



Jess Dannhauser
Commissioner

Testimony to the New York City Council
Children and Youth Committee
October 30, 2025

Oversight: Evaluating ACS Family Enrichment Centers

Good morning. My name is Jess Dannhauser and I am the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I am joined today by Elizabeth Wolkomir, who is the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Child and Family Well-being and Markus Kessler who is the Associate Commissioner for Strategy, Research and Provider Partnerships in the Division. We are pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the achievements of the Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) and provide an update on their expansion across the City.

FECs are welcoming, family-centered spaces co-designed with parents, caregivers, and community members. They are places where families with children can come together to build relationships; share resources, experiences, and expertise; and participate in or lead activities to strengthen their families and communities. No two FECs are alike. Each reflects the culture, strengths, and identity of its neighborhood. In 2018, the first three FECs launched, and now, eight years later, there are 29 FECs, with the contract for the 30th FEC set to be registered in January 2026.

We are deeply grateful to the FEC staff, directors, Advisory Council members, backbone provider agency teams, and most of all, the parents, caregivers, young people, and neighbors who bring each FEC to life every day.

Background on the FECs

The FEC model was developed by ACS as a homegrown approach to strengthening families and communities — informed by national research and rooted in the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) "Strengthening Families" framework¹,

¹ [Strengthening Families - Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)

This research and evidence-informed framework identifies five family protective factors known to promote stronger families and safer children:

- Parental resilience – helping parents cope with stress and bounce back from challenges.
- Social connections – building supportive relationships with friends, neighbors, and peers, especially among isolated or disconnected parents and caregivers
- Knowledge of parenting and child development – helping parents feel confident and informed in their parenting approach
- Concrete supports – ensuring families can access resources that reduce stress and promote stability and mobility.
- Social and emotional competence of children – helping children develop the skills to manage emotions and build healthy relationships.

The promise of the first three FECs was documented in [July 2020](#) in a report on Youth Studies, Inc. evaluation of the FECs.² The study found that FEC members reported a positive effect on social connection, family functioning, emotional connection with their children, and outlook on life. Additionally, those surveyed reported significant increases in their access to advice and resources in addressing several life challenges, including: parenting, financial issues, relationships, food and nutrition issues, and stress management. These findings reinforced our confidence in the model and led the City to provide ACS with the resources needed to expand from three to 30 FECs.

² [FEC Evaluation Report Draft Revised 7.2020](#)

FEC Expansion

Starting in 2022, ACS expanded the FECs in phases through competitive procurement processes — 8 or 9 new FEC contracts starting each year. This phased approach reflects our commitment to quality over speed, ensuring every FEC launches with the right amount of ACS support, community input, and codesign to ensure a strong foundation for community-driven sustainability. There are now 29 FECs: 8 in the Bronx; 8 in Brooklyn; 5 in Manhattan; 7 in Queens; and 1 in Staten Island. The 30th FEC, which is due to have its contract registered in January, will be in the Bronx. A map showing the locations and contact information for the 29 FECs can be found at the end of this testimony.

Because of our phased expansion, the FECs are currently in different stages of maturity:

- Some have been open for many years and are thriving hubs for families and community members with deep roots in the communities they serve.
- Others are in early start-up, focused on hiring and training staff, building awareness of the FEC at community events, developing partnerships with other community organizations and leaders to host events for families, and renovating their space.

Implementing an FEC is a multi-step, community-centered effort. On average, it takes about 18 months from contracting to opening. During that period:

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- Providers engage a diverse mix of community members, especially parents and caregivers typically more isolated or disconnected from networks of support, in FEC site visioning, selection, layout design, decorating, and naming.
 - Hiring is community-informed: local residents often participate in staff selection panels.
 - Newly hired staff work with community members and local stakeholders to guide the planning and execution of community engagement and family support activities.

Before the doors even open, FEC staff support early community events and engagement, often in partnerships with other community organizations, to support families and build awareness, trust, and momentum.

Today, 17 FECs have dedicated spaces open to the public, three more will be opening this Fall, and the remaining 9 will open in 2026 as construction is completed.

Family Enrichment Centers in Practice

Growing family protective and promotive factors are core to FEC practice and to driving the model's family strengthening outcomes. *How* FECs aim to achieve these outcomes is what makes them unique – through **peer-to-peer, relationship-based, and community-driven support and decision-making**. Families don't have to prove need or share personal information. The FECs are not case management programs. They don't require intake, eligibility screening, or documentation. Instead, they operate on trust, relationship, and respect. Families simply walk in — often for a cup of coffee and conversation — and find connection, resources, and community.

In Fiscal Year 2025, 29 FECs offered more than 2,909 activities aimed at strengthening family protective and promotive factors. On average, citywide, FECs offered 390 activities each month, each decided and planned with community members, with an average of 40 family and community members participating in each event. This is separate and apart from families and community members who visit the FEC daily—whether for a cup of coffee or an opportunity to connect with others.

In FY25, about 1500 activities across all FECs aimed to increase families' access to **concrete support**. On average, these were the most well attended FEC activities. FECs help stabilize individual families by providing them with, or connecting them to, tangible essential resources— things like food, clothes, diapers, housing assistance, cash assistance, and neighborhood mutual aid. They also promote mobility by hosting group-based financial empowerment workshops, resource fairs, educational advancement events, and career-readiness sessions, which help families manage budgets, access benefits, or explore pathways to employment and higher education.

For example,

- The Yard – East Flatbush FEC regularly offers financial empowerment and employment pathway events, partnering with other City-funded program like Workforce 1, in addition to offering a community closet with gently used clothes, back-to-school resource fairs with elected officials, and a community baby shower.
- The B.R.I.D.G.E FEC in Rockaway and Broad Channel partners with the SUNY Attain Lab to offer families access to free self-paced skill-building

courses, certifications, and career and academic support for family members seeking employment and educational advancement.

- Bedstuy NEST FEC in Bed-Stuy offers reoccurring financial literacy workshops in partnership with local financial empowerment organizations and partners with a local organization to educate young people about careers in film and to teach skills in filmmaking and production.
- In August, The POINT FEC in Flushing South/Briarwood Queens, partnered with INCLUDEnyc, to host a workshop to support parents, caregivers, and young people in navigating resources funded by the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disability that prepare students for adult life and new educational, employment, and independent living settings.

In FY25, about 670 activities across FECs aimed to grow the social and emotional competence of children. On average, these were the second most well attended FEC activities citywide. FECs create supporting environments and experiences that build positive social skills, emotional regulation, problem-solving, and effective communication for children, teens, and young adults. For example,

- The HAVEN FEC in Central Harlem hosted a “Make Your Own Emoji” event to give children a hands-on way to express their feelings, practice communication, and build confidence. They also host CORE conversation, a space for child, youth, and parents and caregivers to express their

opinions while enjoying a fulfilling meal, in addition to reoccurring age-appropriate movie nights for families.

- Brownsville Connection FEC in Brownsville BK offers “Toddler Sensory Play” activities where toddlers grow their problem-solving, motor, and social skills through sharing, cooperation and communication focused play.
- East Side SOUL FEC in East Harlem and Bronx HYPE FEC in Mott Haven host regular creative writing workshops that give space for youth and parents and caregivers to express their emotions, build confidence, and find their voice.

Besides activities that directly strengthen families, FECs partner with local resources to facilitate families’ access to other services and supports that the model is not intended to provide, specifically more specialized or clinical supports, or to collaborate on events that lean on community partner expertise. For example, the SEVEN FEC in Jackson Heights hosted a series of “SEVEN Ways to Connect” events, each building families’ awareness and access to other local and trusted family support programs, including case management, mental health, child care, housing, and domestic violence supports.

FECs are deliberate in how they build partnerships to support their communities’ priorities. They engage with local entities, leaders and institutions. As FECs continue to mature, they broaden and deepen their relationships to increase visibility and awareness. For example, many FECs already partner closely with local elected officials,

inviting them to co-host events such as backpack drives, holiday gatherings, and resource fairs.

ACS Support and Technical Assistance for FECs

While FECs are community-led, and individualized to meet the differing needs of each community, the ACS FEC team plays a critical role in providing traditional budget oversight support and high-touch technical assistance and coaching to promote continuous improvement towards fidelity to the FEC Model Standards and the model's intended family and community outcomes.

