

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

----- X

Thursday, January 12, 2023

Start: 10:20 a.m.

Recess: 12:45 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chairperson

COUNCILMEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu  
Robert F. Holden  
Vickie Paladino  
Julie Won

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

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Morning and welcome to the New  
3 York City Hybrid Hearing on the Committee on  
4 Technology. At this time, please silence all  
5 electronic devices to vibrate or silent. Chair, we  
6 may begin.

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much. Good  
8 morning. My name is Councilmember Jennifer Gutiérrez  
9 and I'm the Chair of the Committee on Technology.  
10 I'm happy to hold today's hearing on access to  
11 technology and digital literacy programs in New York  
12 City. From the start of my tenure as Chair of this  
13 committee, I knew I wanted to focus all of the work  
14 that we do around equity, using my background as an  
15 organizer to inform how we can organize, educate and  
16 work towards a more equitable city. Access to  
17 programs that promote digital literacy, especially in  
18 the elderly, and access to physical technological  
19 equipment is an important piece of the puzzle to  
20 bring all New Yorkers online. The hearing will focus  
21 on two bills: Intro 664 sponsored by yours truly,  
22 which would require the Department of Citywide  
23 Administrative Services, DCAS, to donate surplus  
24 city-owned computers, computer software and computer  
25 equipment to public and private institutions for  
secular educational use and to nonprofit institutions

2 for use by individuals with disabilities, senior  
3 citizens, or low income individuals, and Intro 665  
4 also sponsored by me, which would establish a digital  
5 literacy program for older adults. Data from the US

6 Census in 2021 showed that many New York City  
7 residents aged 65 years and older do not have access  
8 to broadband, and many older residents do not have  
9 access to the devices, knowledge, or financial means  
10 to connect. At the same time we now use the internet  
11 to book flights transfer funds from bank accounts  
12 check bus times, access vital city services, attend  
13 doctor's appointments through telehealth, and  
14 communicate with our loved ones through video  
15 messaging applications. Simply put, modern living  
16 requires internet connection, access to devices, and  
17 skills to use such devices, all while ensuring that  
18 our personal data is protected. To this end, New  
19 York City had several programs aimed at bridging the  
20 digital divide. For example, in 2020, as part of the  
21 former mayor's equity action plan, the city through  
22 the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer,  
23 now part of the Office of Technology and Innovation,  
24 partnered with T Mobile, LG Electronics USA and Older  
25 Adults Technology Services, OATS, to provide 10,000

2 internet connected tablets to older adults living in  
3 NYCHA developments through the connected NYCHA  
4 program. Residents aged 62 and older and living  
5 alone were prioritized for this distribution. The  
6 tablets came with 12 months of mobile internet  
7 connectivity paid for by the city of New York.  
8 Participants also received free support from the  
9 Department for the Aging and OATS in setting up their  
10 devices, learning how to use them, accessing free  
11 classes and resources, and connecting with friends  
12 and family.

13       Of course, such programs come with a cost.  
14 However, as we continue working on closing the  
15 digital divide in the city, we must not overlook our  
16 most vulnerable in our rapidly evolving population,  
17 as anyone fortunate to live long enough will  
18 eventually fall into the category of being elderly.

19       There are 1.1 million older adults in New York  
20 City making up 13% of the population. And that  
21 percentage is only expected to expand as we all  
22 inevitably age into the senior population. Ensuring  
23 this digital literacy is an essential service that  
24 the city provides. It's a safety net, not just for  
25

2 the current aging population, but for all of us  
3 sitting in this room.

4 Another way to bridge the digital divide is to  
5 donate technology. Many of our schools and  
6 nonprofits across the city are doing some of this  
7 vital digital literacy work already and trying to  
8 bridge the digital divide with the few resources that  
9 we have. When an office decides that they need to  
10 upgrade a tablet then there must be a process to  
11 ensure that that tablet is repurposed for someone  
12 that is in need of it. And working towards our  
13 environmental goals don't even devices to people and  
14 organizations in need also mitigates e-waste across  
15 our city. As part of this process, it will be vital  
16 that precautions in regard to the information stored  
17 on these devices is protected and wiped to prevent  
18 unintended disclosure of proprietary, confidential,  
19 or personal information.

20 The Committee is looking forward to learn more  
21 about the process and the efforts are city to expand  
22 access to technology and facilities digital literacy  
23 program.

24 Now I'd like to thank the technology committee  
25 staff for putting together this hearing. I'd like to

2 also recognize our technology committee members,  
3 Councilmembers Sean Abreu and Councilmember Vicki  
4 Palladino. And then is Councilmember Holden online.  
5 And also recognize Councilmember Bob Holden, who's  
6 joining us from the internets. And I will now turn  
7 it over to Irene, our Committee Counsel for  
8 administrative proceedings.

9 COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good morning,  
10 everyone. Now we'll hear testimonies from  
11 Administration. We have Brett Sikoff, and Ryan  
12 Birchmeier from OTI, and Roman Gofman from DCAS. And  
13 now I ask you to raise your right hands. Thank you.  
14 Do you affirm to tell the truth and answer honestly  
15 each Councilmember questions?

16 ALL: I do.

17 COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin your  
18 testimony.

19 MR. SIKOFF: Thank you. Good morning Chair  
20 Gutiérrez and members of the City Council Committee  
21 on Technology. My name is Brett Sikoff, and I am the  
22 Executive Director of Franchise Administration for  
23 the Office of Technology and Innovation, or OTI.  
24 Here with me today is Ryan Birchmeier, Deputy  
25 Commissioner for Public Information at OTI.

2 I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss  
3 OTI's partnerships related to digital literacy  
4 programs across the city. It has been a little over  
5 a year since OTI consolidated the city's technology  
6 offices, making enormous strides to bring broadband  
7 access to historically underserved populations  
8 citywide. It is an honor to lead the team making  
9 this important progress. However, we know that  
10 access to affordable and reliable internet is only  
11 one part of the equation.

12 Many of us take for granted just how much we rely  
13 on technology to communicate with friends and family  
14 to do homework, to seek employment, and fulfill the  
15 duties of our jobs, to perform everyday necessary  
16 tasks like paying bills and online shopping to name a  
17 few. We know that it is not enough to simply provide  
18 the means of gaining access through a broadband  
19 connection. But it is also necessary to empower  
20 individuals with the skills to navigate how to use  
21 digital tools, both physical and virtual, to fully  
22 participate in society.

23 On the whole, there is a wide ranging ecosystem  
24 for digital literacy programming services and  
25 supports that have varying touch points and support

2 from the city. participating entities range from  
3 public institutions city agencies library branches,  
4 to nonprofit and after school providers, informal  
5 learning collectives and higher education partners  
6 that serve tens to hundreds of thousands of residents  
7 annually. Of note, the Department for Youth and  
8 Community Development administers the Council's own  
9 Digital Inclusion and Literacy Initiative Grants  
10 Program, which enables each Councilmember to allocate  
11 discretionary funds to advancing digital literacy  
12 resources at the most local level. For our part OTI,  
13 currently and other legacy offices, has invested in  
14 digital literacy through its Connected Communities  
15 Initiative for over a decade. This initiative funds  
16 trusted anchor institutions and agency partners to  
17 provide free and reliable internet access, connected  
18 devices, high quality digital literacy instruction,  
19 and technical assistance to help equip New Yorkers  
20 with digital skills. Overall, Connected Communities  
21 underwrites over 100 public sites to enable the  
22 critical delivery of devices, software, mobile  
23 hotspots, and over 24,000 hours annually of high  
24 quality digital literacy programs that help New  
25 Yorkers gain essential skills.

2 OTI does not directly administer the programs  
3 funded through Connected Communities. Rather  
4 Department of Parks and Recreation, Department for  
5 the Aging, New York City Housing Authority and the  
6 city's three library systems provide an array of  
7 digital literacy programs for a wide range of  
8 population citywide, ranging from basic access, to  
9 comprehensive and advanced digital skills trainings,  
10 and software certifications for residents in high  
11 need communities.

12 A few notable examples include: Brooklyn Public  
13 Library provides a laptop loan program across 18  
14 branches that recently distributed 1500 devices. New  
15 York Public Library offers 100 classes designed for  
16 fundamental digital citizenship, exposure and mastery  
17 of technical concepts on public computers with  
18 professional grade software. Queens Public Library  
19 uses funding from Connected Communities and from the  
20 Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to  
21 train dedicated personnel who can deliver workshops,  
22 including a course to provide contextualized English  
23 for Speakers of Other Languages classes for new  
24 immigrants, and workforce training in childcare,  
25 healthcare, and technology for residents.

2       York City Parks operates Media Education labs and  
3 its recreation centers, providing spaces and  
4 equipment for members to creatively express  
5 themselves. NYCHA's Digital Van Program brings  
6 mobile hotspots laptops, Wi Fi, and a printer to  
7 public housing communities citywide. New York City  
8 aging subcontracts to OATS to reach over 80,000 older  
9 adults every year, 80,000, with digital literacy  
10 programming. OTI supports a portion of the NYC  
11 digital safety project, which helps librarians  
12 throughout the city gain skills to support New  
13 Yorkers with digital hygiene through critical  
14 partners such as Metro Library Council.

15       In addition to the Connected Communities pie, OTI  
16 also supports digital literacy through other program  
17 areas. For example, the Open Data Team, in  
18 partnership with the civic technology nonprofit Beta  
19 NYC, developed a curriculum and trained a group of  
20 volunteer Open Data ambassadors to teach other New  
21 Yorkers about what Open Data is and how it can be  
22 used. In 2022, we held 25 of these open data  
23 education classes and taught nearly 800 people about  
24 open data. These classes were hosted by a variety  
25 idea of organizations including community boards,

2 Councilmember offices, Borough President offices, and  
3 the civic engagement commission. We thank the  
4 Council for their continued support of this vital  
5 program.

6       Additionally, the Link NYC franchise includes a  
7 requirement for our franchisee, City Bridge to  
8 provide high-speed internet to a facility in each  
9 borough that offers technology training or other  
10 vital community service to the public. Such  
11 facilities are called Gigabit Innovation Centers, and  
12 they are powered by the Link NYC network.

