

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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APRIL 29, 2022

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B E F O R E: HON. SANDRA UNG

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

GALE A. BREWER
SHAHANA K. HANIF
LINCOLN RESTLER
LYNN C. SCHULMAN

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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

Dr. Sarah Sayeed
Chair & Executive Director New York City Civic
Engagement Commission

Laura Wood
Chief Democracy Officer, DemocracyNYC at NYC Office
of the Mayor

Wendy Trull,
Senior Advisor, Civic Engagement Commission at City
of New York, Mayor's Office of Contract Services

Ben Weinberg,
Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union

Ahmed Butt,
Civic Engagement Coordinator at the Asian American
Federation

Mohamed Q. Amin,
Founder and Executive Director of the Caribbean
Equality Project

Glen Bolofsky,
President of ParkingTicket.com

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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1 COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS 4

2 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Pc recording is underway.

3 SERGEANT BIONDO: And cloud is rolling. And, good
4 afternoon, and welcome to today's remote New York
5 City Council Hearing for the Committee on
6 Governmental Operations. At this time will panelists
7 please turn on their video for verification purposes?

8 To minimize disruptions, upon speaking please,
9 place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent
10 mode.

11 If you would like to submit testimony please send
12 it via email to testimony@council.nyc.gov again that
13 is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

14 Thank you for your cooperation, Chair Ung, we are
15 ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Good morning, I am City Council
17 Member Sandra Ung, Chair of The Committee on
18 Governmental Operations.

19 I would like to welcome my colleagues who have
20 joined here today, uh, City Council Member Lynn
21 Schulman.

22 Before we begin, I want to remind everyone of the
23 stakes of today's hearing. We are living at a time
24 when faith in the democratic system is at a historic
25 low. Recent polling has shown that roughly six in 10

Americans believe that US democracy is in crisis and is at risk failure. Fueled by political polarization and misinformation, distrust in civic institutions is on the rise.

Here in New York State, we are not new to such political cynicism; just last year, two common sense, pro-democracy reforms were defeated in a statewide referendum due in large part to misguided fears about voter fraud. When New Yorkers voted to establish the Civic Engagement Commission in 2018, they were promised that CEC would be force for enhancing civic trust and strengthening democracy in the city.

At today's hearing, The Committee will evaluate how well CEC has lived up to this promise. The New York City Charter gives the CEC a broad mandate to develop new initiatives to promote civic participation including through volunteerism, stewardship of public spaces, participation in community groups and other activities. In addition, the CEC is tasked with implementing three defined programs.

First it is required to implement a citywide participatory budgeting program allowing city residents to identify and vote on projects for The Mayor to include in the Executive Budget.

Second, The Commission is responsible for implementing a Poll Site Interpreters Program designed to expand upon the language assistance services provided by The Board of Elections under federal law.

Finally, the CEC is required to provide various forms of assistance to community boards including by helping them find independent land use experts and helping meet the language access needs of their constituents.

Unfortunately, the commission has faced challenges around this initiatives due in part to interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Project has been typically slow with respect to the citywide participatory budgeting program which has still yet to be implemented almost two years after the deadline given by The Charter. There is no funding set aside for a citywide PB Program in Fiscal 2021 and 2022. The CEC implemented two smaller scale PB Initiatives focused on communities hardest hit by the pandemic.

While I applaud the CEC's effort to make do with the resources it has available, these smaller scale programs were a far cry from the citywide programs

that New Yorkers were promised when they voted to establish the CEC in 2018.

With that said, I was encouraged to learn that plans are underway to finally implement a citywide PB program in Fiscal Year of 2023. I look forward to discussing these plans in greater detail at today's hearing.

I am also eager to learn about CEC's effort to make interpreters available at poll sites throughout the city. Promoting language access service has long been a top priority of mine. In a city where roughly 25% of the residents have limited English proficiency. It is absolutely critical that we provide robust language assistance services at poll sites. This is true today, it will be all true next year when the legal, permanent resident immigrants with work organizations are given the right to vote under the city's municipal voter's law.

And, with that, I want to thank representatives from the Civic Engagement Commission who have joined us today.

I also want to thank our committee staff Principal Finance Analyst, Sebastian Bacchi, and Senior Legislative Counsel, CJ Murray for their work

in putting this hearing together. And, I also want to thank my own Chief of Staff, Alexander Hart, for his assistance.

I will now turn it over to our moderator, Committee Counsel, CJ Murry, to go over some procedural items.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. I am CJ Murray, Counsel to The Committee on Governmental Operations. Before we begin testimony, I want to remind all hearing participants that you will be on mute until you are called on testify, at which point you will be unmuted by a member of our staff.

The first panelist to give testimony today will be Dr. Sarah Sayeed, Chair & Executive Director New York City Civic Engagement Commission. In addition, Chief Democracy Officer, Laura Wood, and Senior Advisor, Wendy Trull will be available to answer questions.

During the hearing, if a council member would like to ask a question of a specific panelist, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and I will call on you in order. We will be limited council member questions to five minutes which includes the time it takes the panelist to answer your question.

Please note that for ease of this virtual hearing, there will not be a second round of questioning outside of questions from the committee chair.

As a reminder, all hearing participants may submit written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

We will now hear from our first panel. Before we begin, I will administer the oath.

Chair Sayeed, Chief Democracy Officer Wood, and Senior Advisor Trull, please raise your right hand, I will read the oath once, and then call on each of you individually for a response.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

Chair Sayeed?

CHAIR SAYEED: Yes, I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chief Democracy Officer Wood?

CHIEF DEMOCRACY OFFICER WOOD: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Senior Advisor Trull?

SENIOR ADVISOR TRULL: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Sayeed, you may begin your testimony.

DR. SAYEED: Good morning, or actually, afternoon, and thank you, Chair Ung and members of the Committee on Governmental Operations, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony about the key accomplishments of the Civic Engagement Commission. I'm delighted to be here, particularly because it is April, and it is our anniversary month, the initial round of Commissioner appointments was first announced three years ago in April 2019.

And, one of the things that excites me about the Civic Engagement Commission is that the story of its creation is itself, is a civic participation win for New Yorkers. The proposal to create the Commission surfaced during a public process to revise the New York City Charter in 2018, and the proposal to create the Civic Engagement Commission eventually made its way on to the ballot in 2018. And, this ballot measure was then in turn passed with over 65 percent of the vote in the November election.

As Chair Ung mentioned, The Charter grants CEC broad authorization to support civic engagement throughout the city in partnership with community organizations and civic leaders in the public and private sectors. The Charter also defines specific

programs and activities that CEC is to create and support, including participatory budgeting, language assistance at poll sites and assistance to community boards. In 2021, pursuant to Mayoral Executive Order 88, DemocracyNYC became a program of the CEC, thereby incorporating voter education and voter registration into our work.

Two additional programs of the Commission include the Taskforce for Racial Inclusion & Equity (TRIE) Neighborhood Initiative (TNI), which is a pandemic response coalition building project in the 33 neighborhoods designated as hardest hit by COVID-19, and the People's Festival, which celebrates New Yorkers' resilience and explores the intersection of civics, arts, and joy.

Our programs work to enhance civic participation, promote civic trust, and strengthen democracy in New York City. By being grounded in the practice of listening and lifting the voices and power of all communities, our vision is to foster dynamic and inclusive civic engagement processes that will help make New York City a national model for democratic participation.

Over the past three years, some key areas of impact include language assistance for voters.

The Civic Engagement Commission is charged with implementing a poll site language assistance program for limited English proficient individuals in languages and geographies that are not served by the New York City Board of Elections. As required by the Charter, CEC conducted a public comment and public hearing in 2020 to promulgate a methodology to select languages and poll sites served through our program.