Historically, FECs had a baselined annual budget of \$550,000 with an additional \$100,000 added to their first-year budget to support with startup expenses, including site construction, design, and decorations. As of this fiscal year, and with the addition of past and current City initiatives to increase pay for contracted human and social service staff -- like the Workforce Enhancement Initiative and COLA initiatives -- the average fiscal year 26 FEC budget increased to: \$595,000. This budget supports the FEC site lease, staff salaries and fringe, as well as OTPS items to support ongoing FEC offering and direct supports to FEC families and community members. FECs are required to have a full-time director; at least 1 (up to 2) community liaisons; at least 1 (up to 2) family advocates; a QA/QI staff person; and a supervisor of the FEC director from the provider agency.

In the Fall of 2023, ACS released FEC Model Standards to provide a roadmap to guide the start-up and quality implementation of an FEC. The Model Standards clearly outline requirements for core components of the model and its intended outcomes,

including expectations for co-designing the site and its offerings, hiring and training staff, conducting community outreach, and developing community partnership and resources to support the FEC and its families. Despite FECs being in different stages of maturation, all adhere to the same Model Standards and the ACS FEC team works closely with FEC teams to provide differentiated technical assistance, model fidelity coaching, and hand-on site support to promote quality implementation.

The ACS FEC team is also in the process of building and testing continuous learning and quality improvement practices —developing and testing new tools to collect data across all FECs, testing ways to surface and reflect on insights in partnership with FEC teams, identifying and sharing emerging best practices, and setting individual and system-wide goals for continuous quality improvement based on what we learn. These emerging approaches will ensure that the FEC model, and the support ACS provides, is continuously refined to strengthen families and communities as intended.

Conclusion

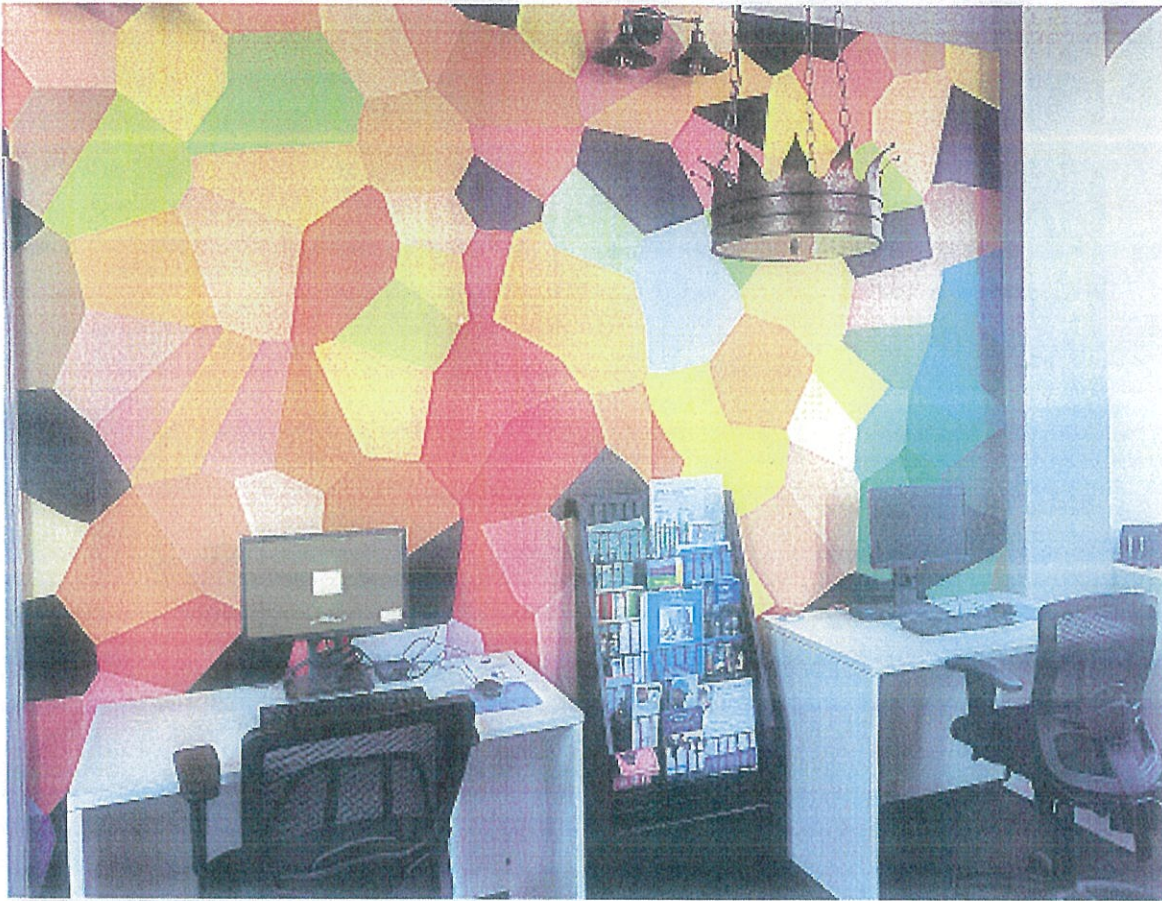
It is difficult to fully capture the spirit of an FEC in writing — you truly have to experience it. We are including pictures at the end of this testimony to help give some flavor to the text. And we have shared stories throughout this testimony. But to truly appreciate an FEC, you must visit. We know that the FECs partner with local elected officials and community partners, so I know that many of you here today have been to your local FEC. If you haven't yet, I invite you to visit an FEC in your district. Walk in, have a cup of coffee, talk with the parents and staff. You will see families supporting

each other, neighbors building connections, and children thriving in spaces that feel like home.

Example of FEC Space







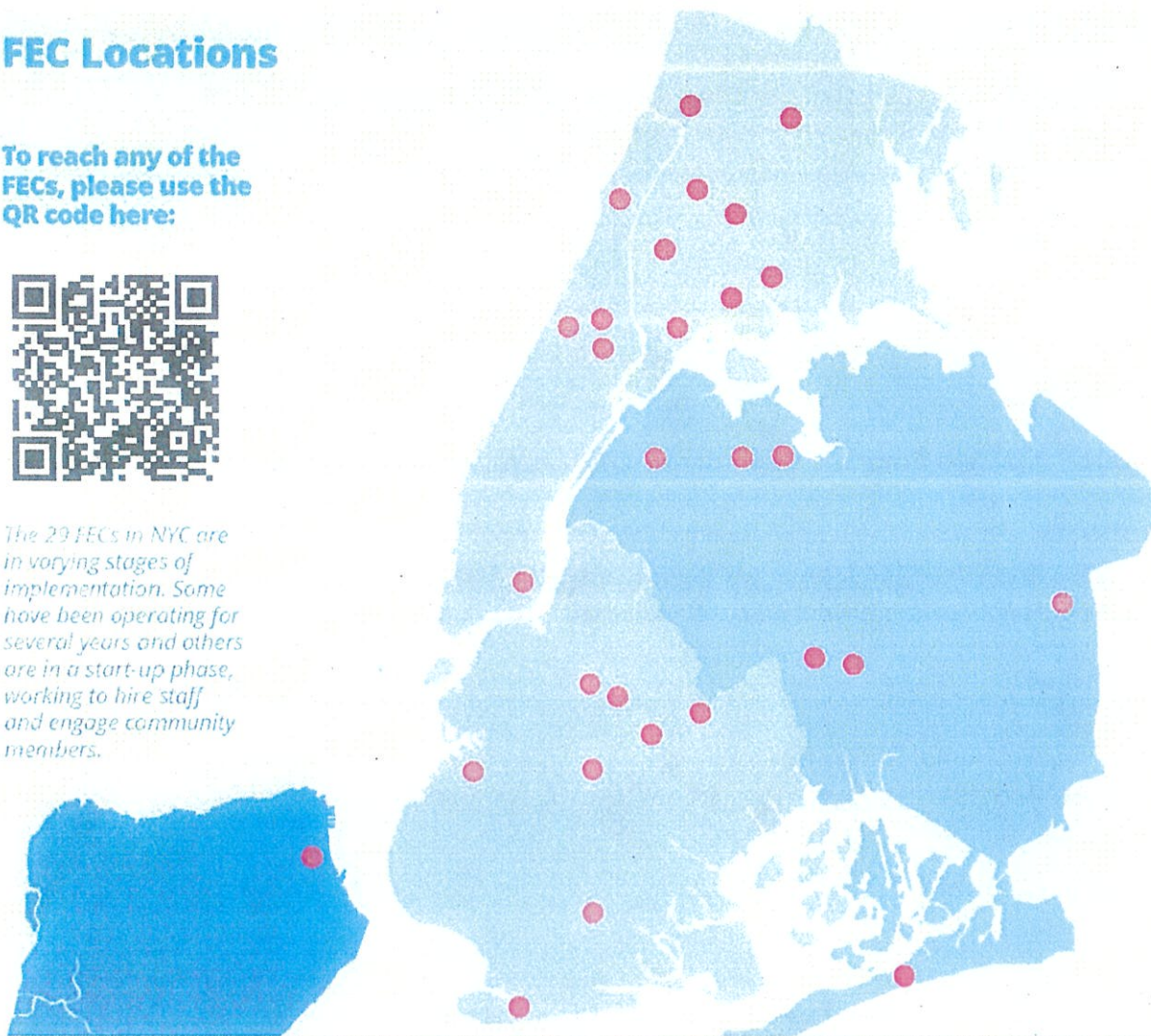
FEC Locations

FEC Locations

To reach any of the
FECs, please use the
QR code here:



*The 29 FECs in NYC are
in varying stages of
implementation. Some
have been operating for
several years and others
are in a start-up phase,
working to hire staff
and engage community
members.*



The full list of FECs and their addresses can be found at: nyc.gov/fec

Bronx

Bronx H.Y.P.E. (Helping Your People Evolve)

- Provider Name: REM Center LLC
- FEC Address: **109 Bruckner Blvd, Bronx, NY 10454**; Office Space: 111 Bruckner Blvd, Suite 203, Bronx NY, 10454
- FEC Neighborhood: Mott Haven/Melrose

O.U.R. Place (Organizing to be United and Resilient)

- Provider Name: Graham Windham
- FEC Address: **940 Garrison Avenue, Bronx, NY 10474**
- FEC Neighborhood: Hunts Point/Longwood

T.H.E. C.O.R.E (To Help Embrace Community, Organizing, Resilience, Equality)

- Provider Name: Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice
- FEC Address: **1244 Manor Avenue, Bronx, NY 10472**
- FEC Neighborhood: Soundview/Parkchester

Circle of Dreams

- Provider Name: Bridge Builders
- FEC Address: **266 East 165th Street, Bronx, NY 10456**
- FEC Neighborhood: Highbridge

Harmony Hub

- Provider Name: Catholic Guardian Services
- FEC Address: **2001A Creston Avenue, Bronx, NY 10453**
- FEC Neighborhood: Fordham/University Heights

The ROC (Restoring Our Communities)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Lutheran Social Services of Metropolitan New York Inc.
- FEC Address: **563 East Tremont Avenue, Bronx, NY 10457**
- FEC Neighborhood: Morrisania/Crotona/Belmont/East Tremont

Our Casa

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Kingsbridge Community Center
- FEC Neighborhood: Kingsbridge/Bedford Park

Uptown FEC

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Bronxworks Inc.
- FEC Address: 3535 Holland Avenue, Bronx, NY 10467
- FEC Neighborhood: Williamsbridge/Baychester

Brooklyn

The C.R.I.B. (Community Resources in Brooklyn)

- Provider Name: Good Shepherd Services
- FEC Address: 2588 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11207
- FEC Neighborhood: East New York

Brownsville Connection

- Provider Name: Riseboro
- FEC Address: 1430 Pitkin Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11233
- FEC Neighborhood: Brownsville

Bed-Stuy N.E.S.T. (Neighbors Embracing Strengths Together)

- Provider Name: Little Flower
- FEC Address: 410 Nostrand Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11216
- FEC Neighborhood: Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy)

The Yard

- Provider Name: Rising Ground
- FEC Address: 3521 Church Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11203
- FEC Neighborhood: East Flatbush

The Bungalow (Coney Island)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service
- FEC Address: 1601 Surf Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11224
- FEC Neighborhood: Coney Island

Bushwick H.O.P.E

- Provider Name: Coalition for Hispanic Family Services
- FEC Address: 499 Madison Street, Brooklyn, NY 11221
- FEC Neighborhood: Bushwick

Our Tent

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: OHEL Children's Home and Family Service
- FEC Address: **1600 East 19th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11230**
- FEC Neighborhood: Flatbush/Midwood

RISE UP (Resilience, Inclusion, Support, and Empowerment for Uniting People)

- Provider Name: Center for Family Life in Sunset Park
- FEC Address: **341 39th Street Suite 604, Brooklyn, NY 11232**
- FEC Neighborhood: Sunset Park

Manhattan

The HAVEN (Harlem Achieving Victorious Excellence Now)

- Provider Name: Living Redemption
- FEC Address: **75 W. 125th Street, New York, NY 10027 (Ground Floor)**
- FEC Neighborhood: Central Harlem

East Side S.O.U.L. (Safe, Oasis, United by Love)

- Provider Name: Union Settlement
- FEC Address: **71 E. 111th Street, New York, NY 10029**
- FEC Neighborhood: East Harlem

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Real Dads Network
- FEC Address: **67 Loisaída Ave (Avenue C), New York, NY 10009**
- FEC Neighborhood: Lower East Side/Chinatown

W.H.I.N. (Washington Heights Inwood Neighborhood)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Children's Arts & Science Workshops Inc.
- FEC Address: **4211 Broadway, New York, NY 10033**
- FEC Neighborhood: Washington Heights/Inwood

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: America Works of New York
- FEC Address: **30 Morningside Dr, New York, NY 10025**
- FEC Neighborhood: Morningside Heights/Hamilton Heights

Queens

Community Connection

- Provider Name: Forestdale Inc.
- FEC Address: **203-12 Linden Blvd., Jamaica, NY 11412**
- FEC Neighborhood: Jamaica/Hollis/Queens Village

The B.R.I.D.G.E. (Build Relationships, Inspire Development, Growth and Excellence)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Ocean Bay CDC
- FEC Address: **217 Beach 92nd Street, Rockaway Beach, NY 11693** - (site temporarily closed but relocated offerings to other community spaces, contact FEC Director for more information)
- FEC Neighborhood: Rockaway/Broad Channel

The SEVEN (Socially, Empowered, Vibrantly, Engaged Neighborhood)

- Provider Name: Queens Community House
- FEC Address: **87-10 Northern Blvd Suite 202, Jackson Heights, NY 11372**
- FEC Neighborhood: Jackson Heights

UNITY (Unifying Neighbors by Integrating Teamwork Yearlong)

- Provider Name: Martin De Porres Group Homes
- FEC Address: **111-20 Jamaica Avenue, Richmond Hill, NY 11418**
- FEC Neighborhood: Richmond Hill/Ozone Park/Woodhaven/South Ozone Park/Howard Beach

CRECE (Center for Resources, Empowerment, Community & Education)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Community Mediation Services
- FEC Address: **105-15 Northern Blvd., Corona, NY 11368**
- FEC Neighborhood: Elmhurst/Corona

The POInt (A Place of Inclusivity, Networking and Togetherness)

FEC site is not yet open, but staff are engaging locally and available for contact.

- Provider Name: Common Point
- FEC Address: **147-25 94th Ave 1st FL, Jamaica, NY 11435**
- FEC Neighborhood: Flushing South/Briarwood

Astoria Love

- Provider Name: Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
- FEC Address: **31-18 31st Street, 2nd floor, Astoria, NY 11106**
- FEC Neighborhood: Astoria

Staten Island

The Spot

- Provider Name: Staten Island Justice Center
- FEC Address: **30 Beach Street, Staten Island, NY 10304**
- FEC Neighborhood: St. George Stapleton



23rd Precinct
164 East 102nd Street
New York, NY 10029
212-860-6430



To whomever it may concern:

I am writing on behalf of the New York City Police Departments 23rd Precinct to offer my strong support for the East Side S.O.U. L Family Enrichment Center (East Side F.E.C) which has been in operation since 2022. In the centers short time it has become a staple to the residents of East Harlem. The center has demonstrated its success in supporting the community of East Harlem by offering high-quality services and community-based training.

One of the more established social services in East Harlem, the East Side F.E.C has a rich range of programs for all of East Harlem, including mental health awareness classes sponsored by the New York City Department of Mental Health, nutritional workshops for new mothers associated with local hospitals both Well Cornnell and New York Presbyterian, crocheting for all ages, financial courses in conjunction with Amalgamated Bank and game nights for family togetherness. And overall providing a safe space for the residents of East Harlem.