13       In the past year, City Bridge and OTI have  
14 celebrated the opening of three new gigabit centers.  
15 In Manhattan we partnered with silicon Harlem and the  
16 See Better Foundation to open the Innovation Space  
17 For People gigabit Center. In the Bronx. The  
18 Gigabit Center is located at the Andrew Friedman  
19 Home, in partnership with The Knowledge House and the  
20 Bronx Community Foundation. In Queens, The Gigabit  
21 Center is located at the Allen Senior Center in  
22 partnership with NYC Aging, supporting workshops and  
23 courses on topics such as wealth and resource  
24 management, beginning and intermediate computer

2 technology, driver safety, hearing deficiency and  
3 hearing aids, and memory improvement workshops.

4 We expect to unveil two more Gigabit Centers this  
5 year in Brooklyn and Staten Island.

6 With respect to the older adult population, OTI  
7 recognizes that older adults need particular support  
8 to engage with the benefits of digital life. We  
9 believe that digital literacy programming when paired  
10 with devices and access, combat social isolation and  
11 mobility barriers, provide basic skills for staying  
12 safe online, and helps maintain civic engagement. As  
13 previously mentioned, through Connected Communities,  
14 OTI provides a role as facilitator, connector,  
15 convener, and advisor where collaboration will extend  
16 the impact of digital literacies. Recent examples of  
17 our work with NYC Aging to this end include  
18 facilitating connections with libraries, and  
19 strategies for enrollment in the affordable ACP  
20 program, and collaboration with the San Francisco  
21 Tech Council to discuss digital equity gaps and  
22 barriers for older adults, and implications for  
23 access, affordability and adoption.

24 I will now turn to the legislation being  
25 considered today. Intro 665 sponsored by Chair

2 Gutiérrez would require OTI in consultation with NYC  
3 Aging and relevant stakeholders to establish and  
4 implement an online digital literacy program to serve  
5 older adults. As I have hopefully laid out earlier  
6 in testimony, digital literacy, particularly for  
7 older adults, is something we support and aim to  
8 continue supporting in the future. We understand  
9 that the Council deeply cares about this kind of  
10 programming, and hopes will not only continue in its  
11 current form, but will also flourish and become more  
12 effective for seniors. We are completely aligned  
13 with that sentiment.

14       However, the bill is, as it is currently written  
15 prescribes a role for OTI to more directly administer  
16 digital literacy training for seniors in a singular  
17 program with broadly-defined parameters. As  
18 mentioned, the city has a robust ecosystem of  
19 existing digital literacy providers, and OTI's best  
20 function is to leverage digital literacy  
21 practitioners and expertise rather than either staff  
22 these programs with in-house personnel or set  
23 limitations on the curriculum practiced by the city's  
24 partners. We worry that this bill could  
25 inadvertently compromise the incredible work already

2 underway. We're looking forward to discussing with  
3 you how the City, the Council and the numerous  
4 organizations with whom we collaborate, can best  
5 deliver digital literacy training in the future. I  
6 will now turn to my colleagues to Department of  
7 Citywide Administrative Services to provide their  
8 testimony.

9 MR. GOFMAN: Thank you. Good morning Chair  
10 Gutiérrez and members of the Committee on Technology.  
11 I am Roman Gofman, Acting Deputy Commissioner of  
12 Citywide Procurement at the Department of Citywide  
13 Administrative Services. Thank you for your interest  
14 in our agency as we strive to make city government  
15 work for all New Yorkers. I'm pleased to have this  
16 moment to testify on Introduction 664, which seeks to  
17 require DCAS to donate surplus city-owned computers,  
18 computer software, and computer equipment. We  
19 continue to review this legislation, are in support  
20 of the spirit of the bill, and its intent to  
21 facilitate access to technology. Introduction 664  
22 does raise questions regarding how a permanent  
23 donation program might operate, and how outside  
24 parties might engage this program. We look forward  
25 to working with the Council and our partners in

2 government to ensure a donation program that is user  
3 friendly, straightforward, and allows interested  
4 parties with equal access to surplus city-owned  
5 property. Thank you for your time today. I'm happy  
6 to answer any questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much for  
8 your testimonies.

9 My first question is for OTI. Thank you so much  
10 for your-- your testimony and kind of outlining some  
11 of the existing the existing literacy program. Is  
12 there anything else that OTI can share, any other  
13 efforts ongoing or upcoming that aim to increase  
14 older adult access to technology and digital literacy  
15 through your agency?

16 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, so thank you for the question  
17 Chair. We are obviously wholly committed to  
18 continuing the Connected Communities Program, which  
19 for many years has served the community very well,  
20 both in the older adult, the younger population. I  
21 think we would like to continue to expand the program  
22 where possible to fill in that gap in the middle,  
23 where citizens may not be covered if they're not in  
24 those two cohorts. And we're continuing to look at  
25 ways to provide that targeted programming where it's

2 possible. But we continue to rely on our partners  
3 who have again served the city very, very well over  
4 the years, who have the expertise in this area, and  
5 where they come to us and say they have additional  
6 need for either funding or want to borrow our  
7 expertise in the area of connecting with certain  
8 partners. Of course, we meet with them all the time  
9 and will continue to do so.

10 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Can you confirm if the  
11 The Gigabit Centers that are, you know, funded and  
12 facilitated by Link NYC, if that's correct: Is the  
13 programming that they do, is any of it catered  
14 specifically to the senior population? Or what does,  
15 if you can kind of give us a layer of what that  
16 programming looks like?

17 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, thanks. For sure. It's--  
18 yeah, two of the three centers are located in older  
19 adult facilities. Thanks to Andrew Freeman and I  
20 forget the other one, but-- but yes, they're--  
21 they're already in existing older adult facilities.  
22 And then this program just supplements all the  
23 existing services they have in place, provides  
24 additional broadband infrastructure, they provide new

2 devices, but it's essentially powered by the Link NYC  
3 franchise in every sense of that word.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm sorry. Can you say  
5 that last one--?

6 MR. SIKOFF: It is powered by the Link NYC  
7 franchise in terms of the broadband infrastructure  
8 that's in place there, the fiber and the facilities,  
9 but it already served older adults, and we just  
10 amplified the services.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And does Link NYC do the  
12 programming? Or are they partnering with  
13 organizations, libraries to do that programming?

14 MR. SIKOFF: I believe they are partnering with  
15 the existing programming that's in place with the  
16 directors of those facilities. Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

18 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I will also add, Councilmember  
19 that the-- the latest one that launched last month  
20 was in the Allen Seniors Living Facility in Queens.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Okay. Um, I have  
22 a question regarding our city's shelters. Some of  
23 the testimony that we had from the commissioner last-  
24 - last month, I think, at the end of December-- was  
25 confirming that almost all shelters are connected

2 to the internet, if not all. Do you have a sense of  
3 how many of them are equipped with computers, other  
4 devices? And do you have a sense if their clients  
5 are also-- also have access to those devices?

6 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, so my understanding is the--  
7 during the pandemic, obviously, a priority was to, to  
8 provide service to family shelters for the kids in  
9 need, and family members in general. And there are  
10 over 200 shelters that have connectivity today. And  
11 as new shelters come online, we work with the  
12 providers to build out the connectivity. But in  
13 terms of devices and other programming for digital  
14 literacy, I don't know that the Shelter Wi-Fi  
15 program, as currently constituted, offers that, but  
16 we, you know, if there's a there's a need for  
17 devices, obviously, our agency partners will let us  
18 know. And we'll see if there's anything we can do to  
19 accommodate.

20 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. So from your  
21 testimony, the-- the pushback that I'm getting on  
22 this bill is that you believe, you know, you're not  
23 the programming experts, and that these-- there are  
24 programs that already exist. Do you all have any

2 other concerns about this bill, perhaps budget  
3 related, that you have reservations about?

4 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, I think, you know, again,  
5 given the longevity of this program, and the success  
6 that we've realized and have seen over the years, the  
7 concern is if the city has to-- would be required to  
8 take a more proactive role in providing and  
9 administering the programs, we could be essentially  
10 competing for the same amount-- pot of funding that  
11 goes to these partners already who rely on this to  
12 support the programs that are in place. So they have  
13 the expertise. They have the the-- the  
14 constituencies, they're there, they are the  
15 constituencies that they know best, and they know how  
16 to target them. So I think if we were to provide  
17 something that's different or supplements it in some  
18 way, it could ultimately be a net negative and take  
19 away some of the great work they're doing and the  
20 money that goes to them.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So the concerns that you  
22 have are -- if I'm synthesizing this correctly -- is  
23 just about over overstepping, I guess some of the  
24 existing work that some of these nonprofits are  
25 already doing. You don't see it as a broader support

2 role. You don't see it as maybe even necessary. I  
3 think what one of these bills wants to accomplish is  
4 to be able to donate these devices. I think OTI  
5 plays a really big role in claiming these devices and  
6 making sure that once they're received, they are--  
7 they are safe, right, for the previous and the new  
8 owners. Do you not believe that OTI can play a  
9 significant role in that partnership, in overseeing  
10 that partnership?

11 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah. Thanks, Chair for that  
12 question. So I think in terms of the devices versus  
13 the programming, I think those are two, maybe  
14 different subjects. Certainly with the with the  
15 programming, we do feel like the partners who have  
16 been in place for many years and have been providing  
17 the program have been really doing a great job. And  
18 we'd like to supplement it wherever we can. With  
19 respect to the devices and, you know, we can  
20 certainly look at to see where there's potentially  
21 available devices that can be doled out to the  
22 centers or to the, to the institutions that are  
23 administering the programs to support the literacy  
24 programming that they have in place. So we can  
25 certainly look at that.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I want to just  
3 switch over to Intro 664, which is about the devices.  
4 So this will go for-- to both. For OTI, if-- or  
5 unless it's-- I think it's OTI, but could you walk me  
6 through the device sanitization process?

7 MR. GOFMAN: For DCAS model -- I'll let OTI speak  
8 if they have anything to add -- so for DCAS's part,  
9 where we receive surplus equipment, it's done by the  
10 partner agencies that have the equipment that are no  
11 longer in use or end of life or have no value. Those  
12 IT departments would have to clear the devices before  
13 it comes to us. So it's typically, they just wipe  
14 out the entire hard drive before it comes to us.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: The agent-- whatever  
16 agency it is.

17 MR. GOFMAN: Whatever agencies have the equipment  
18 in their inventory, yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And they're  
20 capable of doing that. In no instance, do they reach  
21 out to OTI for assistance with wiping out those  
22 devices?

23 MR. GOFMAN: Not that I know of, no.

24 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is it something they can  
25 do? Or just that-- just they don't do?