The Charter requires the CEC to review and update its methodology by September 2022, and at least every five years thereafter. While the total number of poll sites depends on the amount of money allocated to this program, availability of qualified interpreters for the program languages, and the time needed to recruit interpreters, CEC's methodology delineates how the languages and specific poll sites may be selected. The methodology is available on our website.

Between 2020-2021, CEC served 2,784 voters in 11 languages in one primary and two general elections. In the 2021 primary, when ranked choice voting was first implemented in New York City, we leveraged 25

community and ethnic media venues to promote the program in 13 languages.

Based on the resources currently available, CEC services 100 poll sites over the course of each year's primary and general election cycle during the last weekend of early voting and on election day. CEC works closely with New York City Board of Elections to coordinate smooth on-the-ground operations for voters. We also work in partnership with the Campaign Finance Board on voter outreach and education events.

CEC also established a Language Assistance Advisory Committee -- which we call the LAAC -- this was relaunched in in February with the 2022-2023 cohort. It is a Charter-mandated advisory group, and it plays a vital role in developing and implementing the poll site language assistance program and advancing language justice. There are currently 21 members who represent 15 language communities. And, we work with the LAAC, community based partners, and the Campaign Finance Board to target... to produce targeted in-language workshops on civics and voting and translated information about voter registration and poll site services.

We are currently translating voter education palm cards, which were produced by the Campaign Finance Board, into languages beyond the federal Voting Rights Act-mandated languages.

LAAC members also advise the commission on placement of multilingual ads in community and ethnic media to promote the poll site interpretation services.

Under the area of Voter Registration and Education, within the DemocracyNYC Program, last month about 13,760 students registered to vote during the March 2022 Civics Week. This voter registration drive was coordinated by staff in the Department of Education's Civics for All team, the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit, DemocracyNYC and the CEC. In total, since 2018, nearly 75,000 young voters have registered to vote during Civics Week.

In Ranked Choice Voting Education, DemocracyNYC reached 90 percent of New Yorkers with ads in 25 different languages during the 2021 June Primary, and this is an estimate by OpAD which was DemocracyNYC's media placement vendor.

CEC also supported outreach events to language communities and organized outreach in TRIE

neighborhoods. The full multi-sector concert of activities, that included the Campaign Finance Board, Rank the Vote, and many, many non-profits across the city, many elected partners really helped to drive New York City voter participation in the last primary to the highest rate that it has been in 30 years, with over 26 percent turnout.

For Participatory Budgeting [PB], we are charged with implementing a citywide PB program. Citywide PB gives residents direct say in how their tax dollars are spent by engaging residents in idea generation and voting on local projects to be funded in the executive budget. Although an emergency executive order suspended citywide participatory budgeting for health and safety reasons during 2020-2021, CEC was able to run two smaller pilot PB processes that have really helped to raise awareness of PB, and have increased the voices of underrepresented residents in decisions about how public funding is spent -- during the pandemic -- and also these processes have strengthened partnerships and built relationships in the community to help build the civic infrastructure and lay the path for citywide participatory budgeting.

So, in the first pilot, we put up a \$100,000 of our own OTPS funding for a youth-led process called "It's Our Money."

Two-thousand youth chose five projects \$20,000 each, and some of these programs included: Girls Mental Health Mentorship Circle in The Bronx, a community garden project in Brownsville, recycling and climate change programs for youth, school mentorship program in Queens, and a leadership development program for young musicians in Flatbush.

All of these programs have been successfully implemented, and based on survey respondent data, over 90 percent of youth who participated were young people of color.

In 2021, The Mayor allocated \$1.3 million to support a recovery focus participatory budgeting process in the 33 TRIE neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19. Here, community based organizations generated project ideas based on their neighborhood priorities including mental health, reducing gun violence, increasing accessing to youth programming, and addressing hunger -- and each neighborhood had its own ballot form.

Surveys and voting were conducting through both online and in-person/paper formats, and the paper ballots were translated into 15 languages. And, 9,500 residents in TRIE neighborhoods voted in "The People's Money," and chose 33 winning PB projects worth a total of \$1.3 million, which is about \$40,000 per neighborhood.

This year, as was mentioned, CEC plans to launch citywide participatory budgeting in late summer, and OMB granted \$5 million in funding for expense projects citywide through the Fiscal Year of 2024. The program will include a full year of idea generation voting through June of 2023. The projects will be implemented beginning July of 2023 and continue through June of 2024.

The Charter requires the CEC to develop the implementation plan for citywide PB in coordination with borough presidents, community boards, city agencies and elected officials, and in consultation with the Participatory Budgeting Advisory Committee [PBAC]. Commissioners vote on the implementation plan, and we are aiming to have that vote in July.

CEC is required by the Charter to promote participation by communities underserved by

government including non-citizens, immigrant communities, youth 16 years and older, students, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities and limited English proficient individuals. CEC also plans to facilitate the participation of public housing residents, justice-involved communities, labor, LGBTQ communities, parents, social service organizations, and faith-based communities citywide.

We are developing multi-sector partnerships with a wide variety of institutions including libraries, community based organizations, M/WBEs, college campuses and community boards to support the idea and generation of voting processes; we also are engaging an intergovernmental working group of multiple stakeholders to co-design the implementation plan.

We look forward to partnering with City Council members of the rollout of this citywide program to strengthen a community based civic infrastructure that elevates the voices of communities underserved and underrepresented in local government decision making.

I also want to talk briefly about the launch of the Decidim platform. The Civic Engagement Commission was the first city agency in the United

1 Stated to launch the use of Decidim, which is an open
2 source, direct democracy platform used by local
3 governments throughout the world. The platform is
4 governed by an international community of
5 practitioners and is grounded in the principle of
6 transparency. The platform enables residents to
7 propose ideas, endorse, and comment on other ideas,
8 create groups, and vote.
9

10 We used this program to run the last two pilot PB
11 processes that I spoke of for youth and in the TRIE
12 neighborhoods. The platform also hosted 13 City
13 Council Member participatory budgeting processes this
14 year, and to date, over 15,000 New Yorkers have
15 created an account on the platform. The platform is
16 currently hosting the NYC Speaks city employee idea
17 challenge to ask city staff for suggestions on
18 program and policy changes.

19 In the area of community boards, assistance and
20 capacity building, language assistance, and land use,
21 The Charter requires the Commission to provide
22 assistance and training to community boards,
23 specifically by identifying and providing access to
24 urban planning and land use professionals who do not
25 have an interest in the proposals being considered by

community boards; providing services and tools to address the needs of limited English proficient individuals who live in community districts; and training in the use of technological tools and uniform meeting procedures.

Since July 2020, we have held 21 workshops and trainings that have reached 998 community board members. Topics included Parliamentary Procedures such as Motions & Amendments, Nominations & Elections, Committees, Efficient Meetings, Secretary Duties & responsibilities; we also held trainings on Conflict Resolution; Affordable Housing; Public Engagement; and Language Access Tools & Best Practices.

In the area of language access, CEC provided all 59 community boards with access to telephonic interpretation through Language Line. We also worked with the Mayor's Office of Data Analytics to produce the first citywide language map that helps users understand the top five languages spoken in their community district. And, that map is available on our website.

In the area of land use, to improve access to neutral resources, we initiated an REI request for

Expressions of Interest, we compiled a directory of 13 land use consultants, including M/WBE providers, which was distributed to the boards. We also purchased and distributed to 59 community boards plain language guides from Center for Urban Pedagogy on zoning, affordable housing, and ULURP.

