25 discussing accessibility improvements and the work

1
2 that is still needed to be done with employment,
3 health, a lot of those areas? Do you know what
4 initiatives will be in the report?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JACKSON: I'm going
6 to back to the fact that the Commissioner has only
7 been here a month, and we really want to give her the
8 opportunity to look at the landscape, to speak with
9 the community, and to understand where we need to go
10 in the future. I think this is an opportunity for us
11 to look forward, make changes, but she really needs
12 to be the one that's helping us drive this and I'm
13 sure in the next few months into year we'll have a
14 better idea of exactly where we're going to go.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. We definitely look
16 forward to seeing that one. Just my last set of
17 questions before we hear from the public is just
18 around MOPD and SBS initiatives. In 2019, I know that
19 MOPD and Department of SBS with New York City
20 Building Improvement District Association and Public
21 Policy Lab launched Empowering Accessibility, an
22 online resource that enables New York City's small
23 business owners to more easily understand their legal
24 obligation for compliance with accessibility
25 standards. Just out of curiosity, does SBS have any

1 data on whether New York City businesses, have they
2 used the resource, has it been helpful for them, and
3 what metrics are available to evaluate the resource's
4 effectiveness if there is any?

5
6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JONES: Thank you
7 so much for the question. We're really proud of our
8 partnership with MOPD. Since 2019, we've really been
9 able to get out into the business community to really
10 ensure that they understood the resources that were
11 available to them. In terms of the viewership at this
12 point, we've had about 11,000 people, unique
13 individuals, seek access into really identifying what
14 the resources were. We've also done a lot of train
15 the trainers within the BID network to ensure that,
16 again, people just need to know and it's really about
17 communicating the information to them and
18 understanding that we are, in addition to that, a
19 resource for them.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I'm assuming if you work
21 with different BIDs across the city, can you actually
22 languages also because I know that that sometimes is
23 a barrier, especially in districts like mine where
24 it's 45 percent Asian American and there's multiple
25

1 languages spoken just in my district alone and I know
2 Queens in general and the city in general.

3
4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JONES: What I can
5 tell you is it's offered in about 12 different
6 languages at this point and I can get back to you on
7 the specifics in terms of which ones but 12.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. What other
9 programs does MOPD and SBS work together on and offer
10 to help improve access for individuals with
11 disabilities to small businesses in New York City,
12 and it could be programs to increase hiring at said
13 businesses as well as access to small businesses
14 themselves?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JONES: What I can
16 say is we're extremely excited about our
17 collaboration, and I know that Martha's talked in a
18 bit of detail in terms of kind of the upcoming
19 programs that we'll be working alongside with her.
20 MOPD has always been a great relationship. In terms
21 of SBS, the Workforce Division, we currently serve
22 about 100,000 individuals per year, and we do within
23 that population (INAUDIBLE) individuals that do
24 display a disability as well. Working alongside MOPD,
25 we really want to ensure that we're providing even

1 better quality services, better access, they're going
2 to be working alongside of our staff. Currently, we
3 do provide supportive services for them so if anyone
4 were to need or require adaptive equipment or
5 translative services, either at the recruitment phase
6 of the process or throughout the hiring process, we
7 do ensure that we're providing, but, again, I think
8 we're looking to increase jobseekers' awareness, and
9 we do as well work alongside of different community
10 partners within New York City to make sure that we're
11 getting them to the next best step.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. Going back to
14 the Center for an Urban Future report, they had a
15 proposal of having SBS work with MOPD to create
16 mobile small business accessibility teams with the
17 goal of helping over 2,000 small- and medium-sized
18 workplaces become fully accessible in 2025 and just
19 thoughts on how feasible you think this is because
20 when you think of the expansiveness of how many small
21 businesses there are in New York City, I know even
22 with the walk-throughs that I've done with the
23 Commissioner in my District, I don't know if small
24 business owners, how aware they are in terms of what
25 they're obligations are legally for people with

1 disabilities and so I just wanted to see how feasible
2 you thought that goal was of 2,000 small- and medium-
3 sized workplaces?
4

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JONES: What I can
6 do, my specialty is really within the workforce
7 development area, but what I can do is bring your
8 question back to make sure that I do get a dedicated
9 staff member that's able to have a more expansive
10 response.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: If the answer is it's
12 not feasible, we would love to know what the
13 challenges are or what sort of support would be
14 needed to make sure that it is feasible so if you
15 could let us know, that'll be great.