2 MR. SIKOFF: That DCAS can do?

3 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: That the agency, whatever  
4 agency it is that, you know, in surplus of said  
5 equipment, let's say they've tried to wipe it out,  
6 they run into some issue. Do they ever reach out to  
7 OTI? Or it's something that internally they figure  
8 out?

9 MR. SIKOFF: I'm not aware of any issues that  
10 have been-- that they've run into in that regard,  
11 but, yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And then-- Roman, right?  
13 Thank you. Do you have an approximate number of  
14 equipment that in a year or even in the last year  
15 was-- was donated or brought to DCAS because of no  
16 use?

17 MR. GOFMAN: So I could, after this hearing,  
18 follow back up with the actual documentation of what  
19 equipment, the quantities. The only thing I know,  
20 offhand, is the value of revenue that we receive for  
21 auctioning those equipment. It was about 36,000 for  
22 fiscal year 22. But we could share an entire list of  
23 what agencies submitted it, and what the equipment  
24 was.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And is this something  
3 that happens during a particular time of the year, or  
4 just rolling basis, these agencies are reaching out  
5 to DCAS, and like, "We've got all this stuff."

6 MR. GOFMAN: It's just a rolling basis. Once an  
7 agency either switches out equipment or decides the  
8 equipment's not-- no longer functioning, and they  
9 want to either salvage it, auction it off, or give it  
10 to surplus, they'll reach out to us at that time.  
11 There's no timeline.

12 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Can you describe what's--  
13 what kind of equipment are folks giving, or donating  
14 or giving back to DCAS.

15 MR. GOFMAN: Typically, we see a lot of older  
16 screen monitors, some older printers, maybe computers  
17 and some laptops. But we can provide a full list of  
18 what--

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Are there also stuff like  
20 keyboards and just smaller things, things of that  
21 NYCHA that you're also receiving?

22 MR. GOFMAN: Um, there might be. Typically those  
23 keyboards are reusable unless they're, they're  
24 broken, and then they get destroyed. It's more of

2 like, equipment that has a tendency to have end of  
3 life that are no longer working for the agency.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. And once you  
5 receive these devices, is there any secondary  
6 sanitisation that DCAS does on these-- this  
7 equipment?

8 MR. GOFMAN: So we do review to see that-- if  
9 it's a computer or a laptop, if the item has been  
10 reset, and there's no personal information on it.  
11 That's as far as it typically goes.

12 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And then what--  
13 what happens typically after-- or how long are you  
14 all in possession of it before you determine-- before  
15 you determine what the next step is?

16 MR. GOFMAN: So our typical steps in any surplus,  
17 whether it's IT equipment or anything else is: Once  
18 we receive it from an agency, we do internal requests  
19 for city agency transfer. So we put it out for about  
20 seven days to all other city agencies to see if they  
21 may have use for it first. If nobody claims it from  
22 another city agency, we then put it on our public  
23 group auction site and we auction it off. If there  
24 is no value, or something is damaged, and nobody bids  
25 on it through the auction site even to use as scrap

2 metal or other necessities, we issue a destroy order  
3 back to the agency for them to use e-waste. It's a  
4 DSNY contract for IT equipment

5 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And you don't-- do you  
6 have a sense of what those percentages are, how many  
7 you're able to utilize an auction off, versus how  
8 much gets sent to E waste?

9 MR. GOFMAN: Not offhand but I believe we can  
10 provide that information.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And then \$36,000  
12 value that you referenced earlier. That is  
13 particular to the usable items that you'd be  
14 auctioning? Or everything?

15 MR. GOFMAN: So it's everything. So we-- we  
16 auction off items sometimes that are not usable  
17 either. And, you know, there's companies that might  
18 use it for parts that buy it at low values, or they  
19 use for scrap metal, and other instances. We don't  
20 really-- we don't review if it's usable at that time.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: [To others:] Do you want  
22 to ask that? [To Mr. Gofman] What is-- can you share  
23 what happens with this money after this auction?

24 MR. GOFMAN: It goes to the city's general fund.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It goes to the city's  
3 general fund. Okay. Do you have a sense of what  
4 that looks-- I mean, does-- it changes year-to-year?  
5 Do you have a sense of what that looks like?

6 MR. GOFMAN: The total value of all our surplus?

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah.

8 MR. GOFMAN: We could send you the information  
9 for the previous fiscal year.

10 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And, is this auction like  
11 once a year? How often?

12 MR. GOFMAN: This auction is continuous.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm very interested in  
14 this auction.

15 MR. GOFMAN: It's like eBay for the city.

16 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Goodness. Okay. Um, my-  
17 - I have a couple more questions to do, but before I  
18 go on, do-- Councilmembers, do you all have any  
19 questions? Okay. All right. Let me let me just get  
20 through two more, and then I'll pass it off.

21 Okay. Do you all keep any documentation of the  
22 stuff that you-- that you take, in the devices that  
23 you've taken from these agencies?

24 MR. GOFMAN: Uh, yeah. So we-- the documentation  
25 is typically saved on our auction website and local

2 group, so every agency has dedicated salvage officer  
3 that notifies DCAS through this online platform of an  
4 item that they want to sell or dispose of. And all  
5 the documentation is saved on there.

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do you know of any other  
7 municipalities that obviously also take in a big  
8 amount of surplus items, and like what-- what they do  
9 with those items?

10 MR. GOFMAN: I believe, from municipalities that  
11 I've spoken to, everybody has this type of surplus  
12 auctions.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It's strictly an auction.

14 MR. GOFMAN: Yes, it's strictly an auction.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And can you share how  
16 large is the team? Or how many folks are the ones  
17 responsible for receiving this equipment? And then  
18 like double-checking that it's all-- all the  
19 information has been removed?

20 MR. GOFMAN: At DCAS currently, I believe we have  
21 three staffers on hand. I think that's for DCAS.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And is there any-- are  
23 there any agencies or any agency that I guess has  
24 more of these devices? Is there any-- anything that  
25 you can share about the agencies that are--?

2 MR. GOFMAN: Well, we don't have insight into  
3 agencies inventories. We only get notified once they  
4 specify that something is ready for surplus.

5 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. So part of the  
6 Bill 664 requires that the DCAS Commissioner kind of  
7 put together a process for which they will donate  
8 these equipment, right?, these devices. Have you, as  
9 as the deputy, have you all-- have you considered--  
10 maybe, I know that part of your testimony says, you  
11 know, you want to keep engaging, which I appreciate.  
12 But have you considered what some of those  
13 guardrails, or some of those rules will look like to  
14 determine the eligibility of an organization to  
15 receive that device?

16 MR. GOFMAN: I think we're still discussing it  
17 internally and would like to really review this  
18 internally in our agencies as well, with partner  
19 agencies and actually receive comments from the  
20 Council once we come up with our comments on the  
21 Bill. And we would work together to try to figure  
22 out a program that works for everybody.

23 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Right.

24 MR. GOFMAN: Both the City and the residents of  
25 the city.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. I think, for  
3 anyone that's ever like worked at a nonprofit or  
4 worked alongside a nonprofit, the reality is that you  
5 know, and you know this, tech does not have a long  
6 lifeline. And oftentimes, we get contacted by  
7 nonprofits who need assistance with something as  
8 small as one computer. As Councilmembers, that's not  
9 eligible, right? It's not something we cannot donate  
10 one computer and capital. So a program like this in  
11 a bill like this would really help support, whether  
12 it's those nonprofits that are looking to upgrade or  
13 a lot of our nonprofits are starting to branch out  
14 and do work outside of their headquarters of their  
15 offices in the district. And having this support and  
16 knowing that this safety net exists, I think is  
17 really vital to the continued work that they're  
18 doing. So I am eager to continue working with you  
19 all to see what is the best way, because I do believe  
20 the need is there, and what is the best way to create  
21 those parameters and ensuring that these nonprofits  
22 that need it are connected to it. I'm going to have-  
23 - I'm going to pass it to Councilmember Palladino for  
24 questions, and then Councilmember Abreu. You okay?  
25 Okay. Councilmember Palladino.

2 COUNCILMEMBER PALLADINO: Good morning, and thank  
3 you. I have a question. Where do most of these  
4 devices come from? When you say municipalities,  
5 where do you get these devices?

6 MR. GOFMAN: So we only overseas surplus for New  
7 York City municipality, mayoral agencies. So just  
8 the agencies--

9 COUNCILMEMBER PALLADINO: What happens to -- I  
10 don't mean to interrupt -- our schools? They use  
11 things and then they're put in a school basement.  
12 And a lot of this stuff is still very useful, and in  
13 some-- some cases fairly new. They're just somewhat  
14 outdated. Does the city have access to reusing what  
15 has been placed in a school basement or a warehouse,  
16 so that we could better serve our senior citizens?

17 MR. GOFMAN: I'll circle back to see if we have  
18 access to Department of Education's inventory, and if  
19 they use-- utilize their own surplus agreement, or  
20 they piggyback off of ours. But I'll give you that  
21 answer afterwards.

22 COUNCILMEMBER PALLADINO: Yes, because we are  
23 constantly doing with our discretionary funding,  
24 upgrading technologies in a lot of our schools. So  
25 when I go to visit my schools, I often ask, "You

2 know, your smart board works fine. What's the issue  
3 here?" That we have to give another 100,000 to a  
4 school for technology upgrades. But my concern lies  
5 with: What do we what do you do with that equipment  
6 that is perfectly good, that is being no longer used,  
7 whether it be laptops, whether it be, he comes the  
8 boomer in me, the iPads, because I'm a senior, and I  
9 deal a lot with senior citizens, and a lot of our  
10 smaller places for the seniors to go every day, the  
11 senior centers, they don't-- they need classes. And  
12 I know we're concentrating a great deal on NYCHA, and  
13 that's fine. However, we need-- our senior centers  
14 need classes. So with these outdated, somewhat  
15 outdated, but to the seniors fairly new, what can we  
16 do to help our senior centers get more of these  
17 devices?