Working with DoITT, CEC created a community board internal webpage in CityShare to facilitate board staff and board member access to training recordings, presentation decks, and other community engagement and land use resources. We collaborates closely with borough presidents, the Department of City Planning, The Mayor's Community Affairs Unit, DoITT, The Mayor's Office Immigrant Affairs, and OMB in community board outreach and assistance.

For The People's Bus and People's Festival, The People's Festival is a five-borough tour centering the transformative power of arts and culture to activate public spaces, and it bring critical resources and information to communities, and uses music and art to celebrate New Yorkers' resilience. The festival began as a Public Artist in Residence partnership with The Department of Cultural Affairs

and it centered the People's Bus, an artistically transformed bus from The Department of Corrections.

The People's Bus programming began with a two-week Ranked Choice Voter Education Tour in June 2021. More than 800 residents completed an RCV ballot about People's Festival programming. Later in the summer, the People's Festival stopped in the TRIE neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19. In the fall, additional events featuring the People's Bus included a voter registration drive in Flatbush Brooklyn and Get Out the Vote event in The Bronx in collaboration with DemocracyNYC and local community-based organizations. In total, the festival offered 15 creative engagements to the general public and partnered with a total of 16 government agencies to provide resources, information, and to increase public engagement in communities hardest hit by COVID-19.

We received \$175,000 of NYC Arts project funding and \$170,000 in philanthropic funding was awarded to the CEC last year to support arts and civic engagement activities and events, including the People's Festival. And, in turn we distributed 41

grants through the NYC Artist Corp to support 148 local artists in the TRIE neighborhoods.

The People's Bus recently found a permanent new home at The Clemente, a city-owned building operated by The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center Inc., a Puerto Rican/Latinx multi-arts cultural institution that provides affordable working space and venues to artists, small arts organizations, and emergent and independent community producers that reflect the cultural diversity of the Lower East Side and our City. CEC plans to conduct additional community programming with The People's Bus and the Clemente in future months.

As I mentioned earlier, The Civic Engagement Commission also works in the TRIE neighborhood initiatives to support collaborative, community based coalitions across the 33 priority neighborhoods that have been impacted by the pandemic. We connect residents through this program to information and resources to support ongoing COVID-19 recovery, increase local civic infrastructure, and we conducted a needs-based participatory budgeting process.

These coalitions bring together nonprofits, businesses, houses of worship, community boards,

educational institutions, mutual aid networks, and civic bodies, and they provide a localized approach. We manage these coalitions in partnership with the Young Men's Initiative and an M/WBE project management vendor.

Some accompaniments in this coalition building project includes each coalition promoting vaccine education since it began. We have reached an average of about 23,000 New Yorkers each month through a variety of outreach methods including texting, tabling, email and social media campaigns, newspaper ad placements, and communication through apps.

The initiative also reached nearly 144,000 New Yorkers about Right Choice Voting again through a variety of methods. Each neighborhood is currently implementing their winning project from the TRIE participatory budgeting process.

The Neighborhood coalition coordinators meet monthly with the commission YMI and have received training in vaccine outreach, Right Choice Voter Education, the City Human Rights Law, and preventing hate crimes.

Before I close, I'd like to give you an overview of the CEC's structure, staff, and budget. We are

made up of 15 Commissioners, eight of whom are appointed by The Mayor, two by the City Council, and five by the borough presidents. The Chair of the Commission serves at the pleasure of The Mayor and serves as The Executive Director. The Charter requires at least one Mayoral appointee to be enrolled in a political party with the highest number of registered voters, and at least one other Mayoral appointment to be enrolled in a political party with the next highest number of registered voters.

Although initial Commissioner appointees' terms ranged from two to four years to stagger appointments, all Commissioners, except for the Chair, serve four-year terms.

CEC's current employees total nine full time employees, a part-time Artist in Residence, and two college interns. We are in the process of hiring and onboarding for three vacancies due to attrition and three seasonal temps who will support our poll site language assistance services for the primary.

CEC also received 10 additional lines to support the roll out of citywide participatory budgeting in the November plan and is actively recruiting for all these positions. These additions include an expanded

1 outreach team of two new lines and an Outreach
2 Director, as well as lines for the participatory
3 budgeting program.
4

5 The outreach team will develop and implement
6 targeted field strategies to support language
7 assistance, voter registration and voter
8 participation, and other initiatives while
9 integrating in person, virtual, and arts-based
10 approaches. We will also be working closely with
11 other agencies to also leverage their capabilities
12 and ensure the efficient performance of CEC's
13 functions and duties using its core staff.

14 CEC's current budget totals \$4.87 million, with
15 \$1.29 million dedicated to personnel and the
16 remainder to programs. The poll site language
17 assistance program leverages \$1.8 million to provide
18 interpretation services, and \$1.3 million is
19 dedicated for participatory budgeting in the current
20 year.

21 Thank you so much, again, for this opportunity to
22 speak about the work of the CEC. I am looking
23 forward to answering your questions.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, I will now turn it
25 over to Chair Ung for questions.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, also, we have been joined right now by City Council Member Brewer and City Council Member Hanif.

And, thank you, Dr. Sayeed, for testifying today.

So, just to go back with the commissioners, uh, have any commissioners' terms expired yet?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, and they were reappointed. We also two commission appointments that became vacant and those were also filled.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great, so, there is no... Right now there are no vacancies for the commission?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, correct... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you.

And, can you walk us through the organizational structure of CEC right now?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, uh, it is, as I mentioned, there are... Do you... Are you talking... Do you want me to go through sort of the positions that we currently have... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Yes...

DR. SAYEED: Okay... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: That would be great.

DR. SAYEED: Yes, so there is, uh, a Chief of Staff, the Chief Democracy Officer is also part of

the commission, Senior Advisor, both of whom are on the call today, and then we have a Participatory Budgeting Advisor, uh, we have three outreach staff, there is a Communications Line, and a Language Access Manager Line that are vacant, there is also a Poll Site Language Assistance Services Advisor as well.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: And the Artist in Residence, and we have, uh, interns.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, and you had just said that The Mayor's DemocracyNYC Initiative was consolidated in to CEC? So...

DR. SAYEED: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: So, how many of those joined CEC as part of the consolidation?

DR. SAYEED: The Chief Democracy Officer came to the CEC, and we are working to... You know, we will be... As it was mentioned, we will be leveraging our outreach teams to support the DemocracyNYC program.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great. And, do you... Do the two units -- are you working separately or are you now working together as one unit?

R. SAYEED: It's one unit. The DemocracyNYC is a program of the CEC similar to PB or a Poll Site Language Assistant at community boards.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you.

And, just, uh, one quick question about participatory budgeting -- then I am going to turn it over to my City Council Members, who have been waiting patiently -- what are the steps that CEC is taking to educate New Yorkers about PB?

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Yeah, I mean, I think throughout the pilots that we had, we have been developing some strategies for education, and we... You know, we have been talking with residents about how the process works, and we talked with them about their community needs, we talked with them about the voting process, and also we will be talking with them in the citywide program about the overall city budget and how this fits in... you know, how participatory budgeting fits in to budgeting overall.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: So, when you say talking with them, how does that, like, how does that work?