16 Council Member Mealy, go ahead.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I just wanted to
18 ask reasonable accommodations, do you have any output
19 on anyone with disability who was working inside the
20 office and now, with the pandemic, they say they have
21 to come back and some have not or chose not to come
22 back to work, do you have what percentage of
23 individuals who did not come back to work in the
24 office?
25

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: Thank you for
4 that question. We do not have information on that
5 topic, but we can coordinate with our colleagues and
6 get back to you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Has that happened
8 with anyone with disability who was working in the
9 office and then during the pandemic everyone was
10 sheltered in place and then when it was time, like
11 the mandate now to come back to work, they chose not
12 to come back into the office?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OUTAR: In the role
14 that I work in, I wouldn't be privy to that
15 information because EEO officers usually handle
16 reasonable accommodations requests.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. Thank you
19 so much. I'm going to pass it off to Sara.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Thank you,
21 Chair, and thank you very much to members of the
22 administration. We really appreciate your testimony,
23 and you may go at this time. Thank you.

24 We will now hear testimony from the
25 public. I'd like to remind everyone that I will call
up the individuals in panels, and all testimony will

3 be limited to three minutes. Just as a note, we will
4 be doing mixed panels, meaning we will have both
5 remote and in-person testimony.

6 The first panel will be Melissa Lent from
7 the Center for an Urban Future; she will be on Zoom.
8 The panel will also consist of James Wilson from
9 GallupNYC as well as Eman Rimawi-Doster from New York
10 Lawyers for Public Interest. If the two in-person
11 witnesses want to come to the table, that would be
12 great. Thank you.

13 If Melissa Lent is ready, you may begin
14 when the Sergeant cues you.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Starting time.

16 MELISSA LENT: Good afternoon. My name is
17 Melissa Lent. I am a Policy Researcher at the Center
18 for an Urban Future, a think tank focused on creating
19 a more inclusive economy in New York City and thank
20 you so much for the opportunity to testify today.

21 There are nearly 1 million New York City
22 residents with a self-identified disability. In 2021,
23 according to a report from the Center for an Urban
24 Future, nearly 17 percent of all working age New
25 Yorkers with a disability were employed, more than
double the pre-pandemic level. Systemic barriers have

1 prevented thousands more from entering the labor
2 force in the first place. Despite this, there are
3 enormous societal changes promising a major expansion
4 of economic opportunity, remote and hybrid work,
5 advances in assistive technologies, and a surging
6 number of unfilled job openings. The City Council
7 should seize this opportunity to help make New York
8 City a national leader in employment for people with
9 districts.

10
11 First, city leaders will have to tackle
12 several longstanding challenges. Our research shows
13 that providers of career training to disabled New
14 Yorkers and workforce development organizations that
15 serve the general population struggle to access
16 public funding to deliver more effective and
17 accessible programs to people with disabilities. At
18 the same time, key publicly funded initiatives are
19 effective but still far too small scale. The Mayor's
20 Office for People with Disabilities is succeeding in
21 connecting people to living wage jobs, but, as
22 Council Member Lee has cited from our report, its
23 entire budget is just over 800,000 dollars,
24 significantly less than the per capita funding for
25 similar agencies in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Boston.

1 City funding for contracted programs serving New
2 Yorkers with intellectual and developmental
3 disabilities has plunged 82 percent over the past two
4 decades after adjusting for inflation. The City
5 Council should take steps to strengthen and
6 restructure the existing system to foster greater
7 economic opportunity for New Yorkers with
8 disabilities. City officials should consider
9 launching the nation's first accessibility training
10 challenge, a 10-million-dollar competitive grant
11 program for workforce organizations and disability
12 service providers to partner on integrating
13 accessibility throughout existing programs.