As the 23rd Precinct Community Affairs Officer, I am very familiar with the East Side F.E. C's strong tradition of responsive, enriching services for East Harlem youth and families. The 23rd Precinct is very pleased to serve as a partner to the East Side F.E.C. In the past couple of months, the 23rd Precinct has partnered with East Side F.E.C in a multitude of events which included a health awareness event, a senior safety workshop, and a community luncheon.

I believe that the East Side F.E. C's work has a rich and lasting impact on the lives of all the members of East Harlem. Their offerings foster independence, self-confidence, responsibility and most importantly they help the members of the community take a step forward towards brighter futures for themselves. Their programs will undoubtedly continue to bring positive results for the people they serve. They have many new programs that we are looking forward to both participate in and collaborate.

In short, I am pleased to lend my support to the East Side F.E.C., as they will continue to do important work in the community, and they will impact many lives within the community of East Harlem and the surrounding communities. We look forward to working with them in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miguel Rivera".

Detective Miguel Rivera
Community Affairs
23rd Precinct



Community School District 4

Dr. Kristy De La Cruz

Community Superintendent

160 East 120th Street, Room 401; Telephone (212) 348-2873



October 26, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

As Community Superintendent serving Manhattan, I am pleased to offer my full support for the Family Enrichment Center (FEC) in East Harlem. The FEC has been an invaluable resource to our families, providing a welcoming space where community members can access vital services, build meaningful relationships, and strengthen their overall well-being. Since its opening, our families and school communities have leveraged this space as a resource hub for all families.

The East Harlem FEC has become a cornerstone of support for families in our district, offering a safe, welcoming, and culturally affirming space where caregivers and children can access resources, build community, and strengthen family bonds. Its peer-led model fosters trust and empowerment, allowing families to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.

The FEC's work directly complements our efforts in education and child development, helping to address systemic challenges and promote holistic well-being. My hope is that the City will prioritize the continued investment in these centers and urge the Council to expand and sustain this impactful initiative.

The Center's commitment to fostering trust, empowerment, and collaboration aligns deeply with our shared goals of nurturing resilient families and thriving communities. Through culturally responsive programming and family-led initiatives, the FEC continues to uplift East Harlem and serve as a model of holistic, community-centered care.

Feel free to contact me for any testimonials and/or data to support the positive impact of East Side Soul in our beloved community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kristy De La Cruz

Community Superintendent



Dr. Kristy De La Cruz, Superintendent
Lisa Reiter, Deputy Superintendent

160 East 120th Street, New York, NY 10035

October 28, 2025

New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Re: Vital Role of Family Enrichment Centers, East Side S.O.U.L. To whom it may concern,

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the continued funding and operation of the East Side Harlem Family Enrichment Center (East Side S.O.U.L.), a vital resource for families in our community.

As a Supervisor of Social Work based in East Harlem, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of these centers. Community empowerment drives their work and it is evident from the moment you walk into the space. FEC's, like East Side S.O.U.L. aim to create welcoming, non-stigmatizing, walk-in support for families. From its name, to its programming, community, dignity and prevention sit at the center of their mission. There is intentionality to co-create programming side by side with community members. This collaborative approach centers the client and reflects their needs.

In a community where ACS investigations rank amongst the highest in the city, the presence of East Side S.O.U.L. is not only beneficial, but an essential game changer when it comes to breaking stigma and providing access through empowerment.

Our 23 schools in District 4 have partnered with East Side S.O.U.L. in different capacities to bridge gaps of service. Our school communities have engaged in parenting workshops, one-on-one meetings for guidance and support, healing circles, skill building opportunities, utilization of their clothing bank, assistance to fill out complex paperwork related to benefits, housing, health care, etc. We have invited them to our community events and attended theirs. The goal ultimately centers around fostering trust and connection, while building agency.

In a community where systemic inequities exist, East Side S.O.U.L. has become a place of healing and growth for many with the goal of prevention and not reaction.



Dr. Kristy De La Cruz, Superintendent
Lisa Reiter, Deputy Superintendent

160 East 120th Street, New York, NY 10035

Investing in FECs means investing in our families and the future of our children and communities. I urge you to consider the critical impact that Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) have when it comes to providing concrete services, creating community and strengthening neighborhoods across the city.

Thank you for your leadership and for believing in the present and future of East Harlem.

Always about the kids,

Azeen Keramati, LCSW
Supervisor of Social Work
NYCPS Community School District 4


akeramati@schools.nyc.gov



City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Oct. 30, 2025

Oral Testimony – Nora McCarthy

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. I'm Nora McCarthy, director of the NYC Family Policy Project, and I'm speaking today as a member of the Narrowing the Front Door Work Group. I'm here with my colleague Shalonda Curtis-Hackett and – on Zoom – Georgina Gooden of United for Brownsville, who is part of our team.

As you may know, ever since ACS announced the Enrichment Centers, parents and young people impacted by the system have objected to ACS expanding its role. In policy reports, protests and testimony, they have made the case that ACS – an agency feared for its power to separate families – should be less involved in families, not more.

I'm testifying today to share information about a new approach: a planning process to create a new NYC Office of Family Well-being that would, in time, include moving the Enrichment Centers and other primary family supports out of ACS. ACS is supportive of this planning.

NYC has adopted a community approach to public safety in addition to policing. We're growing a community approach to birth justice to address maternal mortality. We also need a community approach to family support.

A groundswell of advocacy groups and research organizations are increasingly calling for the adoption of a public health approach to prevent, interrupt and heal families from crises.

A new city Office of Family Well-being can:

- Centralize and coordinate family support programming;
- Support community-led planning and grantmaking to build on neighborhood assets and fill gaps;
- Create new, restorative approaches to family safety that prevent and de-escalate family crises;
- build up networks of peer support to improve access to existing services and resources;
- Prioritize investment and capacity-building support for grassroots organizations that families trust.

Moreover, we can fund this work by reinvesting millions in city savings from reductions in ACS spending.

This work is being led by the Narrowing the Front Door Work group in partnership with the Innovations Team in the Mayor's Office of Policy and Planning. ACS has committed to moving its primary supports when the plan is feasible and fully developed.

In the coming months, we'll be workshopping our vision and blueprint for getting to implementation. This is a grassroots plan. Our goal is that this planning is taken up as a priority of the next administration.

We know a lot of change is coming to City Council and the city. We hope all of you on this committee – and your colleagues on the Council broadly – will be champions of this new plan for families.

Secure families are a building block of community safety and community care.

A comprehensive, holistic approach and enhanced community investment can strengthen family well-being and provide targeted supports proven to keep children safely together with their families and in their communities.



Leadership, voice and vision for child welfare in New York State

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

**Written Testimony Submitted by:
Dr. Sophine Charles
Associate Executive Director, Downstate**

**New York City Council Family Enrichment Centers (FEC) Oversight Hearing
Committee on Children and Youth**

Thursday, October 30, 2025

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) serves as the principal representative for nearly all nonprofit organizations that provide foster care, adoption, family preservation, and juvenile justice services in New York State. COFCCA comprises over 100 member organizations, ranging in size from small community-based programs to the nation's largest multi-service agencies, all united by the mission of serving children and families. More than 50 of our member agencies collaborate with various city agencies to support children and their families, including contracting with the NYC Administration for Children's Services to deliver child welfare services across the five boroughs of New York City.

We thank this Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Family Enrichment Centers. We deeply appreciate the Council's leadership and continued support of New York City nonprofit child welfare agencies. We fully acknowledge the Council's commitment to prevention service programs, and its dedication to ensuring that children, youth, and families have access to quality services.

COFCCA applauds the New York City Administration for Children's Services for adding Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) in support of child and family well-being in nearly thirty communities across the city. The implementation of FECs is a vital and necessary approach to helping families access information, resources, and support that will enable them to improve the quality of life for everyone in their household.

In this testimony, we will:

- Highlight the value and importance of primary prevention programs;
- Illustrate the need to fully fund and establish baseline support for Family Enrichment Centers;
- Provide recommendations to enhance the capacity of Family Enrichment Centers to serve more families.

Primary Prevention Services

Historically, families involved with child welfare services and family advocates have sought assistance and preventive measures to avoid the removal of children and family separation due to allegations of child abuse or neglect. In 1972, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd agency in Park Slope, Brooklyn, responded to this need by establishing a Family Reception Center (FRC). The FRC was a walk-in center where families received crisis and individual counseling, educational guidance, legal services, mental health and medical referrals, as well as cultural and social activities.¹ It became one of the earliest prevention service programs in New York City. Although primarily designed to address juvenile delinquency, the program also aimed to prevent children from being placed in foster care. Through this program, families received a "no-tracked" form of assistance, meaning they did not have a formal record of child welfare involvement.