DR. SAYEED: Oh, I think it's a variety of outreach methods and strategies. You know, we will be doing in person engagements as well as leveraging

media and ads and virtual workshops as well. So, there will be a wide variety of ways that we will be looking to connect with New Yorkers to help explain what the process is and to invite them in to join the process.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay, so I assume by doing that you are also working with the local... And, this is like the local CBOs of the communities... the different diverse communities? (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yes, uh, yes, thank you so much for that additional, uh, prompt. I... We will be working with community based organizations, and there is funding in the budget to support CBOs who are working with us in doing outreach.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Oh, that's great, uh... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Have you worked with the CBOs in the past? And, if so, who, you know, which CBOs are those?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, we have been actually in the It's Our Money program, there were five CBOs that we worked with. And, we can get you the full detail... you know, the full list of all the community based

organizations we are working with. And, in the TRIE process that I mentioned in the 33 neighborhoods, the lead organization for every coalition is also responsible, you know, working in the process and getting out the vote, and also implementing a program. So, we can get you the full list of CBOs that we are working with.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: That will be great, that will be great, because I am [INAUDIBLE 00:34:47] the other people in the committee have input about, you know, those CBOs and whether those CBOs would be helpful in this process... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: That would be great... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Uh, I... I do have additional question, but I want to turn it over to other members of the committee who have been waiting patiently to ask their questions.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair, I will call on council members in the order that they have used the Zoom Raise Hand Function.

Council Members, if you would like to ask a question, and you have not yet raised your hand, please do so now. The first council member we will hear from is Council Member Brewer, followed by

Council Member Schulman, and then Council Member Hanif.

Council Member Brewer?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank you very much. You know, uh, I will be honest, I think the Chair knows this, and certainly The Commissioner that, you know, I had the bill that provided The Charter, and then it ended up with your agency, and I have fought your agency. So, it's not my favorite agency. I just want to let you know.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What... What I need to understand, having been borough president, how is it that you're not duplicating even what the borough presidents do with the community boards, what VAC (sp?) does with, uh, figuring out how people hopefully get to vote and all of those issues? I mean, I think you are working on language, just nobody seems to be doing that.

But, I do think there's duplication here. So, explain to me how you're not duplicating some of

these other agencies. And, certainly, for instance, I know that the fund for the City of New York, [INAUDIBLE 00:36:13] does a whole lot of work with getting urban planners in to the community boards. So, I mean, I'm part of that program. So, how is it that you're doing something different and adding value to New York?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, thank you, and thank you so much for ,you know, continuing to ask this really important question, because... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You're being very nice, because I... I... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: No, I am not being nice about [INAUDIBLE 00:36:35]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 00:36:36] I'm just letting you know... Go ahead... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: I am actually being... I am actually being very honest about that. I think that's a really important question to keep engaging, because I think we all share the value of having efficient government. And, we do not want duplication. We want to be mindful of how we're using tax dollars and doing our work. And, so I think what we have done is pay close attention to The Charter and what it asks

us to do in terms of collaborating with a wide variety of, you know, agencies and intergovernmental partners to make sure that we are not duplicating anything that anyone is doing and adding value.

In the area of community boards ,you know, we partner very closely, as I already mentioned, with borough presidents, uh, and also Department of City Planning, OMB, MOIA, like all the agencies that have cut across ,you know, the programs that we are supposed to serve on for community boards, we are working with them.

And, uh, as far as access to urban planners, I mean, know that the community boards have been asking for urban planners to be placed within CVs for a very long time. And, I think [INAUDIBLE 00:37:52]...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But they have the

[INAUDIBLE 00:37:53]... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yes?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They have them from, uh,

[INAUDIBLE 00:37:56]... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 00:37:56] they have those.

DR. SAYEED: That is wonderful. We are, you know, we are... What we did so far is to meet The Charter requirement that we are supposed to provide access to neutral planners. We did the M/WBE directory. That is the only thing we have done to date... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

DR. SAYEED: Anything we do in the future will be coordinated with, you know, a non-duplicative. We will be talking... we have already connected with the fund for The City of New York, and we continue to just talk with DCP and [INAUDIBLE 00:38:28] borough presidents who also have planners to assist the boards. So, uh... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

DR. SAYEED: We are going to be making sure that we are not duplicating [INAUDIBLE 00:38:35]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, I just... You have a big staff, so I am trying to think of what else you can do.

Now, PB, I just did PB, 14 of us did PB.... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: [INAUDIBLE 00:38:42]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: With all due respect, I believe the only person we talked to was Benjamin Solotaire (sp?), who seems to be... former intern of mine... seems to be volunteering for PB. And, I never talked to anybody else. And, we did it. So, I don't know, what did you do in terms of PB to help us if at all? I don't know, I'm just asking.

DR. SAYEED: Oh, for the... for The City Council process? Uh, [INAUDIBLE 00:39:05]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: See, we never heard from The City Council, we just talked to Ben... To Benjamin Solotaire (sp?), that's it, nobody else.

DR. SAYEED: Uh, you're talking about the process that ran on the platform recently? (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, so, you did... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: the platform? So, you built the platform? Is that what you did?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, and for the most recent process, we... The City Council did leverage the Participate platform to run the Council process. Yeah, we were... We were not involved in the

process, because that is Council's process. So...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. You know what you could do? You know what you could do [BACKGROUND NOISE] [INAUDIBLE 00:39:34]... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yes?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You know what you could do to help with all of this stuff, is I do think you are duplicating. I am going to be honest with you. The borough presidents do not need you. I didn't need you as borough president. I did not. And, I didn't want you involved with the community boards. I'll be honest, because I think it's a conflict. Because, I think they should be independent, not subject to anything that The Mayor does. And they should be independent. That's my opinion.

However, civic engagement in the schools sucks. So, I mean, we could be... You can start from any, you know, any place you want. I think Generation X does some. There is no civic education. So, if you could figure out what it should be, I think that would be fabulous. That would be something that I believe, you know, DOE is another morass. But, that would be something that I think would be helpful. I

have to be honest with you, others may feel differently. I still think you to figure out what exactly your agency is doing, and keep us... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: up to date on a regular basis.

DR. SAYEED: Yes, we will be happy to work with the DOE Civics for All Program to look... continue to look at civics education in the schools...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, the... Whatever that program is, it is not working. Just so you know.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now, I'd like to welcome Council Member Schulman to testify, followed by Council Member Hanif.

Council Member Schulman?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: You have to unmute me... Oh, okay, I am not on mute. Thank you. I'm sorry.

Dr. Sayeed, so a couple... I have a few... A few questions, one is how much money does Mayor Adams plan to set aside for citywide participatory budgeting in Fiscal Year 2023?

DR. SAYEED: For the coming... For Fiscal Year 2023, we are... I am so sorry excuse me... We will be running a process of \$5 million in expense funding for citywide PB -- the first round of PB. And, that process will go through Fiscal Year 2024.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And, I am a little confused, because I... I used to work in The Speaker's Office in the Community Engagement Division, which did the PB process, is this... How do you work with The Council? Is The Council separate? That is what I am trying to figure out.

DR. SAYEED: For the implementation of citywide PB, Council... City Council is a really important partner. Right? I mean, we will be all around the city, so we look forward to working with the council members to implement this process. And as, you know, Chair Ung mentioned, uhm, you might have ideas for community based organizations and other key stakeholders that we ought to be connecting with in your district. And, so we would love to keep talking

with you about that. It will also be up to each individual council member to continue to use your discretionary funding if you choose to, to run your own process. And assuming you want to continue to leverage the platform, we will certainly be coordinating on that front and hopefully working to align the processes. We are on a slightly different calendar in the sense that we are having a yearlong process of idea generation and voting. And a yearlong process of implementing projects, because they are all expense projects. You know, and so we are just, again, hoping to continue to build the lines of communication between ourselves and Council around this process.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Yeah, it's really important, because some members spend their discretionary and some, it comes out of The Speaker's Office in terms of The Community Engagement Division. So, that is something that all, I think, needs to be coordinated a little better.

I also wanted to ask about early voting in terms of interpreters. How many early voting and Election Day poll sites does CEC plan to serve for June 2022?

And I want to just do a caveat here that we now may have two primaries... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: [INAUDIBLE 00:43:26]

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: because of the court decision. So, do you have the resources and the funding to be able to do that?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, this is just evolving news on that... the possibility of two primaries. We don't know for sure whether... Right? We don't know for sure whether there will be two or one. Hopefully we will find that out soon.