14
15 In addition, the City Council should
16 introduce legislation establishing mobile small
17 business accessibility team operated in partnership
18 between SBS and MOPD with the goal of helping 2,500
19 workplaces become fully accessible to employees with
20 disabilities by 2025. To help coordinate these
21 providers, employers, and investments, the City
22 should build a central career services and employ a
23 directory for people with disabilities and raise the
24 profile of these opportunities by hosting the
25 nation's first..

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Time expired.

4 MELISSA LENT: Accessible careers week.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We really
6 believe that New York City should seize this moment
7 to lead the nation in expanding employment
8 opportunities for people with disabilities.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much,
10 Melissa. If you are okay with me asking just a couple
11 questions and maybe you can fit in some of your other
12 testimony into the answers that got cut off.

13 I just wanted to thank you because your
14 report from CUF has been extremely informative to the
15 Committee. Just wanted to know if there's anything
16 else that you wanted to emphasize. I know you just
17 mentioned centralizing the career agency so aside
18 from what you've already testified to, is there
19 anything else you'd like to emphasize that could help
20 boost New York City's hiring for people with
21 disabilities.

22 MELISSA LENT: Yes, I also did want to
23 emphasize the City Council establishing a 7 percent
24 hiring target for people with disabilities in city
25 jobs and hired through city contracts, replicating a

3 key initiative at the federal level which you
4 mentioned earlier today.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, awesome. Thank
6 you. Just one final question. Throughout your
7 research on this issue, have you observed disparate
8 impacts on accessibility based on intersection of
9 disability with race, gender, and socioeconomic
10 status and, if so, how, and what would your
11 recommendations be?

12 MELISSA LENT: Definitely throughout our
13 research, things that have been highlighted again and
14 again to us is that people who identify with a
15 disability, it is an intersectional issue, and people
16 who do identify as black or Latinx/Hispanic do see a
17 higher unemployment rate than white people with
18 disabilities so that is definitely something that has
19 come up in our research and have even been told
20 anecdotally to us by workforce development
21 organizations that specifically help people with
22 disabilities as well as experts on employment for
23 people with disabilities as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. Thank you
25 so much.

MELISSA LENT: Thank you so much as well.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Thank you,
4 Melissa. We'll now move to our two in-person
5 testimonies. The first witness we'll hear from is
6 James Wilson from Gallup New York City. You may begin
7 when the Sergeant cues you.

8 JAMES WILSON: Thank you very much. I'd
9 like to first thank the Council Members for allowing
10 me to testify today on behalf of GallupNYC, and I'd
11 like to offer my specific thanks to Chairwoman Lee
12 for taking up this issue of workforce development for
13 people with disabilities. It's a very important
14 issue, and I'm gratified to see this Council taking
15 action.

16 My name is James Wilson, and I'm the
17 Executive Director of GallupNYC, an organization that
18 is dedicated to improving the lives of New Yorkers
19 with disabilities through therapeutic horsemanship.
20 GallupNYC has been providing therapeutic riding
21 lessons to New Yorkers for more than 15 years, and we
22 have seen firsthand the impacts unemployment and
23 underemployment has on the lives of people with
24 disabilities and their families. We've seen young
25 people who age out of the system and are left with
few opportunities on a day-to-day basis. Without

1 meaningful job skills, these young people do not have
2 the opportunity to work. We have seen this need in
3 our community, and we have developed a program to
4 address it. Our program is very simple. We teach job
5 skills. We teach people with disabilities the skills
6 necessary to have a successful work life and then we
7 give them the chance to work in a safe, supported
8 environment in order to practice those skills. All
9 work is paid, of course. GallupNYC is currently
10 offering supported employment to people helping take
11 care of our more than 20 horses and people who help
12 support our therapeutic riding lessons. Our program
13 is new and growing. At this point, we only have eight
14 people working in our program and the same number of
15 job coaches. Each staff member is paired with a job
16 coach to support them and help ensure their success.
17 Thus far, we've generally recruited from the ranks of
18 our riders, which allow people who have shown a deep
19 interest in horses and in therapeutic riding to learn
20 more skills and gain meaningful experience. It is
21 ultimately our goal to transition our workers to
22 employers other than GallupNYC. The skills that we
23 are teaching are not specific to horses. They are
24 transferable skills. In our programs, people learn
25