The importance and value of primary prevention programs cannot be overstated, especially when families can choose and receive services without creating a formal child welfare case or record. Families can access services within their neighborhoods without facing stigma or shame for seeking help. Primary prevention programs connect families to community-based supports and assistance through a network of peer and professional resources, often serving as a crucial intervention for families at risk of child welfare involvement due to abuse, neglect, or maltreatment.

¹ Shyne, A. W. & Newman, R., (1974). A Commitment to the People: An evaluation of the Family Reception Center. Child Welfare League of America, Publication No. X-7.

Families understand their own needs, and when they have access to primary prevention programs, they are better equipped to identify and obtain the services they require.

Family Enrichment Centers

In 2017, ACS launched the Family Enrichment Center (FEC) model, a family-centered, place-based primary prevention approach. This model ensures that all community members have access to, and may benefit from, both structured and spontaneous activities and events (referred to as “offerings”) that strengthen family protective factors, enhance child and family well-being, and promote stability.² Primary prevention programs aim to prevent child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment by providing information, resources, education, and other community-based supports, making these programs accessible to everyone in the community. The theory of primary prevention is based on five key components: 1) strengthening parental resilience, 2) fostering healthy social connections, 3) educating individuals about parenting, youth, and child development, 4) providing families with concrete supports, and 5) supporting strong social and emotional competence in youth and children.³ FECs offer families the space, opportunities, and guidance to self-select the services they need to address challenges or struggles that, if left unaddressed, could lead to the out-of-home placement of children. Much of what happens at an FEC—including its name, physical layout, and the services it provides—is co-designed with families and community members. Offerings at each FEC evolve as the community’s needs and interests change, and Advisory Councils composed of community members assist staff in making decisions.⁴

Family Enrichment Center Staffing

Workforce turnover, retention, and recruitment remain top advocacy priorities. FEC staff receive low salaries, and contracts have limited staffing capacity due to insufficient funding—making workforce retention a major challenge for all child welfare agencies. COFCCA’s recent Workforce Compensation Report⁵ provides data indicating a nearly 40% staff turnover rate across nonprofit child welfare programs. The staffing pattern of each FEC includes one full-time Director and three additional full-time staff members, including at least one full-time Community Liaison and one full-time Family Advocate. Community members could benefit from additional staff to extend program hours. FEC contracts require five days of operation per week, with a minimum of five hours per day operating full-time for at least seven hours per day could increase access and provide more resources to the community.⁶

Recommendations

1. **Invest in More Primary Prevention Programs:** We strongly urge the Council to make primary prevention programs available in every community district.
2. **Baseline FEC Funding:** FECs are valuable community-based prevention programs that should be maintained beyond the current contracts. We encourage the Council to increase and baseline funding.

² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/fec-rfp.page>

³ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/fec.page>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ [Workforce Compensation Report](#)

⁶ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/fec-rfp.page>

In conclusion, COFCCA fully supports primary prevention programs and considers FEC programming an essential prevention strategy that will help further reduce the current foster care census of approximately 6,500 children and keep more children safely in their homes. COFCCA members report that FECs foster better community engagement, build trust, and encourage positive feedback from the community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. COFCCA welcomes the chance to engage with the Council in a discussion about our testimony and to answer any questions.

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HOUSES**

45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006

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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Submitted by Paula Inhargue, Policy Analyst
October 30th, 2025**

Thank you Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth for convening today's hearing. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 46 neighborhood settlement houses, including 40 in New York City, that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life at 770 locations. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

New York City's settlement houses offer services that address the protective factors that the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) identifies in the Family Enrichment Center (FEC) model. These services include early childhood education, youth development programs, eviction prevention, senior services and adult literacy, among others. Due to the wide array of services provided by settlement houses, they often serve as an open door to community members with multiple points of entry and have built trust over time in their communities. For decades, settlement houses have specialized in providing family support and empowerment to neighborhoods through programming and community building. In recent years, settlement houses have contracted with ACS to create and operate FECs; currently, seven settlement houses are FEC providers.

Several settlement houses will testify today and share their perspectives and experiences with the FEC model. UNH regularly convenes the settlement house FEC providers, and I will be sharing some recommendations in light of their perspectives and feedback.

First, recognizing the vital role settlement houses play in their communities, **UNH urges ACS to ensure that there are minimal restrictions on co-location for both existing and any future FECs.** Settlement houses have long provided welcoming, well-established community hubs where families access a wide range of supports. Allowing FECs to operate within these same spaces would give providers the flexibility to deliver a broader array of services to families under one roof. In neighborhoods where storefront space is limited and costly, ACS should be open to alternative arrangements, such as co-locating with existing programs or organizations, rather than requiring stand-alone sites. Space is a rare commodity in New York City, and finding a separate location apart from a backbone agency should not be mandatory. Strict space restrictions can harm organizations and limit their ability to serve families effectively in a timely manner. By contrast, leveraging existing, multi-service environments like settlement houses would help maximize resources while maintaining safe, welcoming, and community-centered spaces.

Second, to truly strengthen these programs, providers also need better and more sustainable funding, especially for the staff who make this work possible. Human service workers are the foundation of our city's social infrastructure, yet they continue to be paid far too little for the essential and demanding work they do. **Contracts must be funded at levels that reflect the real cost of providing quality services and fair compensation for staff.** Additionally, contracts should include **more time and flexibility to use start-up funds effectively.** Finding space, hiring staff, and building and sustaining community programs takes time, and the program's funding structures should recognize and support that reality.

Lastly, there are many lessons and community-driven practices from the Family Enrichment Center model that can and should be applied across other City programs that serve families. Families engage with the City through multiple entry points, like Cornerstones, Beacons, early childhood programs, schools, and more. Family support should not be thought of solely within the framework of an FEC. Any program that supports families should operate through this same family-centered, strengths-based lens, because this is what families need and respond to. The success of the FEC model shows what's possible when programs are designed with community leadership, flexibility, and trust. ACS's strong partnerships with providers have helped make these programs work effectively, therefore **these practices should be replicated across all City agencies and family-serving initiatives to build a more coordinated, supportive system for New York City families.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For questions, I can be reached at pinhargue@unhny.org.



October 30, 2025

Testimony Before the New York City Council

Submitted by Graham on Behalf of O.U.R. Place Family Enrichment Center (Hunts Point / Longwood)

Good morning, Chair and Members of the City Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of **O.U.R. Place**, one of New York City's **Family Enrichment Centers (FECs)**, which is located in the Hunts Point/Longwood community with **Graham** as the backbone agency. My name is Dr. Emily Lopez, Senior Director for Community Leadership Development at Graham. Before taking this role, I launched and managed O.U.R. Place, and I now lead community engagement at Graham, which includes the FEC as well as other community initiatives.

O.U.R. Place is a safe and welcoming space where families and community members come together to shape the supports, connections, and opportunities they want to see in their neighborhood. Every individual is valued as an essential part of this collective effort. Here, the community leads—deciding what help is needed, sharing their strengths, and supporting one another through care, creativity, and collaboration. What began as an invitation to connect with community has grown into a vibrant network of mutual support and belonging, where everyone contributes to building a stronger, more connected and resilient Hunts Point/Longwood community.

About the Family Enrichment Centers

Family Enrichment Centers co-designed by community members, staff, and the backbone agency, provide a range of offerings and supports – each ground in factors such as social connection, resilience, economic mobility and concrete supports.

Each center receives **approximately \$560,000 annually** from the Administration for Children's Services, and with **30 centers citywide**, this represents an investment of roughly **\$16.8 million** each year. Collectively, these centers **serve approximately 60,000 families citywide each year** — an average of about **2,000 families per center** — providing vital, community-rooted supports that help New Yorkers thrive.

While this investment has had a profound impact, we respectfully urge the Council to consider **doubling the annual allocation to \$33.6 million**. This increased investment would expand capacity, enhance staffing, and ensure that every neighborhood has equitable access to the deep, relationship-driven support that Family Enrichment Centers provide.

Community Leadership and Co-Creation

At O.U.R. Place, our **Advisory Council**—comprised of community members who receive leadership, advocacy, civics, and engagement training—plays a central role in shaping our offerings. Working hand-in-hand with staff, they help create a shared language and a sense of collective ownership that drives every initiative.