18 MR. GOFMAN: I'll follow up on the DOE  
19 specifically, but talking on other agencies that have  
20 surplus equipment. Like I said, before, we're in  
21 support of this bill, we just want to make sure that  
22 it works for everybody. I just want to just mention  
23 just items that are unused, compared to surplus.  
24 It's-- have different meanings, right? So DCAS  
25 specifically doesn't direct agencies, when or what

2 they need to give up to our office of surplus  
3 activity. Their agencies have to come to us saying,  
4 "Hey, we're no longer using these items." Either  
5 they're not working, there's no life left in them,  
6 there's no value left in them. And that's when we  
7 take over, take over the equipment and either  
8 transfer it to other agencies if somebody else wants  
9 them, or auction it off, or after the fact if this  
10 bill-- after this bill, we would work with you guys  
11 to figure out how to do a donation program. But we  
12 wouldn't just say-- you know, we wouldn't have the  
13 ability to go to agencies and see just what products  
14 are unused and take them over and say you should  
15 donate these. Each agency would have to specify the  
16 equipment themselves.

17 COUNCILMEMBER PALLADINO: Okay, I think that just  
18 about covers it for me. Like I said, I'm more  
19 concerned with what happens to the Board of Ed,  
20 Department of Ed, their-- their equipment and where  
21 it goes. Because that's something that I think  
22 really can be used. Even in schools that don't have  
23 the smart boards are huge. They constantly changing  
24 them out. And I want to see these things recycled  
25 and used because they're perfectly good. And they're

2 in the basement. So okay, that's where my questions  
3 lie. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And did you-- Roman, did  
5 you make the distinction between surplus items that  
6 you're receiving versus like unused or...?

7 MR. GOFMAN: So the agencies make the-- this  
8 initial distinction of surplus, right? That they're  
9 no longer using it. They want to transfer it out.  
10 Even if an agency would say there's no life left and  
11 we want to destroy it, we don't allow them to destroy  
12 it unless at least we attempt to auction it off.  
13 Sometimes we do multiple attempts to auction it off  
14 just in case somebody didn't see it. We wouldn't  
15 issue a destroy order before that. So we-- we don't  
16 make the distinction of what's unusable. The market  
17 does. All right.

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. Next, we're going  
19 to have Councilmember Abreu.

20 COUNCILMEMBER ABREU: Thank you, Chair. This  
21 question is for OTI. In your testimony, you  
22 delineate some concerns that you have on 665. I  
23 understand that 664, there's at least some support  
24 here. Can we count on the Administration's support  
25

2 on getting to a final bill that works for both  
3 parties?

4 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, of course. Thank you,  
5 Councilmember for that. You know, happy to sit down  
6 with the Council at any time to talk about the  
7 programming that's in place, what we're doing to  
8 support it, to fund it, and look at potential  
9 expansion opportunities or alternative programs. But  
10 absolutely, we're always happy to sit down.

11 COUNCILMEMBER ABREU: Thank you.

12 MR. SIKOFF: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember  
14 Abreu. So I'd just like to acknowledge Councilmember  
15 Won has joined us. Next we have Councilmember Holden  
16 via zoom with a question.

17 COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank you,  
18 Chair. Do you hear me?

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, sir.

20 COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, well, I think both  
21 bills are very, very good. And as a Councilmember  
22 that's been funding OATS for-- since I've been in the  
23 Council, I think that's one of the most successful  
24 programs. Certainly, the problems we had, though,  
25 with it with our seniors is when the senior centers

2 were closed. And that, you know, that presented the  
3 problem. But I would go to the graduation classes  
4 for the older adults who, you know, took iPad classes  
5 or computer classes, and they actually had a  
6 graduation, which was great, and a certificate, and  
7 they just felt that it opened up a whole new world  
8 for them, and it's money well spent. So anything we  
9 can do to expand that. Because in my district, I  
10 don't have NYCHA housing, so I rely on the senior  
11 centers where they can get-- and certainly libraries  
12 with-- with the cutbacks and the open hours, we had a  
13 very, very limited, again, exposure to technology for  
14 older adults.

15 So what are we doing with our with the DOE? Is  
16 the city doing anything with training seniors in the  
17 schools, for technology?

18 MR. SIKOFF: Thank you, Councilmember Holden, I'm  
19 not aware of anything specifically related to DOE and  
20 related to our connected community--

21 COUNCILMEMBER HOLDEN: Bingo. So that's where  
22 you guys-- again, that that could be a program. We  
23 have classrooms. We have-- everything is set up. We  
24 have the technology in the classrooms. So there  
25 should be an older adult program set up. And again,

2 it could be from your office, it could, you know, you  
3 could facilitate it. But here-- here's two bills  
4 that aim to address technology with older adults,  
5 which as we all know, is sorely lacking. They need  
6 the help. And without technology, nowadays, the  
7 person is at a disadvantage.

8       So here we have schools. We have technology in  
9 the schools. And we have the classrooms in the  
10 schools, obviously, that we could open up. And these  
11 two bills aim to address some of that. By the way,  
12 on the equipment, I think most of us fund the  
13 Technology Recycling Program, and it's amazing what  
14 is thrown out. You know, perfectly good iPads.  
15 People upgrade, and this stuff is-- goes to landfill,  
16 or it does get recycled. But-- but there is a  
17 greater need that the city can facilitate, I think  
18 through these-- through both bills. So I think that  
19 there's a0-- there's something, there's a void here.  
20 And we have to put our heads together, both of the  
21 Council and the administration to try to fill this.  
22 So I would support both bills. And I think the  
23 administration should also. Thank you.

24       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember  
25 Holden. And thank you for your-- sharing your

2 experience in districts especially that don't have  
3 NYCHA. Because even in those programs that are  
4 operating in NYCHA, I don't-- you know, I always  
5 think that there's more reason to continue to invest  
6 and expand, and there's no reason why we can't  
7 utilize our school buildings, which is why Community  
8 Schools are so important.

9 I have a couple of questions regarding the-- the  
10 programs that you detailed in your opening statement.

11 So obviously, we're I think a lot of us at the  
12 Council were very supportive of-- of supporting these  
13 programs that are in our libraries, right? They're  
14 hubs. They're community facilities in districts  
15 where there are no community centers, or NYCHA, or no  
16 senior centers, libraries are that home. But I'm  
17 deeply concerned about the proposed cuts to  
18 libraries. We're hearing from the Queens Public  
19 Library, the Brooklyn Library, the New York library  
20 about how they're fearing having to go back to a time  
21 where the libraries are closed on Sundays, having to  
22 roll back a lot of these programs that you yourself  
23 admit are crucial. So I hear what you're saying,  
24 where the idea is that these-- these partners are  
25 experts, but we can't-- we can't elevate them while

2 at the same time saying we're likely going to cut  
3 your budget, and we need to have a safety net. So  
4 can you speak to those proposed cuts and where you  
5 are all seeing kind of how those cuts are going to  
6 impact senior programming, ESL classes, computer  
7 programs?

8 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Yeah, Councilmember, thank you  
9 for that question. And we-- I mean, we completely  
10 agree, and I think our testimony makes it clear that  
11 we feel very strongly about those programs and  
12 libraries playing a critical role in the communities  
13 they serve, and the success of the programs to date.  
14 Unfortunately, Brett and I have not been in higher-  
15 level conversations between the Administration and  
16 OMB about Have a proposed budget. So we can't speak  
17 to any of the proposed budgets here. But-- but I  
18 think we've made it clear that we are, are in  
19 complete support of, of these programs.

20 MR. SIKOFF: If I may add, in terms of the  
21 Connected Communities program, that is fully funded  
22 for the next three years. So the-- the digital  
23 literacy side of it -- you know, setting aside the  
24 broader budget for the libraries, which I can't speak

2 to -- that is fully funded. So that's going to  
3 continue through 2025.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Which program is that?  
5 I'm sorry.

6 MR. SIKOFF: So that's Connected Communities,  
7 which is the OTI, what we oversee for our partner  
8 agencies like-- like the libraries, like parks, and  
9 NYC Aging, so that that is in place, and that-- you  
10 know, we're good there.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You feel confident?

12 MR. SIKOFF: I do. I do.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Just, because there's--  
14 there have been some budgets that have been approved,  
15 for example, between last administration and this  
16 administration that had locked in funding between FY  
17 22 to 26. And that's not the case that we're looking  
18 at for FY 24. So that's why I'm asking if you can  
19 confirm that that money will be there, and not-- not  
20 be sacrificed.

21 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, that's certainly the  
22 expectation. It has been funded for over 10 years.  
23 And we are going to continue that.

24 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. I wanted to -  
25 - sorry, just give me one second -- I wanted to ask

2 about the connected NYCHA program. So hopefully OTI  
3 can-- can speak to-- a little bit about that. That's  
4 the program that started during the pandemic, you  
5 talked about it in your in your opening testimony.  
6 So I'm just curious. In 2021, the City announced a  
7 year extension of free internet service for those  
8 10,000 tablets distributed to older adults in NYCHA  
9 during the pandemic in 2020. Can you share what the  
10 current status is of this original connected NYCHA  
11 program that was started in 2020?

12 MR. SIKOFF: Sure. Thanks, Chair. So the 10,000  
13 tablets with connected service that was provided to  
14 NYCHA seniors. Many of them are still active,  
15 meaning the devices are still in service. I think we  
16 get reports every now and then where I think there's  
17 about half or so that are still active, and the  
18 service is still being provided. That said, we are  
19 looking to see if we can get all those NYCHA seniors  
20 who are in developments that are served by Big Apple  
21 Connect, which has a much higher bandwidth and can  
22 get better service to them, to make sure that those  
23 older adults are aware of Big Apple Connect and are  
24 going to engage with us and sign up where possible.  
25 So that eventually at some point, that service may

2 end. I believe, at this point, it's month to month.  
3 But as a long-term strategy, Big Apple Connect will  
4 be-- will certainly better serve those older adults.

5       So as we go into NYCHA facilities and try to sign  
6 people up for Big Apple Connect many-- just  
7 anecdotally, many older adults will say, "What for?  
8 What do I need it for?" And that goes to-- that  
9 speaks to the additional literacy training that they  
10 need, so that they can be-- they can participate in  
11 the digital world that we live in, they can be safe  
12 online and effectively use it to communicate with  
13 relatives, or do banking, or purchase, telehealth,  
14 anything that you know, they want. They're just not  
15 aware of how they can utilize Big Apple Connect. So  
16 that's going to be something that we focus on in the  
17 in the coming year, targeting those NYCHA seniors who  
18 have access to Big Apple Connect, getting them  
19 connected, and if there's other programs that can be  
20 offloaded, we're going to seek to do that as well.