1 how to arrive on time, people learn how to
2 communicate with their supervisor, they learn how to
3 plan their work to be able to accomplish in the
4 allotted time, which I might not, and how to meet
5 customers and address questions along the way. A very
6 brief success story. Earlier this year, we hired our
7 first customer-facing role through the job skills
8 program. Claudine is passionate about supporting
9 people with disabilities as she was one of our
10 therapeutic riding students and she has her own lived
11 experience with the benefits of therapeutic riding.
12 This passion translates to a wonderful energy on
13 site. This a win-win for both Claudine and for
14 GallupNYC as we have an engaged, committed person who
15 demonstrates our values on site and loves to come to
16 work, and Claudine is able to learn and practice
17 those skills that allow her to have a more full and
18 engaging life.
19

20 I'd like to pause here and ask for your
21 support. GallupNYC wants to do more, and an
22 allocation of 50,000 dollars through the Citywide
23 Young Adult Entrepreneur Program Initiative will
24 allow us to expand our program and offer more
25 opportunities for people like Claudine.

3 Finally, I'd like to ask Chairwoman Lee
4 to come out and see our program. Anybody basically
5 who's in this room come see our program. There are
6 few things more impactful than seeing our work
7 firsthand, and it would be my pleasure to show you.

8 Thank you for your consideration and
9 thank you very much for your time.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I'm always a
11 huge fan of doing site visits because I feel like
12 it's different when you see things versus just hear
13 about them and so I'd be curious to check it out.
14 Just out of curiosity, the 50,000 that you would want
15 to ask for for the Citywide Young Adult Entrepreneur
16 Initiative, would that be used for staffing, would it
17 be used to pay instructors, just if you could
18 elaborate a little bit.

19 JAMES WILSON: Sure. It would be five
20 people who are actually working and then an
21 equivalent number of job coaches as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I'm sorry.

23 JAMES WILSON: Five people with
24 disabilities who would be working on a weekly basis.
25 The number of hours that they work depends on the

1 person, obviously, and then we would also use that
2 money to support those workers with job coaches.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Got it. Thank you.

5 JAMES WILSON: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: We will now hear
7 from, and I apologize if mispronounce, Eman Rimawi-
8 Doster from New York Lawyers for Public Interest.

9 EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER: Thank you. It's Eman
10 Rimawi-Doster, but it's all good. It's not very easy.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: I apologize and
12 you may begin when the Sergeant cues you.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Starting time.

14 EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER: My name is Eman
15 Rimawi-Doster, and I'm here as the Access-A-Ride
16 Coordinator and Organizer at the New York Lawyers for
17 the Public Interest, NYLPI, which has advocated for
18 45 years for the rights of persons with disabilities
19 in New York.

20 If you think on unemployment is generally
21 bad, it's even worse in the disability community. The
22 most recent report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics
23 states that only 19.1 percent of persons with
24 disabilities were employed, and that was from last
25 year. Instead of being reactive, we need to change

1
2 our approach and be proactive. Employers must send
3 job listings to organizations and agencies that may
4 come in contact with individuals with disabilities
5 including independent living centers, college
6 disability offices, or state vocational and
7 rehabilitation agencies. I tried obtaining employment
8 help from these disability advocacy organizations,
9 but I was told time and time again that because I
10 didn't have any mental problems or I was over-
11 qualified for many available jobs for people with
12 disabilities I couldn't get help and to just be
13 patient as I searched and applied alone. Even the
14 Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities merely
15 told me to join my Community Board, become the
16 President of the Community Board, and then call them
17 back once I got that appointment. That was 2017 by
18 the way. I got no referrals and no one told me about
19 any of the independent living centers organizations.
20 The organizations that are independent living centers
21 are run by people with disabilities in every borough.
22 We need to connect people with disabilities to
23 advocacy organizations who can actually help find
24 employment, and we need to have adequate funds for
25 those organizations. By the way, I received zero help