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Taking Care of Business (TCOB): Investing in Economic Mobility

One of our flagship initiatives, **Taking Care of Business (TCOB)**, is an innovative entrepreneurial program connecting community members with skill-building opportunities in **seamstress/tailoring, barbershop training, and food handling/community kitchen certification**.

Since its launch, **TCOB has engaged over 300 community members** and awarded **203 microgrants** to individuals starting their own small businesses—providing real pathways toward **economic mobility and financial independence**. By addressing barriers to traditional startup funding, TCOB empowers residents to transform their skills into sustainable livelihoods, creating ripple effects throughout the local economy.

Food Distribution and Essential Supports

At O.U.R. Place, concrete supports with dignity are central to our mission.

- **Food Distribution:** Each week, the center provides fresh organic produce and protein to **over 100 families weekly**, serving approximately **450–500 community members monthly**. This program has been a lifeline during economic hardship, pandemic-related unemployment, and the current surge in food insecurity.
- **Essential Items:** Over the past year, we have distributed **thousands of essential items**—including clothing, toiletries, diapers, baby formula, and hygiene products—ensuring families maintain dignity while receiving critical support.
- **Ms. Millie's Closet:** Created by Hunts Point Community Member Millie serves over twenty families weekly, Ms. Millie's Closet offers gently used, clean clothing for adults and children, helping families stretch limited budgets and respond to urgent needs with dignity and care.

These initiatives are more than services—they are expressions of solidarity and compassion that remind families they are seen, valued, and supported.

Family Engagement and Community Connection

Family engagement is at the heart of O.U.R. Place. The center serves as a living hub where families and residents co-create activities, events, and initiatives that reflect their lived experiences, interests, and hopes for the future. This collaborative process fosters a deep sense of ownership, empowerment, and belonging—transforming the center from a service site into a community network of mutual support and shared leadership.

A key role in this effort is the Community Liaison, who builds and sustains vital connections between residents and the broader neighborhood ecosystem. The Liaison actively engages with community boards, precinct councils, local elected officials, and trusted organizations to creating avenues for community members to have a direct voice in shaping community priorities. By vetting high-quality agencies and creating a pipeline to credible, competent supports, the Community Advocate ensures that families can access resources they trust—delivered by partners who respect their culture, dignity, and potential.

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Through these partnerships and the active participation of families themselves, O.U.R. Place strengthens the social fabric of Hunts Point and Longwood—linking neighbors, leaders, and organizations in a shared vision of care, connection, and community well-being that extends far beyond our walls.

Recommendations for Continued Support

As the City continues to strengthen and expand the Family Enrichment Center model, we respectfully present the following recommendations:

1. **Expand Investment to \$33.6 Million Annually**

Doubling the current investment will allow centers to enhance programming, hire additional staff, and meet the growing demand for holistic family supports across all five boroughs.

2. **Integrate Economic Mobility as a Core Protective Factor**

Sustainable family well-being depends on economic stability. Embedding financial education, job readiness, and small business development programs like TCOB into the FEC framework helps families build lasting self-sufficiency.

3. **Increase Funding for Staffing and Competitive Wages**

As demand for services continues to rise, centers need additional staff capacity and equitable pay to attract and retain talented, community-rooted professionals.

4. **Sustain Concrete Supports with Dignity**

Continued investment in food, clothing, and essential resources ensures that families' most basic needs are met with compassion and respect—an essential foundation for growth and resilience.

Conclusion

At Graham and O.U.R. Place, we deeply value the City Council's commitment to the Family Enrichment Center initiative. The annual investment of **\$560,000 per site**—totaling **\$16.8 million across 30 centers**—is not just a budget figure; it is a testament to New York City's belief in **prevention, partnership, and community empowerment**.

By **doubling this investment**, the City can expand its reach and impact—empowering FECs to support not just 60,000 families, but potentially **more than 120,000 families citywide** each year. Together, we can continue building a stronger, more connected New York where every family has the resources, respect, and resilience to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued partnership in this vital work.

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October 24, 2025

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Committee on Children and Youth
New York City Council
Attn: Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair

Re: Support for the Family Enrichment Centers

Dear Council Member Stevens and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Literacy in Community (LINC), I am writing to express our strong support for the Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) and to underscore the essential role they play in strengthening families and fostering community well-being across New York City.

As a community-based organization dedicated to empowering families to build literacy-rich environments for their children, LINC has had the privilege of partnering closely with FEC SOUL in East Harlem. Through this partnership, we have witnessed firsthand the deep commitment and impact this center has in uplifting families and creating safe, inclusive spaces for connection and growth.

FEC SOUL has been an invaluable partner to LINC in numerous ways. Together, we have collaborated to bring our literacy programs directly to families in the neighborhood, and the FEC SOUL has been instrumental in supporting outreach and recruitment—distributing flyers, promoting our programs during other community events, and personally reaching out to families. The staff have generously provided private space for our team to work when we are in the neighborhood and need to participate in virtual meetings. They have also offered in-kind support such as snacks, coffee, and toys for children during our sessions, ensuring families feel welcomed and cared for. FEC SOUL frequently invites us to table at community events and lead read-alouds that allow us to meet families where they are. Beyond our direct collaboration, the center serves as a trusted resource that we regularly refer families to for clothing distributions, fitness and yoga workshops, skill-building classes like crochet, and engaging monthly family activities for the entire family, from the smallest to the oldest members.

The team at FEC SOUL is consistently welcoming, collaborative, and deeply invested in the well-being of families. Their work exemplifies the spirit of community partnership and mutual support that is essential to creating thriving neighborhoods.

When a community reads, children succeed!



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We strongly urge the City Council to continue its investment in and expansion of the Family Enrichment Centers. The FEC model is not only effective in connecting families to vital resources but also in cultivating community resilience, empowerment, and trust.

Thank you for your leadership and for recognizing the importance of programs that put families at the center of community life. LINC is proud to stand in solidarity with our partners at FEC SOUL and with all Family Enrichment Centers citywide.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eliana Godoy".

Eliana Godoy
Deputy Director
Literacy in Community (LINC)

egodoy@lincnyc.org



When a community reads, children succeed!

Send to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Submitted by
**Naisha Solomon, Director of the Community Resources In Brooklyn (C.R.I.B.) Family
Enrichment Center**
Good Shepherd Services

October 30th, 2025

Thank you, Chair Stevens and the Members of the Committee on Children and Youth for hosting this oversight hearing to evaluate the New York City Administration of Children Service's (ACS) Family Enrichment Centers.

My name is Naisha Solomon, and I am the Director of Good Shepherd Services' Family Enrichment Center known as the C.R.I.B. - Community Resources In Brooklyn located in East New York in Council Member Sandy Nurse's district. The C.R.I.B. was among the first FECs to be opened in the City of New York. I began as a Community Organizer in 2017 and was promoted to Director in 2023.

Good Shepherd operates 94 programs that support 33,860 children and families across the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Guided by our values, Good Shepherd Services partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

The C.R.I.B. (Community Resources in Brooklyn) is one of the 29 Family Enrichment Centers (FEC) across New York City, providing community-driven support and resources for families. Each FEC is led by local communities and nonprofit agencies with support from the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). The C.R.I.B. is a warm, inviting space where neighbors identify community-focused resources, share their talents and interests, and offer each other support. Everything about the center – including its name, the physical layout, and offerings – is co-designed with the community through a process of appreciative inquiry.

My testimony will focus on the CRIB's impact.

- **Economic Mobility.** The first three FECs received Doris Duke funding to support our Economic Mobility offerings which were co-designed with the community. This funding allowed us to engage with 150 businesses and support the launch of 3 non-profits, each serving the East New York population in socially innovative and culturally responsive ways. This funding also supports a Community Success Coach who coordinates this work. Before this role, our coach served as a Dream Team member, which is our advisory board. This work has provided pathways for credible messengers, immigrants and those lacking access to formal education to create economic opportunities for themselves. In addition, this funding has allowed the C.R.I.B. to provide funding for local businesses, micro grants, the Minority/Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) certification, cover the costs of business filings and purchase of critical supplies and equipment for entrepreneurs to thrive. The Economic Mobility work exemplifies the FEC's commitment to community development and disrupts recidivism and poverty. The

sustainability of this work is threatened given that Doris Duke funding will expire on Dec 31st, 2025.