21       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So between 2021, which is  
22 I believe, like when the program-- the original  
23 timeline was for, and today, there are seniors that  
24 may or may not still have these devices, but are  
25 maybe not connected, right?, especially for those

2 that are not in a Big Apple Connect development. Is  
3 that the-- is that-- is that the case?

4 MR. SIKOFF: That-- I'm sorry, ask the question  
5 again.

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Of seniors that are-- of  
7 the original 10,000, can you confirm that 10,000  
8 tablets were actually distributed? Do you have a  
9 sense of that?

10 MR. SIKOFF: I believe they were.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: They were. And you said  
12 about half are still being utilized.

13 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But those that are being  
15 utilized, those seniors, or those recipients are  
16 paying for an internet service, right?

17 MR. SIKOFF: They're not.

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: They are not. Okay.

19 MR. SIKOFF: They have not paid a dime to it.

20 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So the city also  
21 extended, not just the tablet use, but the  
22 connectivity.

23 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah. At this point, it's month to  
24 month. But, yeah, the older adults who have those  
25 tablets and the service have not paid a dime.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And just to  
3 confirm that I heard correctly, the goal is for those  
4 seniors with devices that are in a Big Apple Connect  
5 designated development, is just to connect them with  
6 Big Apple Connect to the city. And is the city  
7 paying for that connectivity month-to-month for those  
8 seniors that are not connected with Big Apple  
9 Connect?

10 MR. SIKOFF: I'd have to check the records to see  
11 what we're being billed for. If it's devices that  
12 are not active. I don't believe we're getting  
13 billed, but I will have to go back and check.

14 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Because the city was  
15 paying for that connectivity for that year during the  
16 pandemic, and I'm assuming also continued to pay  
17 during the extension. So if you could give us a  
18 sense of how many of those devices are active that  
19 the city is paying for.

20 MR. SIKOFF: Sure. Absolutely.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And then to the best of  
22 your knowledge, is OATS still providing that  
23 technological training and assistance to older adults  
24 in those NYCHA buildings?

25 MR. SIKOFF: I believe they are. Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: They are. Okay.

3 Okay. And then could you confirm about-- of the  
4 tablets or devices that are still in use today?

5 MR. SIKOFF: With respect to the NYCHA? Or the--

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah. With respect to  
7 the connected NYCHA program?

8 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, we'll look into that. That's  
9 part of like, identifying how many tablets are still  
10 in service and still active.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And just so you can  
12 educate me, was the idea that they would keep these  
13 devices in perpetuity?

14 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Great. Okay. Do seniors  
16 know what to do with them once they don't want them  
17 anymore? Ergo, this bill, my friend. I think it's a  
18 good opportunity. I'd hate for 10,000 devices to be  
19 tossed out on the street or in these developments.

20 Do you all-- does OTI-- for those tablets-- I'm  
21 still on the connected NYCHA program-- does OTI-- I  
22 think it was T Mobile, you said was the partner that--  
23 - and so to your knowledge, is T Mobile still the  
24 partner, even month to month?

25 MR. SIKOFF: Yes, it is.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Okay. So I have  
3 some questions about Big Apple Connect, which I know  
4 you're so enthused to talk about. So in September,  
5 we had a hearing about Big Apple Connect. It was, I  
6 think, on the same day as the announcement. Can you  
7 give us an update on how Big Apple Connect is doing?  
8 I know you said earlier that the goal for this year  
9 is to just do more outreach to ensure that these  
10 tenants that are in these developments have access to  
11 it. So can you explain a little bit about what that  
12 looks like? And what is the goal? Like how can we  
13 get-- how can we meet that goal? How can we get  
14 these folks enrolled?

15 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for that.  
16 So Big Apple Connect launched last year, sought to  
17 provide connectivity to NYCHA households immediately.  
18 We went in there. Infrastructure was in place. We  
19 worked with the providers to quickly set up tabling  
20 events, get people signed up, thanks to Councillor  
21 Won as well, and seeing her there. And it was a  
22 super success. Having been at I think every  
23 development personally, and seeing the faces of  
24 people signing up hearing about the program,  
25 initially skeptical, hearing that it's legitimate and

2 that they're able to get installed the same day. We  
3 have installers right on site, you can clearly see  
4 the difference that was making in people's lives,  
5 once they understood that either they didn't have  
6 service or were reluctant to engage in service  
7 because they didn't know if they could afford the  
8 service every month. And know that that was going to  
9 be taken care of. So we're extraordinarily happy  
10 with that.

11 As we look to-- and to your question about where  
12 we are today, it's at 130 developments, currently  
13 touching about 90,000 households, just over 90,000  
14 households. Of those about 68,000 are enrolled in  
15 the program. So we're about 74% of who is eligible,  
16 who have signed up for the program. So that's really  
17 where we're going to-- over the next-- over this  
18 year, particularly as the weather improves, and we  
19 can do more on-site, open outdoor events and get  
20 people signed up. We're going to target those--  
21 those households, those individuals who have been  
22 either unaware of the program or reluctant to sign  
23 up, but do not have connectivity today to sign up and  
24 take advantage of the program.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Can you-- who-- who's  
3 eligible? I didn't realize that there was a  
4 distinction aside from like you living in the  
5 development. Who is...?

6 MR. SIKOFF: So everybody within an eligible  
7 development is eligible. When I say eligible, I  
8 mean, developments-- there are there are some NYCHA  
9 developments that are not yet in the program. And  
10 we're going to look to expand the-- the overall scope  
11 of the program. But if you live in one of--

12 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, I see. So of the  
13 developments--

14 MR. SIKOFF: -- the 130 developments, you are  
15 automatically eligible.

16 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. So about 74% of  
17 those residents are-- are connected.

18 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do you have a sense of  
20 those-- of that 74% that are eligible, how many of  
21 them are how many of those units are older adults?

22 MR. SIKOFF: We don't. But that's part of what  
23 we're looking to do as we-- as we analyze the those  
24 individuals who have not signed up yet, try to  
25 identify exactly why, whether they're older adults,

2 whether they're-- whatever demographic that they fall  
3 in, trying to target them and get them to sign up.  
4 So we're working very closely with the mayor's public  
5 engagement unit to try to identify validators,  
6 ambassadors, those who can target those-- those  
7 individuals in the community who have not yet signed  
8 up, try to find out why, and work with them to at  
9 least make them aware of the program, and engage  
10 them, and hopefully sign them up.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Something  
12 that we spend some time on at the September hearing  
13 was getting a sense of-- of the cost. And I know  
14 that it was a little bit of, you know, expectation,  
15 that there was a certain amount of that Big Apple  
16 Connect cost, and there was an expectation that in  
17 this future budget where we are now, we'd be able to  
18 we'd be able to support that. Can you share how much  
19 the agency has spent on Big Apple Connect to date and  
20 what the-- what the expectation is to continue to  
21 fund this so that it rolls out in the way that you  
22 have detailed.

23 MR. SIKOFF: Sure. And I may turn this over to  
24 Ryan, but I'll just say generally, I believe today  
25 our preliminary budget is being released. So I think

2 there may be some-- we may have to go back to our  
3 budget folks.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I can't wait till 12:30.

5 MR. SIKOFF: Yes. So we're probably going to  
6 have to go back to our budget folks to just identify  
7 what was in there, but I don't know if Ryan, you have  
8 any thoughts.

9 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. So do you  
10 have a sense of how much-- you don't know how much  
11 Big Apple Connect has cost to date, though?

12 MR. SIKOFF: I think we estimated what the cost  
13 was going to be and it was going to be, depending on  
14 the number of people who sign up and households who  
15 sign up that he was going to be in the 20 to \$30  
16 million range. But it's really dependent on the  
17 number of people who sign up but at this point,

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And is this is this 20 or  
19 \$30 million range per month?

20 MR. SIKOFF: No, no, no. It'd be per year.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: That's the cost for the  
22 year. Okay. So in January of 2020, the Internet  
23 Master Plan was announced. There was a cost of-- a  
24 capital cost of \$157 million towards this investment.  
25 It sounds to me that the agency has moved away from

2 the Internet Master Plan based on some stuff that I  
3 read in November. You can confirm if not. I know  
4 that the many times that we've asked OTI to come to  
5 these hearings, the feedback that-- that we got was  
6 that the Internet Master Plan was being assessed. It  
7 was being assessed in March and September. Can you  
8 share what the assessment has been looking like? Can  
9 you confirm if the agency is in fact moving away from  
10 a focus on the Internet Master Plan? And then can  
11 you share what's going to happen to that \$157 million  
12 capital allocation? If you've used any of that money  
13 for Big Apple Connect? If you can just confirm that?

14 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah.

15 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I can say that we've-- we've  
16 confirmed this, and in the media that we that we are  
17 moving away from the previous administration's  
18 Internet Master Plan. The immediate focus was-- was  
19 filling the immediate need to get folks, the most  
20 vulnerable communities in NYCHA, to get them  
21 connected as quickly as possible. That does not mean  
22 that there is not middle- and long-term planning  
23 happening at OTI. In October of last year now, we  
24 released OTI's strategic plan, which outlined our  
25 entire approach to-- to tech and our strategic

2 initiatives. There is a section on connectivity, in  
3 that, that lies-- that outlines some broad buckets of  
4 where we're trying to go to increase broadband access  
5 across the city. But in the coming year, we will--  
6 now that we are solving the immediate need of getting  
7 the most vulnerable communities access, we will start  
8 to outline some of those longer-term strategies, now  
9 that we've-- we've fixed-- we've fixed at least a  
10 portion of the population and getting them online.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But what--

12 MR. BIRCHMEIER: And on the on the money, we are  
13 still in conversations with OMB about the best use  
14 for that money. So we-- we can follow up with you.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But to your knowledge,  
16 Big Apple Connect, since it started, let's say like  
17 last-- last summer? 2022?

18 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You have not utilized  
20 that initial capital investment of 157 --

21 MR. BIRCHMEIER: That's correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: -- that was intended for  
23 the Internet Master Plan. So Ryan, so I understand  
24 you've confirmed that the Internet Master Plan is  
25 something that this agen-- this administration is not

2 interested in moving. But I'm disheartened because  
3 it wasn't just a-- like a plan that the previous  
4 administration put together. It was a plan that  
5 nonprofits and advocates have been putting together  
6 for decades, right? It was just something that the  
7 administration was able to package in a very nice  
8 PDF. But the intent and the mission is not this last  
9 administration, it's very much tied to New Yorkers'  
10 real needs. So while I understand that you all feel  
11 that the most vulnerable is, for example, those in in  
12 those NYCHA developments. I agree, I think the  
13 Internet Master Plan was an attempt, like most major  
14 cities, to look at this comprehensively, because  
15 NYCHA is not the only need. NYCHA is not the only  
16 pocket. We have families in project-based Section 8  
17 and voucher-based Section 8. Like, they're like,  
18 "What's good with my internet?" And that's real,  
19 that you all have to respond to.