1
2 to keep my Medicaid, the lifeline for people with
3 severe disabilities when I found work so I went on to
4 NYLPI's insurance which has been extremely expensive
5 for a double amputee with lupus. We need to help
6 people with disabilities retain Medicaid when they
7 start working. Historically, I have never had an
8 issue getting in the door for a job, but, once I got
9 hired and they could see that my lupus flareups
10 happened, employers would change their tune and
11 suddenly say and do things that would be deemed
12 discriminatory. I wasn't believed by one employer
13 when I was having mini-strokes and nearly died. I
14 wasn't accommodated while working at a different
15 organization when I asked to work from home once a
16 week, which led to me pushing myself to the point of
17 coming into the office and I finally just quit
18 because of my pain. The last organization I worked
19 for a few years before I worked at NYLPI wouldn't
20 allow me to go part-time and literally told me push
21 yourself through the pain and exhaustion because we
22 need you hear full-time. I ultimately quit that job
23 too, which is often what people with disabilities in
24 my situation are forced to do. I'm educated. I have
25 an extensive amount of organizing and facilitation

1
2 experience. I've worked with a number of non-profits
3 and agencies throughout New York City and the U.S.
4 since 2000. I've been around the world and I've made
5 all kinds of contacts with whom I still talk and
6 still work with all while having lupus, but having
7 lupus for 24 years and being an amputee for the last
8 nine years has shown me just how strong ableism is.
9 I've been treated like my accessibility asks are too
10 much when they are very within the ADA, Americans
11 with Disabilities Act, mode and I just don't
12 understand why I'm discriminated against. I've been
13 made to feel bad or wrong when I've addressed this
14 discrimination which I knew was there. Employers must
15 be aware of the requirements of disability laws, and
16 they must provide people with disabilities with the
17 necessary supports and accommodations to perform
18 these jobs. I've been working for NYLPI for almost
19 six years, and NYLPI has seen my dedication I have
20 put into my work every single day. Not only does my
21 work get results, but I keep NYLPI in the media, I
22 keep them in the press, and I keep funding coming in
23 while being disabled. I just needed someone to give
24 me a chance and believe in me and believe that I
25 could do the job.

1
2 I'll submit the rest of my testimony.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Yes, please do.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much for
6 that. Because I came from the non-profit sector, I
7 know that they need a lot of help in this area just
8 serving the community that has a lot of the similar
9 issues that you're facing as well so thank you for
10 the work that you do.

11 Just one quick question. This is
12 something that some folks have been talking to me
13 about, and I wonder because I oftentimes feel like
14 education, the earlier that it starts the better, and
15 so if there are awareness or education even amongst
16 school-age children and staff as well as parents, do
17 you think that that would be helpful because
18 oftentimes I feel like parents also have no clue in
19 terms of what services are even out there. I had one
20 parent in my District who had to literally send her
21 child who lives in Eastern Queens into Manhattan and
22 that commute daily is very grueling also for her
23 child so I just wonder if in your situation, for
24 example, would it had been helpful if you had been
25 connected earlier on as well.

2 EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER: Oh, yeah, absolutely.
3 Unfortunately, when you are a physically disabled
4 person and you can hold a conversation and you have
5 experience and skills people suddenly think you don't
6 need any help whatsoever, and that's a lie. It took
7 me a long time to re-enter the workforce and get a
8 job and then stay in that job, but I got no help and
9 I'm not the only one like that. I've talked to a
10 number of people who have approached MOPD for this
11 help and they get denied that as well, and that's
12 unconscionable. I can't imagine calling an agency and
13 saying hey, I've got all these skills, look at me, I
14 want to come out into the community, even if it's low
15 paying, I'll come, and then them tell you go join
16 your Community Board and then basically say that they
17 want to use you as a political pawn instead of
18 helping you. That's not community support. That's
19 spitting in my face and telling me oh yeah we're
20 going to help and support you and then you don't, and
21 I appreciate one of the people sharing, talking about
22 the intersectionality of racism and sexism within the
23 disability community because I've noticed a lot of
24 gatekeeping. They don't want people like me there,
25 and they don't want a lot of people like me there,