As far as the number of sites we are serving, we have been serving 25 on Election Day and 75... Oh, sorry, 25 for early voting and 75 for Election Day. And we hope that we will be continuing that. And, depending on what happens with the calendaring of the primary -- if there are two or if there are one -- we will need to assess our budget and see how we... you know, what we will need to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, and I want to, at some other point, because I don't have a lot of time left, talk to you separately about where those... how those sites are selected. For example, I have a Russian community in my district, so I wanted to make

sure that they have... because, in the past stuff has gone on where people from the community come in and interpret for people who really shouldn't be doing that, who don't have the training and all of that. So, we should talk about that. That's one. The other, is a totally separate question, when you... By the way, I want to thank Chair Ung for this important hearing. But, you had talked, uh, when Chair Ung had asked about the organizational structure, you mentioned Artist in Residence Can you explain... Can you talk about that a little bit?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: What that [INAUDIBLE
00:45:03]

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, I mean, we started as... As I mentioned, we were working with Department of Cultural Affairs on the Public Artists and Residents Program, and we had an Artist in Residence with us through that program. And, after the project was completed, to transform this bus from the Department of Corrections into Mobile Civic Engagement Units, we felt it was really important to continue to integrate Arts into our work, and to, uhm, connect Arts and Civic Engagement in more powerful ways. So, we

wanted... We are continuing to work with the Artist in Residence, and it's a part-time function that we are hoping to continue to build on, you know, build on the Arts in connection to civics through that work.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Alright, and I... There's art... There are artists throughout all of the boroughs too that I want... that I think should be connected. So, uh... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: That would be great... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Alright, so I'd like to learn about that in the future, and thank you very much for answering my questions.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Council Member Hanif?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, [INAUDIBLE 00:46:16] from Dr. Sayeed.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you [INAUDIBLE 00:46:18]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, uh, first and foremost for continuing participatory budgeting at

1 this time, [NO AUDIO] [INAUDIBLE 00:46:24] especially
2 focusing this initiative towards the needs of young
3 people. I think all channels and opportunities for
4 participatory budgeting is necessary. So, excited to
5 continue the work in The Council, for council members
6 to lead participatory budgeting, I too was among the
7 council members that led PB this cycle, the 11th
8 cycle for us. Uhm, we need to bring back PB in to
9 the schools, and then for the CEC to do their PB is
10 essential, too. If we are going to talk about budget
11 justice, I think as many opportunities that New
12 Yorkers have towards deciding how to spend dollars,
13 and then focusing that attention around how dollars
14 get spent and how much programming costs towards the
15 needs of young people, I think is just... is
16 phenomenal work. So, I am excited to support the
17 CEC's initiatives towards that.

18 I'd like to know, uh, the breakdown of the people
19 involved in your PD process from leadership,
20 structures, to the voter turnout. I'd then
21 additionally like to know about some of the
22 challenges that have come up through doing PB. PB is
23 extremely challenging no doubt.
24
25

And, then what are some of the lessons that you are learning?

DR. SAYEED: Uh, by leadership structure, do you mean internally or just overall how we have been running it? Sorry... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How you have been running it. I know there's, like, a staff dedicated to participatory budgeting... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: So... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And, then volunteers, uhm, if you're replicating the district committee model that some of The Council offices have?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, so, so far we have been... To date with the two processes, we have been working with community based organizations who are proposing... because it's expense funding, who are proposing the ideas and working, you know, with our community after needs are determined. They have also been running the voting phases. And we will be looking to continue that process in this first iteration of PB, because we do have expense funding again. We are working out an implementation plan. Right now we are talking with stakeholders about what that implementation could look like citywide, and,

you know, whether the district committee model is something that we want to keep going with, uh, depending on geography. Right? Like, we... We also... That's another decision point is, what's the geographic focus of the process? And, in order to reach New York City residents. Uh, so that... Those are some of the ways we are thinking about that. Uh, and then I'm... Could you repeat the other parts of that question? I'm sorry?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What's been the voter turnout? Or is there a voting model?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, the voter turnout for the TRIE process was about 29,500 people that voted. And they voted online, uh, on the platform. They also voted online through an... you know, like, just a straight survey. They had paper ballots. We went to libraries, uh, CBO partners shared with their clients, so, I mean, for... In the youth process, there were 2,000 youths who voted. So, you know, next... we are hoping to just keep building on that participation, [INAUDIBLE 00:49:53] process...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Oh, so this current model isn't just specific to young people anymore?

DR. SAYEED: The current model [BACKGROUND NOISE]
in the TRIE neighborhoods?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right.

DR. SAYEED: No, it was everybody... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, got it... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: It was everybody... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: got it... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: It was everybody, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And, then, you know, the 13
or 14 council members that did PB this cycle, it was
really tough, because it wasn't centralized, uh, and
we're trying to get The Speaker to support this. And
I am hearing rumblings that she does, and we are
going to figure out how to do this well and
successfully. And, I agree with, uhm, Council Member
Brewer's frustration that we only had, you know, Ben
and Laura to sort of like walk us through how to do
this. And, I think the hardest part was the
platform.

DR. SAYEED: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: The hardest part was the
platform. I think this cycle garnered probably the
lowest voter turnout, not because, uh, people weren't

excited about deciding how to spend the city's dollars, and on projects that are dear to them, but because of how inaccessible the website was.

DR. SAYEED: Yeah...

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Uh, I'd love to figure out how to make this work. Because, if we keep the Decidim we are going to fail PB in this city.

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, it's, uhm, I'm so glad that you're raising this, because, you know, we have been... I think it's... I think it's... We went with Decidim as a platform, because, you know, it is... it allows for transparency. Right? Like, we're really... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

DR. SAYEED: Oh, we researched a variety of different platforms and found this one was... seemed to be the best one. And, it also allows us to stay connected with other, you know, municipalities who are doing this work.

You are right in that, you know, we... CEC, has... continues to be, as a new agency, we are building the plane as we fly it. And, we are continuing to learn along the way. I mean one of our values is dynamic learning. So, you're right that,

you know, the platform and the user interface has been challenging, so we are doing user testing. And we will continue... We will need to continue to be open to hearing from residents about their experience with the platform and keep tweaking it. I mean, it is... Decidim is actually, you know, it's an international community of people who are working with the programming of that site. So, whatever changes we are making to the site, we are going through that process as well, uh, to continue to improve the platform, not just for New York City, but users worldwide.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, I would like to stay engaged with that, and of course as we, like, move in to centralizing the process in The Council, uh, really thinking about how to make sure that voting is easy.

DR. SAYEED: Yes... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Uh, I think the hardest part, which is the outreach, you know, will continue to be hard, but once people are, uh, brought in, the voting piece should be the easiest lift.

DR. SAYEED: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Uhm, yeah.

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, I mean, and... and your...
The other point to... for us to work together on,
also is that, you know, I think there is going to be
different kinds of strategies we will need to use
given the digital divide, right? Like, the online
voting process also has like to different groups of
people I'd say. One is the Participate Platform, and
if at all possible, like, if we need to, and we did,
in the TRIE neighborhood process, because people
don't... They don't want to set up an account...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right.

DR. SAYEED: for a variety of reasons, and so we
allowed them to have a vote on, uh, just a form where
they clicked a survey. The advantage of the platform
is that it makes sure that you have one vote per
person, uh, we want to preserve the integrity of the
vote. However, for those who feel, you know,
concerned, they could do that online method. And,
then there are a lots of people who we would get
through ,you know, just local on the ground canvassing
and outreach and through partnerships ,you know,
with... with community partners.