20 So I'm curious kind of what the assessments that  
21 you all shared, what you were doing. What-- what  
22 came-- what's the conclusion that helped determine  
23 that this Internet Master Plan is not something that  
24 this administration is moving forward with?

2 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I think-- I'll turn it over to  
3 Brent, since he's the expert here, but I think I  
4 think we can all agree that there were a lot of  
5 components of the Internet Master Plan that were that  
6 were good. But-- but--

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: What were the ones that  
8 were not good. I just-- I just feel like we have not  
9 been a part of the conversation. I found about-- I  
10 found out about it in the press, which is not great  
11 as the Tech Chair of the City Council.

12 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Right.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So I just need to  
14 understand what was your rubric? What were you  
15 looking at that said this doesn't make sense. This  
16 is no good. And I also think that that a lot of  
17 these nonprofits that have been doing this advocacy  
18 for so long, I think they're owed an explanation too.  
19 This is more about them than it is about me. So I  
20 would love to understand where-- where were the  
21 deficiencies? Where were you all looking and saying  
22 like, "This doesn't work," because you have not been  
23 you have not been clear.

24 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Yeah. The resounding feedback  
25 that I got, frankly, is that it was going to take too

2 long to get folks connected. I think this was  
3 released, and then no contracts were signed, and then  
4 the pandemic hit, and then it was 18 months later and  
5 folks still hadn't been connected.

6 So this administration came in and said, "How do  
7 we fix this need right now?" Folks got sent home in  
8 the pandemic. Kids had to go to school online.  
9 People had to go to work online. People had to do  
10 Telehealth online, obviously. So it was about fixing  
11 that immediate need. But-- but I will, I will also  
12 say that the long-term, medium- and long-term  
13 planning has not has not stopped. And we are  
14 continuing to do that. And we're also working with  
15 some of the respondents to the initial Internet  
16 Master Plan. And Brett can talk a little bit about  
17 that, too.

18 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, of course. And we still  
19 strongly support expanding and diversifying the  
20 marketplace so that those community ISPs, many of  
21 whom are MWBs as well, that they get into the  
22 marketplace to ultimately bring down costs. So  
23 that's-- that obviously was a key component of the  
24 Master Plan that we were-- we are planning to  
25 continue, but just in a different form. As Ryan

2 mentioned, the duration, the length of the program  
3 as-- as it was described and articulated, was way  
4 beyond what this administration's focus was. We  
5 wanted to get people connected now. And obviously,  
6 we're looking in the near, intermediate, and long  
7 term as well. But all of our efforts were getting  
8 people connected now. We didn't want people to  
9 continue to suffer without connectivity, when we  
10 could very relatively easily provide them with that.

11 But we are looking at long term strategies. We  
12 are in conversations with many of the providers that  
13 involve the providers who were interested in  
14 participating in the-- in the former plan, in the  
15 plan as it was written to see where there's  
16 opportunities for them in this administration.

17 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So I hear that. I'm  
18 really eager to learn what some of those long term  
19 plans look like. Again, it's a little disheartening  
20 that this plan would have just been trashed or  
21 tabled. I get it for the purpose of efficacy. I  
22 think that with any plan, there's an opportunity to  
23 really prioritize, as opposed to just do away with  
24 something that I think it took a long time to put  
25 together. And I think really focused on diversity

2 and inclusivity in a way that, in the last year, we  
3 have not seen yet from this agency with specific to  
4 Big Apple Connect, right? So we have to confirm:  
5 It's the two-- three providers, I think? I don't  
6 know if Verizon has been folded in with Altice and  
7 Charter being providers. Has Verizon been folded  
8 into the conversation:

9 MR. SIKOFF: Not at this point.

10 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: No. But in September, I  
11 think that same day, we said-- I think you all had  
12 said that you had started conversations, but it has  
13 not been formalized.

14 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct. We're still in  
15 conversations with Verizon. But as of this point,  
16 it's just Altice and Charter.

17 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So you briefly touched on  
18 wanting to kind of fold in some of these MWBEs. What  
19 does that-- what does that look like? I-- you know,  
20 I'm working directly with a lot of these folks that  
21 had applied to the city's RFP, that got notice that  
22 they got awarded, and then got told they didn't. So  
23 what are the efforts that you are all making?  
24 Because it-- it doesn't look good, y'all, to put  
25 something out, to say you've been awarded, and then

2 say, "Just kidding, we're not moving forward," and  
3 then kind of give no recourse for how they can  
4 continue to do this work, that once again, they've  
5 already been doing in these communities.

6       So what-- what does that look like? Because I  
7 spoke to them on Friday, and they said they have not  
8 heard anything from OTI. The only-- the only  
9 communication they got was a notice from SBS late in  
10 the fall saying that their RFP had been-- their award  
11 had been rescinded. So what are you all doing to  
12 make this right?

13       MR. SIKOFF: Well, that's exactly what we're  
14 doing. We're looking to make it right. We're  
15 looking to work on a long-term plan that will include  
16 many if not all of those providers. So as it  
17 currently stands, they all-- the ones who  
18 participated in the program prior to the-- the RFP  
19 going out part of an RFEI, they do have  
20 infrastructure in place at certain NYCHA developments  
21 today, and they're providing their service and  
22 participating in the ACP program. So they're still  
23 there. And they're providing that. And we're  
24 looking at ways, like I said to--

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Those RFEI recipients  
3 that are still there. Is that who you're referring  
4 to?

5 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

7 MR. SIKOFF: Many of whom are those same-- in the  
8 same group.

9 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Also applied for RFP.

10 MR. SIKOFF: Yep.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Many of them got  
12 encouraged to apply to the RFP by the city. So can  
13 you all just also -- before I pass it off to  
14 Councilmember Won -- for the Altice and the charter  
15 at this point? Are they required? What is the  
16 requirement for them to do programming, right? We  
17 spent a good portion of this hearing, all being an  
18 agreement of how important programming is, of being  
19 an agreement of how important it is to continue to  
20 expand and invest and not slash these programs. So  
21 it is unclear to me if they are required to partner  
22 or provide a program. Can you share with us what  
23 that contract looks like? Or what that expectation  
24 is of them?

2 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah, thanks for that question,  
3 Chair. So for the most part, well, entirely the Big  
4 Apple Connect program is just about access, at this  
5 point, right? We have the great Connected  
6 Communities Program that's focused on the digital  
7 literacy and training and skills and upskilling. But  
8 you know, obviously there's a multi-faceted approach  
9 to digital equity in general. You have the access,  
10 you have devices, and you have the-- the training.  
11 Big Apple Connect is about access, and that's what  
12 they're laser focused on at this point.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So-- so no is your  
14 answer?

15 MR. SIKOFF: Correct. It's just about  
16 connectivity.

17 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So there-- okay. So  
18 okay, it's about connectivity. So that's, I think,  
19 problematic in and of itself. I don't know if  
20 there's a way, if you're all open to building a part  
21 of the contract, reflecting the fact that like,  
22 connect-- that programming use is just as important  
23 as connectivity, right? I think OATS has provided a  
24 ton of data in the work that they've already been  
25 doing through the NYCHA program to demonstrate, you

2 know, there's a portion of seniors that have these  
3 devices, but when they don't participate in the  
4 classes, when they don't participate in the workshop,  
5 they go unused. So-- so it's a it's a waste,  
6 essentially, and that's not what we want. So what  
7 can this administration, what can they do to enforce  
8 a system of, you know, mandating programming as well  
9 in these systems? I know-- you know, I think there's  
10 a lot being put on the Community Center, the social  
11 service provider, but they're not often digital  
12 literacy experts, right? So what is the  
13 administration doing in these Big Apple Connect  
14 elements to ensure that programming is-- is  
15 happening?

16 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah. So I just want to be clear,  
17 though, it really is two different functions, right?  
18 I mean, Big Apple Connect focused on access.  
19 Connected Communities focuses on training. And they  
20 work in harmony with one another. As it relates  
21 specifically to NYCHA, we are working with Altice and  
22 Charter, where there are older adult centers on NYCHA  
23 property campuses, within the developments. That we  
24 are working with those-- with the directors and the  
25 community groups that run those older adult centers,

2 to provide them with the connectivity so that they  
3 are already providing the services. They are already  
4 providing the facility and the devices. And we're  
5 working with Altice and Charter to wire those  
6 developments-- those community rooms where the older  
7 adults congregate.

8 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, I apologize.  
9 I would like to ask Councilmember Won to make her  
10 questions.

11 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Good morning. Thank you so  
12 much, Chair Gutiérrez. I have a few follow up  
13 questions -- good morning, it's good to see you all -  
14 - about Big Apple Connect.

15 So from my conversations with Verizon, they have  
16 expressed that the difference between being a service  
17 provider for just internet, like Spectrum and Altice,  
18 on being a cell service provider in addition to  
19 internet, and how there's also a difference in the  
20 regulations and the ways that they are held to a  
21 higher standard federally, and how they also are the  
22 only ones that are unionized, so their workers cost  
23 more.

24 So there seems to be a lot of variables that are  
25 holding up why Verizon isn't part of Big Apple

2 Connect. And I just wanted to understand what the  
3 latest negotiation has been, because it seems like  
4 both sides want to partner but there seems to be some  
5 sort of hold up.

6 MR. SIKOFF: Thank you, Councilmember Won, and  
7 thank you for your support with all-- with Big Apple  
8 Connect in particular. Because we are still in  
9 conversations with Verizon, I think-- I just want to  
10 be careful about the information we share at this  
11 point, because we want to move forward to the extent  
12 that we can.

13 But I would just say that our goal is to ensure  
14 that all of the developments that are included in the  
15 program are-- all the residents and that the  
16 households and people who are touched by it receive  
17 the same service, the same quality of service. And,  
18 and we don't differentiate between one provider and  
19 another in terms of, not just messaging which is  
20 probably the least important thing, but just we want  
21 people to have the same experience. We want them to  
22 have the same great experience that they're getting  
23 today. So that's obviously our goal in ensuring that  
24 whatever provider we partner with, comes to the table  
25 with.