3 and I've encountered a lot of folks who are
4 specifically black and brown women who have
5 encountered this as well. Regardless of what they're
6 doing now, historically it's been that way so that's
7 what I'm going on and since they've not done anything
8 yet with the new Commissioner, I mean great, awesome,
9 I want to see what they're going to do but I'm not
10 interested in what they're saying because what
11 they're saying does not line up with what they're
12 doing, and it's really annoying me as an advocate
13 who's been out here for decades doing all this stuff,
14 continually being ignored, and just shooed away like
15 I'm annoying gnat when I'm bringing up something
16 that's valid and that the community actually cares
17 about and wants addressed and I wish we addressed the
18 racism and sexism that goes on in the disability
19 community because it's rife, and I'm sick and tired
20 of it.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you for sharing
22 that point.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Please submit
24 your written testimony. We'd be very interested.

25 Thank you both. You may go back to your
seats.

Our next panel will be fully remote. The first panelist will be German Junior Santos. You may begin when the Sergeant cues you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Starting time.

GERMAN SANTOS: Hi. This is German Santos speaking.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: You may begin.

GERMAN SANTOS: Good afternoon. I'm a New York City resident. I was born and raised in Morningside Heights area. My life experience, I've been unemployed since I graduated with an associate's degree back in college, and I've been trying to seek employment recently and I've been dealing with some sort of rejection recently because some employers tell me that I need to complete certain requirements in order to fit in the description of that position. Can you guys hear me?

CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Thank you.

GERMAN SANTOS: My main purpose is that I'm not only trying to help myself continue on to seek employment elsewhere, my main purpose is to help other people with disabilities or without disabilities seek resources and just by asking questions to those employers out there, whether it's

2 from a corporation such as Duane Reade, such as
3 applying for the United States Postal Service, such
4 as applying to work inside of a sports arena.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Are you finished
6 with your testimony?

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: I think you were
8 muted. If you are looking to be unmuted, just give us
9 one second.

10 GERMAN SANTOS: Hello.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Yes, we hear you
12 now. Thank you. You can continue. We paused the
13 clock.

14 GERMAN SANTOS: I'm sorry about that. My
15 main purpose is to not only help myself achieve my
16 goals through seeking employment through whichever
17 company is hiring, whether if it's working for a
18 corporate store such as Duane Reade or working for a
19 restaurant or working for a non-profit organization,
20 and I'm doing volunteer work with a street block
21 association in the borough of Manhattan, but what I'm
22 trying to do is improve my skills and continuing to
23 seek more resources by learning to connect with
24 employers, by learning to adapt to have that social
25 network connection with those professionals in need,

1 and that's what I'm trying to guide people with
2 disability..
3

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BIONDO: Time expired.

5 GERMAN SANTOS: To learn to take action,
6 to take action to connect with those professionals
7 out there in order to have that emotional guidance,
8 have that emotional support. That's my comment.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much for
10 your testimony. I'll get your contact information
11 actually afterwards because I would want to actually
12 sit and connect you with some folks, but I appreciate
13 your testimony and for sharing your thoughts. Thank
14 you so much.

15 GERMAN SANTOS: If you need my contact
16 information, you can let me know ahead of time.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL DWYER: Thank you. Our
19 next witness will be Joseph Damiano. If you are on
20 Zoom or if you are watching the livestream, please
21 log on. If not, we will be moving on.

22 Because Joseph is not present, we will be
23 moving on.

24 If there is anyone present in the room or
25 on Zoom that hasn't had the opportunity to testify,

1
2 please raise your hand or find a Sergeant to submit a
3 witness slip.

4 Seeing no one else, I would like to note
5 that written testimony which will be reviewed in the
6 full by Committee staff may be submitted to the
7 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing
8 by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

9 Chair Lee, we have concluded public
10 testimony for this hearing.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much and,
12 again, thank you to all the advocates. This hearing
13 was really from advocacy efforts and your pushing us
14 to do better so we thank you and look forward to
15 actually having some very near future other hearings
16 on disabilities in the future so please stay posted
17 for that and make sure you check on the Council
18 website for a list of the future upcoming hearings,
19 but we are planning a couple more specifically on the
20 topic of people with disabilities. Thank you so much.
21 That concludes the hearing. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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25

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 October 6, 2022