So, we are going to have to keep doing all of those things I think to just really raise the participation as much as possible.

Of course the online outreach was difficult during the pandemic, you know, and hopefully that will come back, and continue to build the PB participation citywide.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, I am looking forward to getting to the best version of this website. Uh, if we keep to Decidim or another platform, I do agree all of the PD processes should be hosted on one platform. I think that's what makes participatory budgeting unique, and to see all of the simultaneous initiatives running together or at different timelines, just shows that the city is deeply engaged to civic engagement and democracy. So, I am excited for us to continue that work together, thank you.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, I will now turn it back to Chair Ung for further questions.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, CJ.

So, uh, I want to move on to the language assistance and Voter Outreach Program.

How much does CEC coordinate with DOE and CFB on this? Because I think as Council Member Brewer said, you know, there seems to be maybe duplicative efforts going on about this. So, if this is... Like, do you guys talk, you know, before, you know, early voting starts? Do you... You know, is there a coordination among all three agencies?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, there is, there is. I mean, CEC, uhm, is permitted to provide language assistance, but based on The Charter, we cannot be duplicative of anything the BOE is doing. We provide assistance in languages that are not currently covered under The Voting Rights Act. And, we do coordinate with the Board of Elections on operations. We work with the CFB to help translate and promote outreach materials beyond the current Voting Rights Act language that they don't, you know, translate into. And, we also work closely with the Campaign Finance Board in convening and attending meetings of the New York City Elections Consortium.

And, as I mentioned ,you know, we are working with CFB and others to ensure that our voter turnout education work is complimentary, and continue to partner on events to help make ,you know, to help

make sure that we are reaching as many New Yorkers as possible.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: So, thank you. So, when you say complimentary, what does that actually mean? Like, is there a conference call with BOE with before elections? Is there a... How does... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: that [NO AUDIO] [INAUDIBLE 00:56:44] work?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, so we do have... We do coordinate with BOE and we do have, you know, we do have meetings and calls with them where we are discussing... first we get a list of where the poll sites are, and we take that list and analyze it to determine ,you know, where we will be providing our services based on our methodology. We then give that list to BOE so that they know where we will actually be in their universe of sites. And, then they in turn coordinate with their on the ground operation staff to let them know we will be there providing services. And we work with each site to figure out where our interpreters will be stationed. And that is also communicated to BOE staff on the ground.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Has it happened to pass where there was a site or two that were, uhm, you know, between CEC and BOE that was missed

DR. SAYEED: Uh... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: That the... Mm-hmm?

DR. SAYEED: By missed?

CHAIRPERSON UNG: By, like, they needed interpretive services, but, uh, like, either CEC or BOE wasn't there with the poll site interpreters.

DR. SAYEED: I mean on our part, we have been using our methodology to determine where our interpreters should be stationed. Right? I mean, and in pretty much all of the cases where we have decided based on our methodology, this is where interpreters need to go, you know, we have had interpreters stationed there. And, I use the words pretty much, because I think in the first... One time it was, like, super cold, and it was, you know, it... Because of the way the poll site was, it was a small site, uhm, and we couldn't find a place inside the site where we could be ADA compliant, but outside the poll room, which we have to do by law. So, our interpreters had to be stationed outside, and it was extremely cold that day. And, so, because of that,

we were not able to provide services at that particular site for just that day. But, we also revised our methodology to be able to take -- as a result of that-- to be able to take in to account ,you know, how, uh, the interpreters themselves are being treated throughout this process in terms of ,like, cold weather. So, we are looking in to that, and the methodology will continue to consider these questions as we revise in September 2022.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Great, and actually where... Actually, since you brought it up, where actually are the CEC's interpreters?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, we do have signage that indicates we are providing services in additional languages at each site. And, then, inside there is also signage about where, you know, where the interpreters may be seated. In some of the sites, uh, they may be outside, and those ,you know, tents are marked and visible on our tables ,you know, we have Civic Engagement Commission labeled with the language ,you know, that we are providing services in. And, those are typically right outside of the polling room so people can see it as they enter the polling room.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: So... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: And, we have to be outside the guardrail per... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Oh, okay... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: per the state law.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Oh, you have to be outside of the guardrail... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: So, that's separate from where the BOE interpreters are?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, it is, yes... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: We're... Yeah, we're... we're... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Oh, okay... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, so it would be... We have to be compliant with the state laws... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON UNG: [INAUDIBLE 01:00:37]... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, it makes it... it... You know, it makes it tough for... in some cases, you know, for voters? You're right to point that out. Uhm, you know, and we are trying to provide as much signage as possible to let people know, you know,

that we are there. And, we are also doing outreach beforehand to know that... that we are there, so that they know that we are there.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Okay, that's... Yeah, that's... So... Oh, so, how can a voter find out whether or not interpreters will be available at their poll site through CEC? Like, what is the outreach to them?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, we... We have been, again, promoting through... We have a voting center on our site, also on our Participate site, uh, so... And, then have been doing geo targeted ad placements in the election districts where we are providing services in different languages. And, then now with an expanded outreach team, we are going to be doing on the ground canvassing in specific neighborhoods as well to promote a greater awareness.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. And, oh, the... With the municipal voter laws going into effect, have you... has CEC dug through that about how that would change, uh, the interpreters program going forward -- or modified?

DR. SAYEED: I think we will... We will have an opportunity to consider some of those questions as, uh, and it will be important to consider those

questions as we are, you know, modifying and revising the methodology. We are in the very early stages of planning for a public hearing on the revision of the methodology, and we are looking at utilization patterns across years and languages for the full site, and then thinking about how language communities are growing. And, also, we will be looking at, you know, the new, uh, the changes to the law in municipal voting as we are revising.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Have CEC and BOE been in contact about this issue at all, or are you waiting for that?

DR. SAYEED: Uhm, for... On this particular matter, we have not communicated with the BOE specifically. Right now a lot of our communication is very focused on making sure our operations are smooth for the elections. But, we will, you know, we will continue to talk with BOE, CFB, and a variety of partners to make sure that the rollout of municipal voting is as smooth as possible. It is going to be very important to be coordinated with a lot of different stakeholders on this.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, Dr. Sayeed.

And, just one last question about early voting. Right now I believe CEC is only providing

interpreters on the final two days of early voting, which... Are there thoughts about, like, expanding that for the full early voting period?

DR. SAYEED: Uh, that can be another consideration in our revision. We went with the two, uh... And, I think it's also important to remember that early voting is still growing as a phenomenon. Right? And, so, we need to do a lot of education for New Yorkers to take advantage of early voting overall.

In considering the early voting implementation, in the first round of when we were doing the methodology, we were looking at how widely early voting is being used. And, we noticed that, uh, the last weekend, it was the greatest use. So, that's why we went with that. And, I think in reviewing the methodology, we can look again at how it's fairing. You know? And consider whether we want to adapt it to changes in the patterns of usage.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. I look forward to seeing the new methodology.

And, I am done for now, but I just want, uh, City Council Member Restler has joined us. I don't know if has any questions? Maybe not? Yes, he's here, okay. You're muted.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Somebody has to unmute...
Oh, there we go. Okay, great. Uh, thank you for
unmuting me, I appreciate it.

So, I'm sorry, I'm on a bicycle, but it's always
good to be with Dr. Sayeed, and Chair Ung, thank you
for your leadership.

So, there were two things I was hoping to ask
about. Uhm, firstly was regarding participatory
budgeting, uh, which, you know, with the central
staff at The Council no longer providing the same
support as was the case a few years ago. It's a
heavy lift on small council member offices to do this
work. And, I think we are all very eager for the CEC
to step and help us play, uh, help play a leadership
role and making participatory budgeting a reality
citywide.