2 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Because I just want to flag  
3 that this council class cares very deeply about union  
4 labor and making sure that we protect workers'  
5 rights. And we know that Spectrum has a history of  
6 union busting and to withhold this contract from  
7 Verizon, I think we need to understand the nuances of  
8 how much more the labor will cost because Verizon is  
9 unionized. So I want to make sure that that does  
10 move forward. And then I had a question: If you had  
11 a timeline for all of the rest of the NYCHAs that are  
12 still waiting to get connected through Big Apple  
13 Connect.

14 MR. SIKOFF: So we are-- we are planning to add  
15 additional developments this year. We committed to  
16 doing more in 2023.

17 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Good.

18 MR. SIKOFF: So we're looking at those  
19 developments to identify which ones are-- may already  
20 have a broadband provider in place so that we're not  
21 duplicating efforts. But essentially, we'll  
22 hopefully have something to announce fairly soon.

23 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay, thank you so much.

24 MR. SIKOFF: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember  
3 Won. So I just have a couple more questions. The  
4 original RFEI that-- my understanding is these ISPs,  
5 these smaller ISPs are still very much-- they are--  
6 they're functioning, right?, and that there isn't any  
7 overlap with Big Apple Connect in those developments  
8 where those recipients are working? That's correct,  
9 right?

10 MR. SIKOFF: I believe so. Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You believe so. Okay.  
12 Well, they told me on Friday, so. So my question is,  
13 and the reason that I keep bringing this up is  
14 because part of their contract is not only to provide  
15 internet service, but to also do programming. These  
16 are smaller nonprofits that are like-- that are doing  
17 it, right? And they have a lot less than an Altice  
18 and a Charter. So I'm just curious. I get that it's  
19 two separate things, but I'm just curious why we are  
20 not holding these huge, wealthy corporations to the  
21 same-- to the same standard that we are the smaller  
22 nonprofits, mostly led by women and people of color  
23 in these NYCHA developments. Why was the reaction--  
24 or why was the initial response to work with these  
25 big huge corporations that aren't necessarily-- were

2 not always traditionally in these developments,  
3 hadn't done the groundwork to connectivity. It could  
4 be why you're having such a challenge in connecting  
5 the remaining population in these Big Apple Connect  
6 developments. But why are they not being held to the  
7 same standard of programming and internet service as  
8 these nonprofits, the smaller nonprofits as  
9 designated in the RFEI, what-- why?

10 MR. SIKOFF: It's a great question,  
11 Councilmember. So, well, I'll call back to what I  
12 noted earlier about it. This was really focused on  
13 access. And we totally understand the concern about  
14 why not-- why not include other services other--  
15 other possible--

16 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But digital literacy is  
17 access. Do you understand? If you give my mother a  
18 tablet, who is 72 years old, she is going to make it  
19 a part of her decoration in her room and not utilize  
20 it unless you're telling her and teaching her how to  
21 utilize it. So access is, yes, connectivity and all  
22 the logistical circumstances, but it's also learning  
23 how to use that device. Without it, it is not  
24 access. So that is why I'm really disappointed that  
25 we're not there yet. And I hope that you can all

2 take this back, that I think it's crucial that the  
3 city continues to want to work with the Altices and  
4 the Charters of the world, that they'd be held to the  
5 same standard as some of these smaller nonprofits  
6 that are not making-- making at all the same amount  
7 that they are. But they're being held to a  
8 different-- their-- their protection is, like, well  
9 it's just about connectivity. Access is digital  
10 literacy. And I think it's really important that  
11 that you all drive-- help me drive this message that  
12 we can't just allow them to come into these  
13 communities and walk away and just be like, well,  
14 it's not up to us how they use it, because it really  
15 is. We are responsible. They are in contract with  
16 the city. That is our responsibility.

17 MR. SIKOFF: Totally understood, Councilmember.  
18 I just-- again, note that there are already really  
19 great programs in place at many of these NYCHA  
20 developments. I understood that, you know, your  
21 concern about Altice and Charter is not providing the  
22 training themselves, but where we can partner,  
23 providing the actual, you know, the connection within  
24 the apartment, and the programs that are available on  
25 site, many of which are just a few-- the next

2 building or in the basement of that building, where  
3 there is connectivity there, they have access to  
4 devices, they have their own Wi Fi hotspots, and they  
5 have digital literacy programs, like organized  
6 programs in place. We can certainly marry the two.  
7 And we will take back your sentiments.

8 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I had a conversation with  
9 Altice last week. Right? They are also-- they're  
10 not fully aware of kind of what the future in the  
11 next few years. So basically, they are aware of the  
12 developments that they're in now. That's kind of  
13 where they're at. They're unaware of my  
14 conversations with Commissioner Fraser. The goal is  
15 to continue to expand, potentially in year three  
16 even, even continue to work with those RAD  
17 development sites that are excluded from Big Apple  
18 Connect.

19 So it really means-- it sets a precedent, right?  
20 I don't believe that there's existing programs in  
21 every single NYCHA development. And so if the city  
22 is going into a contract, into a partnership with  
23 these big corporations, it's important that we set  
24 that tone now. We can't just rely on these programs  
25 that-- we'll learn in about an hour whether or not

2 they are going to be sacrificed, whether or not  
3 they're going to be cut. But these corporations have  
4 money, and there is no reason why we should not be  
5 holding them to that standard. I'm going to pass it  
6 to Councilmember Won.

7 COUNCILMEMBER WON: I just wanted to ask a  
8 clarifying question. For the Big Apple Connect that  
9 were contracted last year, I believe you said that  
10 that those are three-year contracts, correct?

11 MR. SIKOFF: That's correct.

12 COUNCILMEMBER WON: So for those that are being  
13 contracted in this year for 2023, are those three  
14 year contracts as well? Or will they be two years?

15 MR. SIKOFF: That's a really good question,  
16 Councilmember. I need to go back to the legal folks.  
17 I don't want to give you the wrong answer. So allow  
18 us to get back to you to see if it's three years from  
19 the date that those developments come on, or three  
20 years from when the contract was signed.

21 COUNCILMEMBER WON: And for those that are being  
22 contracted this year, do you have a percentage? So  
23 if you're saying that out of all of X number of NYCHA  
24 houses last year, you accomplish getting X percent  
25 onboarded this past year, is there a certain goal

2 that you have? A target of how many NYCHAS, and when  
3 the NYCHAS will all be on boarded by, including the  
4 RAD and PACT programs?

5 MR. SIKOFF: Well, certainly our goals are more  
6 focused on the developments that are in play today,  
7 and getting as many people sign up as possible. But,  
8 no, obviously as we get our-- get under the hood with  
9 respect to the RAD PACT developments, understanding  
10 what broadband requirements they have in place,  
11 because many of them have broadband requirements that  
12 the private property manager is required to provide  
13 some subsidized broadband connectivity. So we're  
14 working through that now. I believe as of this date,  
15 there-- none of those RAD PACTS have a broadband  
16 provider in place that's providing the service. So  
17 we're looking to see if those can be enveloped in the  
18 program as well.

19 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay, because the word pilot  
20 itself means that it is a test run to see the success  
21 of the program before expanding fully. So I'm just  
22 trying to understand and have clarification. If this  
23 is a pilot, are you going to wait the full three  
24 years to see the completion of 100% registrations for  
25 the existing NYCHA contracts, before expanding to the

2 whole entire city? Or is it... Because I see him  
3 shaking his head?

4 MR. BIRCHMEIER: No. We're planning to expand to  
5 additional NYCHA developments. We're not-- but in  
6 tandem, the-- the near term goal is to is to get to  
7 as many0-- as many eligible households in the current  
8 developments that have Big Apple Connect, get them  
9 on-- online. But-- but no, we are going to, in  
10 tandem, expand to additional NYCHA developments.

11 COUNCILMEMBER WON: So do you have benchmarks set  
12 for Spectrum and Altice and Optimum in the NYCHA  
13 developments they currently are contracted for? What  
14 is their benchmark that-- or targets that they need  
15 to hit per quarter to ensure that they're increasing  
16 registrations?

17 MR. SIKOFF: So I don't believe there's-- there  
18 are benchmarks in terms of that. I mean, that's just  
19 our overall goal, is that we're working internally,  
20 both with our city partners and the providers  
21 themselves. There are benchmarks with respect to  
22 service, performance, and uptime, and all that. So  
23 that's built into the contract. But with respect to  
24 how many people they sign up, it's our goal to get as  
25 many people as we can.

2 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay. So just to put on the  
3 record: For the contracts themselves with the ISPs,  
4 they are not-- there was nothing written in the  
5 contract of how-- that they have to reach 100% of  
6 registrations within the NYCHAS. They will get paid  
7 no matter what, as long as they were servicing them  
8 to a certain standard.

9 MR. SIKOFF: They-- correct. They will get paid  
10 for as many households that they sign up. That's  
11 what they get paid for.

12 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay. So that's the  
13 incentive built in? To have them sign up more  
14 people?

15 MR. SIKOFF: Yeah. Absolutely.

16 COUNCILMEMBER WON: And are you seeing increases  
17 in signup? How are you tracking that per NYCHA  
18 development?

19 MR. SIKOFF: Yep. We-- we get daily reports from  
20 the providers, both of them, automated daily reports  
21 that show the progress at each development. We meet  
22 with them weekly, both individually and then  
23 together, to assess the-- how things are going. As I  
24 mentioned, we have a really robust engagement, public  
25 engagement plan. We're working with the providers

2 during the warmer months. We're doing outdoor  
3 events. We're setting up tables and giveaways.  
4 We've had a-- we've partnered with them on a number  
5 of turkey giveaways during the holiday season. We're  
6 participating in Family Day events. We're working  
7 with them to distribute mailers and flyers. They're  
8 doing on site door knocking. So there's a pretty  
9 robust outreach and engagement plan. And we're--  
10 we're learning. We're trying to improve on it. So  
11 as we add more developments, and as more people get  
12 signed up, we'll-- we'll learn from those and improve  
13 on them.

14 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Do you-- would it be possible  
15 for you to share the current enrollment data with the  
16 Chair and the rest of the Committee, per NYCHA  
17 development, so that we can understand how the  
18 Councilmembers of those districts can also support,  
19 to increase enrollment in these NYCHA developments?