- “For us, by us” strategy. Our hiring process includes community members. Hiring from the community is essential to our success. All the front-line staff of The C.R.I.B. were either born or raised in East New York and have a bachelor's degree. Our former Director is now a Vice President for the agency and was also born and raised in East New York. This highlights their resilience and talent. If we truly want to honor participant voice and local hiring, we must provide frontline workers with a livable wage that accounts for inflation and true cost of living.
- Appreciative Inquiry. We expanded our Appreciative Inquiry work to form the Eastern Brooklyn Collaborative – a collective community response to community emergencies that arose during the pandemic. This was a way to target community issues by aligning the power of multiple CBOs. Together, we tackled food insecurity, housing immigration, mental health, and economic mobility.
- The FEC model breaks the norm, providing community leaders with access to training and workshops led by city agencies, further enhancing career readiness and independence. This centers participant voice and reinforces the value in the uniqueness of our approach, which elevates community as expert instead of non-profit agencies. There have been 109 offerings over the past year. 58% of the offerings had an organizational partner while 82% were co-led by community members and our advisory council. On average, 23 people attended each offering.
- Technical Assistance. ACS has solicited the C.R.I.B. staff to provide training and workshops to the 2nd and 3rd round of FECs based on the foundational FEC approaches which include, Appreciative Inquiry and Co-Design. This reinforces the critical need for funding to hire additional staff and expand resources within the FEC Learning Community to ensure fidelity to the model and the potential of FECs across the City.

Lastly, this model helps families impacted by the child welfare system to view ACS through a different lens. At the C.R.I.B., families with ACS cases have shared that they feel safe speaking with our staff. We attribute this to the relationships staff have with community members outside of the C.R.I.B. They not only know our staff but trust our staff. In some cases, we have helped families access the concrete support needed to reunite with their children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Laura E. Riley, MD

*Given Foundation Professor and Chair
Obstetrician and Gynecologist-In-Chief
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525 East 68th Street, PO Box 122
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Christina Pardo, MD MPH

*Medical Director, Women's Health Practice
New York-Presbyterian - Ambulatory Care Network
Weill Cornell Medicine*

October 16, 2025

Council Member Althea Stevens
Chair, Committee on Children and Youth
New York City Council

Dear Council Member Stevens.

We write to express our enthusiastic support for the **Family Enrichment Centers (FECs)**, which play a vital role in our neighborhoods by offering essential resources, support, and programs designed to strengthen families and promote community well-being.

As **Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Weill Cornell Medicine/New York-Presbyterian** and **Medical Director of the Women's Health Practice**, we have had the privilege of collaborating with **East Side S.O.U.L.**, the FEC located in East Harlem, on community-based initiatives focused on improving outcomes for pregnant and postpartum individuals. Their deep-rooted presence in the community and unwavering commitment to culturally responsive, family-centered care have made them a trusted and indispensable partner in this work.

The **Family Enrichment Centers** are uniquely positioned to connect families with critical resources that address the social determinants of health—including access to prenatal care, nutrition, housing, and emotional well-being—within a welcoming and empowering environment. Their dedicated team of staff and volunteers exemplifies the kind of grassroots leadership that bridges hospitals, public health systems, and the communities we serve.

At a time when we face a maternal health crisis, the work of the FECs is more essential than ever. Their partnerships with healthcare systems help ensure that families receive holistic support—rooted in trust, culture, and community strength.

This collaboration reflects our shared goal: to ensure that every mother and birthing person—regardless of background or circumstance—has the opportunity for a healthy pregnancy, safe delivery, and thriving postpartum experience. We offer our full support for **Family Enrichment Centers** like **East Side S.O.U.L.**, and look forward to continuing our collaboration to advance this critical work.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need additional information.

Respectfully,



Laura E. Riley, MD
Given Foundation Professor and Chair
Obstetrician and Gynecologist-In-Chief
Weill Cornell Medicine
New York-Presbyterian Hospital



Christina Pardo, MD MPH
Medical Director, Women's Health Practice
New York-Presbyterian - Ambulatory Care Network
Weill Cornell Medicine

Dear Committee on Children and Youth,

My name is Che Sherrod, and I am a proud member of the East Side S.O.U.L Family Enrichment Center community. I am writing to express my full support for the Family Enrichment Centers and to share how deeply this initiative has impacted my life and the lives of those around me.

This program holds a very special place in my heart. I sit on the council, where we listen to the voices of our neighbors and help make decisions that reflect the real needs of our community. I single-handedly chose the building that now houses our Family Enrichment Center at a time when no other community members were available, because I believed in what this space could become. Watching that vision grow into a thriving, supportive hub for families has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

From the very beginning, I was involved in interviewing and helping to choose the staff members and initial offerings that would shape the culture of the center. The East Side S.O.U.L team has continuously honored community voices by giving us ownership, opportunity, and room to grow. They have even given me space to create and lead my own workshops, helping me bring my ideas to life and support others in the process.

But beyond leadership, I've also been a participant — a mother and community member who has benefited from the programs, resources, and support offered here. The center has been a safe haven, providing both encouragement and tangible help when my family needed it most. It's not just a building; it's a family.

The Family Enrichment Centers are living examples of what happens when the community leads and the city listens. They restore faith, dignity, and connection in places that need it most. They give us not only services but also belonging.

I urge you to continue funding and supporting the Family Enrichment Centers so that families like mine and leaders like me can keep building stronger, safer, and more connected communities.

Thank you for your time and for recognizing the power of this work.

Warm regards,
Che Sherrod
Community Council Member and Participant
East Side S.O.U.L Family Enrichment Center
(Safe Oasis United by Love)
646-796-7088

chevonsherrod@gmail.com

To the Office of Children & Families and council member Athea Stevens:

I wanted to take a moment to share how much the Family Enrichment Center (FEC) - East Side Soul - has meant to me and to our community. The center has truly become a cornerstone of support, growth, and connection for so many families and individuals in our neighborhood.

The Family Enrichment Centers play an essential role by providing meaningful resources, guidance, and programs that strengthen families and build a stronger sense of community. Through a variety of activities and initiatives, I've seen firsthand the positive difference the FEC makes—helping people overcome challenges, build resilience, and find empowerment in their daily lives. The caring and dedicated staff at our center work tirelessly to create a welcoming space where everyone feels safe, valued, and supported.

What makes the FEC so special is not just the programs it offers, but the people who make it come alive. The staff take the time to greet each person personally, remembering names and details about our lives. When they ask how you're doing, it's not

just a polite question—they genuinely care about your well-being. Their kindness and compassion create a sense of warmth that fills the space and makes everyone feel at home. Because of them, the center feels more like a family than just a community resource.

The FEC also provides a space where our voices matter and where we feel truly heard and respected among our peers. It's a place where people from all walks of life come together, share experiences, and uplift one another. The environment is one of encouragement and understanding, making it a vital part of our community's emotional and social well-being.

Personally, I've had the opportunity to take part in several wonderful programs, including crochet and embroidery classes, self-care and writing workshops, and sessions focused on nutrition and mental health. Each experience has not only helped me learn new skills but also connect with others in meaningful ways. The FEC has given me a place to grow creatively, focus on my well-being, and form friendships that truly enrich my life.

It's inspiring to see how the Family Enrichment Center brings people together, encourages personal growth, and fosters a sense of belonging. I am

deeply grateful for all that the center does and for the compassionate team that makes it all possible. Our community is stronger, healthier, and more connected because of the FEC.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Maritza Maestre

PAC Member of East Side SOUL

Melissa Barber

Bronx NY 10454

October 30, 2025 @ 10:00 am
Written Testimony for Family Enrichment Center
NYC Council Subcommittee on Children and Youth

Dear Committee on Children and Youth

I, Melissa Barber, a registered voter and resident of the Mott Haven-Port Morris Section of the Bronx submit this testimony on behalf of The Bronx H.Y.P.E. (Helping Your People Evolve) Family Enrichment Center, which is one of many family enrichment centers throughout New York City.

As a model of co-design with the adjacent community in which it dwells, The Bronx HYPE Family Enrichment Center has been a beacon of hope and light for the Mott Haven-Port Morris/Melrose community since its inception several years ago. Centered and missioned in our seven protective factors and with very little budget money, we have provided ongoing inclusive offerings for the families in our community.