Is there currently a plan for making that happen,
and what should... If not... What can we expect in
the upcoming fiscal year in terms of an expansion of
BP in our communities?

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, thank you so much for that
question. And, it's... I don't think I've ever
talked to a council member while they were on a bike.

Uh, so for citywide PB, we are... we were given an allocation of \$5 million in expense dollars for citywide PB for the first round through fiscal year of 2024. And, we have been running pilot processes. So far, we had one that was youth focused. And, another one that we have just recently completed in the TRIE neighborhoods, and organizations, uh, CBOs proposed ideas and community members voted on those ideas, and those winning projects are now being implemented in the 33 neighborhoods at the Taskforce for Racial Inclusion and Equity.

And, I believe in your council district, it's El Puente (sp?), uh, that has been running the process and is implementing. It's a project focused on mental health. And, we will be continuing to work with CBO partners in the rollout of the citywide expense process. And, also looking forward to working with council members, uhm, you know, to make sure that we are creating the most inclusive process that we can and reaching as many residents as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Oh, great, thank you for unmuting me.

The, uhm, that's very helpful Dr. Sayeed, thank you, and thank you for the great work that you do and that Laura does and everybody on the related initiatives.

I was surprised to hear you reference that you think state law prohibits the city funded interpreters from accessing... from standing within, uh, the poll sites or within the 100 feet rule.

I had thought that, uh, this was a Board of Elections interpretation that was problematic and that should be reconsidered. Uh, just wanted... I was hoping you could clarify on that, that this is in fact, you think, uh, a clear state law violation for our interpreters to be standing within the poll sites.

DR. SAYEED: Yeah, uh, as you know, there was litigation around this issue. Right? And, uhm, we are going with... In order to work effectively on the ground with the BOE operations, I mean the... We are going with that interpretation of the law, uh, at the moment.

So, in an ideal world, to serve voters, and the BOE agrees with this, you know, we would want to be very closely coordinated. So, I think, uhm, there

are opportunities to look at that, uh, you know, should this program continue to work and serve voters.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay, that is helpful.

Uh, and then, I think that covers my questions for now. I really appreciate it, Chair Ung, and for your leadership on this committee, and for all of the great legislation you have been sponsoring in The Council. I am really... I was really enjoying the bills that you put forward yesterday, so thank you for your... for all the work that you are doing.

And, Dr. Sayeed, thank you, I am so happy that you are continuing to lead in this role. It's good to have you there. So, thank very much.

DR. SAYEED: Thank you. Have there been other council members on bikes in Council hearings?

[LAUGHTER]

Just wanted to... He could be setting a trend here.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Oh, your hand is up again.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I was just going to say, I am off my bicycle, I am now walking. But, it was, uh... (CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Oh! Okay, okay...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I usually... I'm usually not on camera when I am biking, so that was a special... I just didn't want to be rude to you, Dr. Sayeed, so I was trying to go extra slow and...

(CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Thank you

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: be careful, so...

(CROSS-TALK)

DR. SAYEED: Thank you...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But, I, uh... Yeah.

But, it's great to see you, sorry...

DR. SAYEED: You, too.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, City Council Member Restler.

And, I am done with my questions Dr. Sayeed. I don't know if anybody has any more questions. I believe City Council Member Hanif had her hand up before.

It's... Okay, the hand up is back up. Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thanks. I mean, I guess I want to know if the citywide participatory budgeting is working. Uhm, just, uh, to expand on Lincoln's question, I mean, the idea was to have like several planks of PB initiatives. The idea was never for the

CEC to lead and support, uhm, council members leading participatory budgeting. It was just adding on another anchor so that New Yorkers have one more opportunity to decide how to spend the city's dollars.

Do you think in its iteration, this is working? And, I had asked about some of the challenges or the lessons. I would love to hear what those have been.

DR. SAYEED: Oh, thank you, yeah, I didn't... I didn't really, uh, talk about that. Thank you for bringing that up again.

Uh, I think one of the challenges is... we already discussed, right? How do we create opportunities for participation that are digital online? The digital ones, making sure that they are working. So, that's been... That's been an area of a lot continuing to work with communities on that.

Uh, one of the areas we innovated and is just working with community based organizations.

As you know, uh, in your former role, with Council Member Lander, you ran an expense process, you know, at the neighborhood level. And, we had the change to that across 33 neighborhoods. So, what... That has also been a place of learning, because we

find that community based organizations, you know, have varying capacity, right? To do all kinds of things. So, how to support community based organizations and really build their capacity, that is something we will be building in to the citywide program -- that capacity building piece. So, we help organizations really develop their civic engagement work more deeply.

And, I think the other great lesson for us has really been the value of an expense process. You know, we have talked about this before. I think The Council process has largely been a capital process, and what that has meant is that the time it takes to complete projects is often longer, which means that residents don't see the direct result of their participation. Whereas, with an expense process, since the timeline is shortened, they can more directly see that, hey, I am participating, and there is a project I voted on, and it's implemented, and I have an impact and my voice makes a difference. So, think that's... Just amplifying that kind of citywide if going to be really key.

And, the last thing I wanted to say about lessons learned, is I think... I think really need to sort

of change the story and the narrative about what PB is, who participates, by elevating the voices of people...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

DR. SAYEED: Uhm, you know, who have been participating, getting them to share their stories of participation. And we started to do that actually in the TRIE neighborhood spaces. We started, like, interview some of the CBOs who working with us, and get their stories about, like, why this project or process mattered for them. Like, how it made a difference for their communities. And we will be sharing that, those stories out more in the coming months to help excite people about what they're stepping in to, and hopefully galvanize more participation.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's really wonderful. And, has this CEC put out any reports about participatory budgeting, or is there forthcoming reporting on just how PB has been running?

DR. SAYEED: Yes, we will... We will be writing up a report to talk about what we have learned during the pilot phases and ,you know, see how we can ,you know, integrate the lessons, make... We are going to

be making sure that we integrate the lessons into citywide for sure.

And, I think, like I said, dynamic learning is going to be really key for us, because it will be the first time that they'll be a citywide process; it will also be the first time there will be a citywide expense process. So, there is going to be a lot of learning that we will all do. So, we are really excited about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Great.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, I don't see any other council member's hands raised. Uhm, so, if you don't have any other questions, we can move on to public testimony.

CHAIRPERSON UNG: I do not, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great, thank you.

We will not turn to public testimony, please be advised that for this portion of the hearing, we will be calling on individuals one by one to testify. Each panelist will be given two minutes to speak. Please begin once the sergeant has started the timer.

Council members who have questions for a particular panelist, should use the Zoom Raise Hand

Function, and I will call on you after the panelist has completed their testimony.

For panelist, once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you, and the Sergeant At Arms will set the timer and give you the go ahead to begin. Please wait for the sergeant to announce that you maybe begin before delivering your testimony.

I would now like to welcome Ben Weinberg to testify, followed by Ahmed Butt, Mohamed Q. Amin, and then Glen Bolofsky.

Ben Weinberg, you begin when the sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

BEN WEINBERG: Hello, good afternoon, members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations. My name is Ben Weinberg, and I am the Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union. Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers for 125 years.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to provide comments today, and we commend Chair Sandra Ung and the committee members for conducting an

oversight hearing on a new city agency that has yet to be reviewed by The Council.

I just want to focus my quick testimony on community board assistance. It was a fascinating conversation so far, and I have learned a lot as well.

Community Board support was one of the three main Charter-mandated tasks that the commission given by the voters. And when the 2018 Charter Revision Commission considered what assistance the future commission would provide for, the community board, it focused on land use recourses. It has also tasked the commission with language and technological assistance, but really the heart of the reform was in land use resources, and specifically in creating an available pool of urban planners independent of borough president offices. And, that was because of the import role community boards play in developing 197-a plans and ULURP processes. And, indeed community board's comments on developments are kind of the first line of community input and sometimes the first line of defense. Their opinion is, although advisory, significant enough that lobbyist

spend significant sums of money lobbying those
community boards.

Unfortunately, that Charter mandate is dependent
on appropriations as detailed in City Charter §3203.

So, I will make it short, because I see time is
running out. Citizens Union urges the Council to
provide the resources needed to develop a meaningful
land use assistance program for community boards. We
believe these resources are... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

BEN WEINBERG: [INAUDIBLE] inspired way in
empowering communities who face powerful and well-
funded developers and city agencies. And, we ask The
Council to turn this Charter provision into a fully
funded mandates.

My written testimony includes a references to
other aspects of the Commission's work, and I didn't
have time to acknowledged, of course, their hard work
in setting up a new agency under COVID and their
great work on language access at poll sites.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

I would now like to welcome Ahmed Butt to testify, followed by Mohamed Q. Amin, and then Glen Bolofsky.

Ahmed Butt, you may begin upon the sergeant's announcement.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

AHMED BUTT: I want to thank Committee Chair Ung and the Council Members here today for the opportunity to testify. I'm Ahmed Butt, Civic Engagement Coordinator at the Asian American Federation, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

Our Asian American community is getting more and more dispersed across our City and moving beyond ethnic enclaves. We work and live across our City, and that presents a challenge when it comes to civic engagement.

Because our LEP population is spread out and not always within clusters, our most politically-isolated community members are often looked over by critical programs like the Poll Site Language Assistance Program. Furthermore, a lack of education in our communities about this program undermines its impact.

Nonetheless, the Asian American Federation and the civic engagement coalition we lead, the AAPI Power Coalition, have and continue to do large-scale on-the-ground work in our most marginalized communities.

The CBOs of our coalition, who collectively made almost 2 million contacts with Asian voters last year, and who serve eight different ethnic communities in four boroughs, have credibility in our most isolated communities and must occupy leadership roles in city civic engagement initiatives. Our coalition members must be a part of the process, engaged as partners and centered as experts.

Given the recently proposed changes to this year's primary election timeline, it is of utmost importance that voter engagement efforts center the ability of our CBOs to guide and educate underserved communities. While the state redistricting process has largely been viewed as a political fight, the proposed changes will without a doubt increase confusion and indifference among voters. We are running the risk of further disenfranchising our most isolated communities while we should be focused on increasing their participation.

I urge you to consider the impact these changes will have on turnout, and partner with our CBOs so as to not leave our communities behind in your education efforts.

The following recommendations will help city agencies ensure that our community members are not only not excluded from their voter registration efforts due to a lack of adequate resources or training, but are also provided culturally-competent and language-accessible civic engagement resources.

Build rapport and prioritize community based organizations... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

AHMED BUTT: Make information on poll site interpretation services more easily accessible, and eliminate language barriers present *before* reach the polls.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, I would now like to welcome Mohamed Q. Amin to testify, followed by Glen Bolofsky.

Mohamed Q. Amin?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MOHAMED Q. AMIN: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like first to thank Chair Ung and the council members here today for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Mohamed Q. Amin, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Caribbean Equality Project.

Founded in 2015 in response to anti-LGBTQ hate crime violence in Richmond Hill, Queens, Caribbean Equality Project is an NYC-based community organization that empowers, advocates for, and represents Black and Brown, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming immigrants in New York City.

Since 2015, the Caribbean Equality Project has built political power through civic engagement, voter registration, public education, and legislative advocacy. The organization cultivates civic participation and promotes education to build collective political power for Afro and Indo-Caribbean LGBTQ+ people in New York City and Caribbean immigrants.

Currently, The Caribbean Equality Project's civic engagement work is hyper-local in Caribbean-centric neighborhoods in NYC, such as Little Guyana in

Richmond Hill, Queens, Little Caribbean in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and Castel Hill and Soundview in The Bronx.

The organization leads and collaborates with community members, and faith-based institutions, and civic groups such as the Asian American Federation to mobilize documented and undocumented LGBTQ+ community members and their families to engage with elected officials through town halls, community board meetings, and city and state hearings, regardless of their immigration status.

In 2021, to encourage civic participation in the primary and general elections and promote voter education, we launched "Mash-up De Vote," a culturally-responsive Black and Brown Caribbean immigrant-focused civic engagement campaign. To continue building political power at the neighborhood level, we founded the now annual Little Guyana Votes Festival a culturally- responsive hyper-local civic engagement drive and resource fair in Richmond Hill, Queens.

New York City is home to the largest Caribbean immigrant population... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MOHAMED Q. AMIN: In 2021, our voting rights advocacy included passing Intro 1867. The legislation expands democracy in New York City, to give over 900,000 green card holders the right to vote.

We are recommending an investment in community based organizations that are doing culturally competent voter registration and education work in geographically immigrant communities, and to expand hyper-local voter education on Ranked Choice Voting. This also includes the Board of Elections to make sure that immigrant communities know their rights under the new law that gives immigrants and permanent residents the right to vote.

And, I will also submit my written testimony which has more recommendations for The Council.

Thank you for the time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

I would now like to welcome Glen Bolofsky to testify.

And, at this time, if your name has not been called, and you wish to testify, please raise your hand using the Zoom Raise Hand Function.

Glen Bolofsky?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

GLEN BOLOFSKY: Good afternoon, uh, Chairwoman Ung, very nice to see you, and all the council members, Restler, and everyone else. I also want to thank central staff for organizing this, I know it's very time consuming. You guys make it look easy.

I'd like to speak about Government Operations in terms of the New York City Department of Finance programs.

If you are an individual who cannot get around very well, if you're a disabled individual, or a senior citizen, or just an average member of the public and have a parking ticket, you can fight a ticket for Sanitation with OATH and you can do so remotely by phone. You cannot do that with The Parking Violations Bureau, so people are required, if they want to give oral arguments, to actually physically come in to do so. This is a due process issue for individuals, because they can't always get in there, so they have to literally mail it in or upload it -- denying them the ability to make oral arguments.

We are here today talking about voting rights. And, it's great that we are improving in that area, but those who are already here and getting parking

1 tickets or denied their fundamental due process
2 rights, unless they can physically travel to the PVB.

3 It would save government a lot of money if their
4 judges didn't have to sit in their offices to conduct
5 these hearings. It would save the PVB millions of
6 dollars a year in office space, computer space
7 locally -- and printers and in storage of materials
8 as well, because when they find a ticket not guilty
9 on paper, uh, that you bring in for a live hearing,
10 they store those for several years to examine them
11 for fraud. So, they are storing the documents and
12 then they are paying extra for the storage and for
13 discarding the documents later.

14 That's my testimony today, and I thank you so
15 much for giving me the opportunity to do this.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

17 And, seeing no further hands raised, Chair Ung,
18 I'll turn it back to you for closing remarks.

19 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you, I really, uh, Dr.
20 Sayeed, especially, thank you so much for spending
21 time with us today. I think we all have learned a
22 lot from this hearing. I look forward, actually,
23 maybe in, perhaps soon, in a year, I don't know, but
24 soon to talk about what is next with CEC. I think it
25

2 is actually all very exciting. Having the
3 conversation today from participatory budgeting to
4 language assistance at poll sites, you know, the
5 upcoming year with all of the new City Council
6 members and [INAUDIBLE 01:27:44] vote, ,you know, I
7 definitely see ways where CEC will be working more
8 with the new City Council members and with the
9 different CBOs out there.

10 So, again, thank you so much.

11 [GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 10, 2022