Our programming of offerings range from community dinners, where everyone in our community is invited to have a free full-course, culturally adequate, nutritious meal, sponsored by a local business, to journaling, Zumba, and parenting classes. With collaboration through partnerships, we have provided photography and poetry writing classes for our youth and teenagers. We have done print screening and t-shirt design workshops for our families. We have provided bi-weekly food pantry, clothes and coat drives, community baby showers, and now host a weekly closet, Second Story, where community members can shop for new and gently used items that will meet their family's needs. We have offered classes in CPR, mental health, and emergency preparedness, which were well received and attended by many of the members of our community. We even host family-friendly community movie nights. We rally around our participants and have even supported several of our sick participants by visiting them in the hospital, regularly checking in with them, and even doing the NYC breast cancer walk to let them know that we are with them as they fight. Our center's families have become a collective, unified community of people who participate and share in a host of events that better our family and community dynamics.

As a member of its Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), aka the HYPE SQUAD, for three years, I have watched single parent members of our community without high-school diplomas feel empowered to pursue their GEDs, get them and then go on to receive full-time jobs in city agencies. Many of our participants have been connected to vocational training and have started online courses for Google Certification towards careers in Project Management and Cybersecurity. We have had several of the couples in our community undergo couples therapy and learn how to foster communication and joint parenting goals. I have seen fathers and mothers receive parenting training classes and workshops on how to help their children, even those who have uniquely-gifted and abled children on the autism spectrum and later feel empowered to advocate for the services that are needed for their children. We have hosted several mother's and father's day celebrations, parent cafés, holiday celebrations, along with our weekly Family fun Fridays, where we provide a space for families to do arts and crafts, play games, watch tv, etc. Our center is really a home away from home for many of our families.

I've seen our family enrichment center evolve and transform to meet the needs and request of our community. In our original co-design model, we wanted to provide a space for participants to use tech and wi-fi to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. However, when it became evident that a large population of our community needed clothes and other items for the family, with a partner-Foster Pride-we transformed that space into a community closet where families can shop for clothes, baby items, personal hygiene items and just about meet the needs of every family member. Our center is keen on keeping our ears open to the needs of the community and aligning our co-design model to meet those needs.

Unfortunately, many times our center has to implement much of our programming with very little to no budget funds. Fortunately, we have found creative ways to fundraise and partner with other organizations that allow us to meet the needs and desires of the community members that we serve. I testify in favor of having Family Enrichment centers within at risk communities as a model to help families thrive. However, moving forward, I hope and request that this committee can help us in receiving more funding to sponsor the offerings that help/will help the families within our community to continue thriving.

Sincerely,

Melissa Barber

Eastside S.O.U.L. Family Enrichment Center

My name is Natasha Ragin, resident of East Harlem. Community member who walked into Eastside S.O.U.L. in 2023 and introduced myself as a small business owner who wanted to give back to the community I was born and raised in. I presented an idea of teaching a cake decorating class and was welcomed to not just do the class but to also connect with like minded community members interested in learning. That was my first time learning of the Family Enrichment Centers Model, which to me is about community, inclusion and respect.

I also had a family emergency with my daughter who came home from college and Jocelyn Caceres the Director at East Side SOUL stepped up and gave me the resources and help I so desperately needed. For the first time as a single parent I didn't feel alone and helpless. My experience with the FEC has been life changing not just for me personally as a community member, single mom and small business owner but as now a year later as a PAC member on the counsel helping to make decisions in the space and help families and children with the resources needed in the trying time we are all living in right now.

Eastside S.O.U.L Family Enrichment Center is exactly what East Harlem needs now and forever. Our youth are at risk and need a safe space to go to. Over the period of time being in the space I have facilitated not just cake classes but have also taken part in various community events such as a Women Empowerment event with Council Woman Diana Ayala, Mental Health Workshops, Dept of Health Information Series in addition to my small business being able to lead a 7 week Children culinary series called Rainbow Bites where I taught 20 kids ages 3 to 12 from my community basic kitchen skills, cooking the fruits and vegetables of the rainbow as well as learning about entrepreneurship by having a lemonade sale with a real lemonade stand made by hand by Mr. Jose from the Mission Garden right next door to the FEC. Now if that doesn't show how we as a COMMUNITY can pull together and grow I don't know what will.

Eastside SOUL has opened doors for me personally where I am now currently about to get my Quickbooks Certification thru Union Settlement, as well as made entrepreneur connections where I have established a partnership with another non for profit organization Friends of the Children of NYC in which I would have otherwise never come in contact with Family Enrichment Centers throughout NYC are very important for not just our communities but for our families and youth.

Natasha Ragin, 53, East Harlem Resident, single parent, 28 year Fedex professional, small business owner, community member, Eastside SOUL Family Enrichment Center Community PAC Member.

大家好，我是 Qingxia Zhu，日落公园的居民，也是 RISE UP FEC 的参与者。我是两个孩子的妈妈，其中一个早产儿，养育过程充满挑战。

RISE UP 为我提供了一个开放的平台，让我认识来自不同文化背景的人，也慢慢地帮助我的孩子与多元文化连接。这里的活动和与资源让我更自信、更有力量，也激励我回馈社区，无论年龄、种族或性别。

通过参与 RISE UP 的社区研究小组，我学会了发声和连接资源的重要性。每当遇到困难，RISE UP 都给予我支持和帮助，让我能坚持前行。如今，我是我孩子学校 Title 1 副主席，努力链接家庭与资源，推动实际改变。我也在 RISE UP 开展的 ELS 课程中学习英语。

感谢 RISE UP，让我和我的家庭更坚强，也让我有机会支持更多社区成员。我希望 FEC 可以获得更多经费，让更多像我一样需要帮助、却充满潜力的社区成员，在成长的道路上感受到陪伴和支持。

谢谢

Hello everyone, my name is Qingxia Zhu. I'm a resident of Sunset Park and a participant at RISE UP Family Enrichment Center. I'm a mother of two children, one of whom was born prematurely, and raising them has been full of challenges.

RISE UP has provided me with an open and welcoming space where I can connect with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It has also gradually helped my child engage with different cultures. The activities and resources here have made me more confident and empowered, and have inspired me to give back to the community, regardless of age, race, or background.

Through participating in RISE UP's Community Study Circle, I've learned the importance of speaking up and connecting with resources. Whenever I face challenges, RISE UP offers support and guidance that helps me keep moving forward. Today, I serve as the Title I Vice Chair at my child's school, working to link families with resources and advocate for meaningful change. I'm also taking English classes through RISE UP's ESL program.

I am grateful to RISE UP for making my family stronger and giving me the opportunity to support other community members. I hope the Family Enrichment Center can receive more funding so that more community members like me—those who need help but are full of potential—can feel support and companionship on their journey of growth.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Emily Lopez

Address: _____

I represent: Graham Wincham / O.U.R. Place

Address: 940 Garrison Ave, Bronx NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jess Dannreuther, Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth Walkomir, Deputy

Address: Commissioner

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Markus Kessler

Address: Associate Commissioner

I represent: _____

Address: Administrator for Children's Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10.30.2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liangliang Han

Address: 341 39th St, Suite 604, Brooklyn, NY 11232

I represent: R.I.S.E U.P Family Enrichment Center

Address: 341 39th St, Suite 604, Brooklyn, NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10.30.2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Qingxia Zhu

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11220

I represent: R.I.S.E. U.P Family Enrichment Center

Address: 341 39th St. Suite 604, Brooklyn, NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NAISHA SOLOMON (GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0843-2025

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trevor Rouse

Address: [Redacted] Bronx, 10459

I represent: Myself

Address: N/A

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Mejias

Address: 202A Creston Avenue Bx 10453

I represent: Harmony Hub Family Enrichment Center

Address: 202A Creston Ave Bx 10453

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Amanda Renee (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Bronx HUPE

Address: 111 Bruckner Blvd.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/25

Name: Docelyn Caceres (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: EAST SIDE SOUL FEC

Address: 71 EAST 111th STREET NY NY

10429

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

Name: PAULA INHARGUE (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: Oct 30, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nora McCaamy

Address: 242 W. 38th St. 6th Fl.

I represent: NYC Family Policy Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DR. SOPHIE CHARLES

Address: _____

I represent: COFCCA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 10/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shalonda Curtis

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY 11237

I represent: Narrowing the Front Door

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth Robbins

Address: 605 East 168 St NY 10456

I represent: FEC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elaine McMillan

Address: 631 East 168 St

I represent: FEC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/30/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leontopse

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Self

Address: _____