20 MR. SIKOFF: Absolutely.

21 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember.  
23 A couple more questions regarding Big Apple Connect.  
24 I think Councilmember Won kind of alluded to it. In  
25 the September hearing, you know, we discussed-- you

2 all shared that it was about-- that you were looking  
3 at a three year plan, and that you were still  
4 evaluating what would happen after the three year  
5 period. Do you have some sense of where you are-- of  
6 what that looks like beyond, I guess, the 2025  
7 benchmark?

8 MR. SIKOFF: No, not at this point. I mean,  
9 we're obviously encouraged by the increase in  
10 subscribership just in this last month or so. It's  
11 actually been a significant uptick. But beyond that,  
12 I think, you know, we do want to add more  
13 developments. We are going to add more developments  
14 in the coming months. And as we do that, and we see  
15 where there's additional opportunities to expand the  
16 program, we'll certainly explore those. But beyond  
17 that, I think we want to take a deliberate approach  
18 in terms of how we roll out the program.

19 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: In your testimony, you  
20 share that there was a Big Apple Connect RFP. Is  
21 that the case? We haven't seen it. Do you-- this  
22 was in September. I think it was the September  
23 testimony? Yeah. So my understanding was that there  
24 was an RFP, and so that's why it went to the Altice

2 and Charter. Do you have-- can you share some  
3 information about the RFP that went out?

4 MR. SIKOFF: I will have to check to see what,  
5 what solicitation or RFP or whatever-- whatever form  
6 it took, in terms of sending it out to those  
7 providers. But yeah, well, you know, whatever we  
8 have, we can certainly send you.

9 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah, you could share  
10 that. And if you could also share just who else  
11 applied for it. I'm curious about that.

12 MR. SIKOFF: Sure.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I have some followups on  
14 some of the-- the prior hearings. So obviously you  
15 can-- you can let me know where we're at. In August,  
16 Commissioner Fraser testified that the department did  
17 a survey of every agency and all technologic-- all  
18 technology programs that they have running of  
19 significant size and scale, so OTI could begin to do  
20 an assessment to see areas where you all could  
21 consolidate, save costs, areas that needed support  
22 management and quality assurance.

23 Do you have a sense of what was DFDA and DCAS's  
24 responses to those surveys?

2 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I do not have that in front of  
3 me, but we can follow up.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Would love to  
5 learn that. My next question is regarding the My  
6 City App. In July, the mayor and the agency  
7 announced the plan to create the centralized portal  
8 dubbed the My City Portal, or My City App, which  
9 would allow New Yorkers to apply online for all city  
10 services with the first phase being available in the  
11 fall of 2022. What is the progress? And my  
12 understanding was also that there was supposed to be--  
13 - the first accessibility was for the Department of  
14 Education? That's correct? So I'm curious, what is  
15 the progress? It is 2023. What do we got?

16 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Yeah, absolutely. So the first  
17 My City service will be a child care portal, And it  
18 will help families sign up for childcare subsidies.  
19 And the mayor-- the mayor has said over the past few  
20 weeks that it will be ready in early 2023, and we are  
21 on target to to hit that benchmark, and so we should  
22 have more to share in the coming weeks.

23 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Interesting. And what is  
24 the next-- so early 2023-- I mean, we're January.

2 When-- when are you all looking? Is there a calendar  
3 timeline?

4 MR. BIRCHMEIER: In the cut in the coming weeks,  
5 but still in-- technically early-- early 2023.

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So something that the  
7 commissioner had shared and one of the hearings was--  
8 was, you know, his belief and like testing this out,  
9 obviously. I'm curious if you are all testing any  
10 bit of this portal. Granted, I get it's about early  
11 child care right now. But any part of this portal,  
12 is it being tested on our aging population?

13 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I will have to speak with the My  
14 City team, but there is a robust effort to do user  
15 testing on-- on this technology. It's not just being  
16 created in a government office, in a vacuum. They're  
17 bringing in real New Yorkers to use this technology  
18 and navigate it to make sure that it makes sense.  
19 And that's-- that's the whole thesis behind My City.

20 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And can you confirm that  
21 there will be a deliberate approach to testing this  
22 on older adults 60, 65, and up?

23 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I will-- I will have to check  
24 with My City team, but I can get back to you on that.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, I hope so. Can you  
3 also share about the My City App-- can you share if  
4 there is going to be an opportunity for people to,  
5 like, fill out a webform or fill something out, if  
6 there's some kind of issue?

7 I think, you know, at that hearing -- I think it  
8 was the August hearing -- Councilmember Brewer shared  
9 with Commissioner Fraser, that she's got  
10 reservations. I think we all do, right? I don't  
11 think that there's a lot of trust just yet that New  
12 Yorkers have in the ability to really streamline this  
13 in a centralized way. I think the idea is great. We  
14 haven't seen it. We keep getting pushed back  
15 timeline. So already the trust is being chipped away  
16 at. Originally, it was fall 2022, and now we're  
17 looking at early 2023.

18 But is there-- are you all planning for that as  
19 part of this app that, you know, people, New Yorkers  
20 can communicate when something is wrong?

21 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And then do you have a  
23 sense of what the protocol is once this complaint is  
24 received?

2 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I'm not on the on the My City  
3 tech team, but I can I can check with what that  
4 process is.

5 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Got it. Thank you.  
6 Well, I am. I'm looking forward to it. I hope that  
7 maybe we can touch base with OTI before it's  
8 officially up and running.

9 Um, my next question is regarding the hearing  
10 that we had in December, which was a joint hearing  
11 with the Committee on Fire and Emergency. Can you  
12 all share, what is the internet service provider that  
13 the city uses for Fire CAD?

14 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I do not have that in front of  
15 me, but I can follow up with the Public Safety Team.

16 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. You don't know.  
17 So you don't know if the city has-- if you all have  
18 considered switching that-- even switching that  
19 internet service provider.

20 Um, my next question. Okay. I think-- I think  
21 that's it. I think what-- we hopefully will want to  
22 continue this conversation. I'm encouraged by the  
23 fact that we are all in agreement of how important  
24 accessibility is. Oh, Julie, Councilmember Won?

2 COUNCILMEMBER WON: I just had a off-topic  
3 question that I've been hearing from my NYCHA  
4 residents. I was wondering what the latest update is  
5 for the Digital Wallet, for digital payments for SNAP  
6 benefits, and other EBT, et cetera. I know that that  
7 was being worked on last year, and I was wondering if  
8 there was any update on the progress?

9 MR. BIRCHMEIER: I unfortunately don't have an  
10 update on progress, although I do know that that  
11 remains a priority for the administration and also  
12 CTO Fraser.

13 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay. Okay.

14 MR. BIRCHMEIER: We can come back to you with  
15 with a better sense of a timeline on what that could  
16 look like, because I know that it does remain a  
17 priority, but I just-- I just haven't been read in on  
18 where that stands.

19 COUNCILMEMBER WON: Okay. And then I just want  
20 to put on the record that many of the residents who  
21 would have to be part of this Digital Wallet program,  
22 their main concerns that they raise is their privacy,  
23 and surveillance, and security, from the tracking of  
24 every single transaction that they would be doing,  
25 location tracking, et cetera. So we will be paying

2 close attention, and I look forward to hearing that  
3 the Chair will be having. Thank you.

4 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Of course. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember  
6 Won.

7 Just before-- I think we want to pass over to  
8 public testimony next? Oh, no, we have one more  
9 testimony.

10 My last question is just regarding accessibility  
11 at every hearing: We have consistently testimony  
12 from New Yorkers who are hearing impaired, vision  
13 impaired, and it just seems like they keep coming and  
14 testifying because they just don't feel like they are  
15 being seen or heard or listened to. I'm curious if  
16 you can share any insight on how some of those issues  
17 that they raised around LinkNYC. I'm not sure if  
18 they raise any issues around Big Apple Connect. But  
19 how this agency has been addressing those concerns?  
20 I'm sure we'll hear from-- from some folks in that  
21 community today, but it is-- I think we should take  
22 this seriously that they're showing up and they're  
23 testifying. They're participating every single time  
24 because they're not really being listened to, and  
25 their needs are not really being incorporated. So

2 can you share anything right now that OTI is doing  
3 uniquely to respond to this community?

4 MR. BIRCHMEIER: OTI just held a meeting with  
5 folks from-- from that community. I'm blanking on  
6 the date, but I believe it was two weeks ago.

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Was commissioner Fraser  
8 there? Because I know that that was important that  
9 they meet with the commissioner.

10 MR. BIRCHMEIER: Commissioner Fraser was not  
11 there, but I was I was there as a Deputy  
12 Commissioner, and also the Deputy Commissioner for  
13 Public Safety was there, because the primary concern  
14 was on the next-gen 911 system and making sure that  
15 it's built in an accessible way. And that was the  
16 primary topic that that folks wanted to discuss. And  
17 as part of that-- and also, I will say the-- the  
18 Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities was also  
19 there, and that commissioner was-- was there too.  
20 And so we had a productive conversation. And as  
21 part-- as a follow up to that conversation, we are  
22 setting up a regular cadence with that community to  
23 regularly update them on the next-gen 911 system,  
24 which seems to be the-- the highest priority, at

2 least from what we heard in the meeting, but also  
3 other OTI initiatives too.

4 And so it's looking like-- we're still going back  
5 and forth on the cadence, but it's looking like it's  
6 going to be a quarterly meeting between OTI and that  
7 community to give regular updates and get their  
8 feedback on projects.

9 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, thank you.

10 So I'm going to pass it off to Irene. But before  
11 that, I just want to thank you, Roman, for being  
12 here. I look forward to continuing to work this out  
13 with you. I know that it-- you know, I'm-- I think  
14 there's a lot more to gain here. It seems a little  
15 bit out of the wheelhouse, but I think that there's a  
16 lot to gain from here if you-- if you hear from these  
17 nonprofits on the ground that could benefit from  
18 these, like, totally usable devices. Um, so I hope  
19 that we can continue this conversation. I know it's  
20 not the end.

21 And then from OTI, we will continue to have this  
22 conversation. I am really looking forward to the  
23 next time we meet that there's more specifics around  
24 how the agency will work with these smaller ISPs that  
25 were awarded an RFP, was rescinded, how we're folding

2 them into this bigger connectivity discussion. And  
3 of course, love-- I would love to learn a little bit  
4 more about the agency's long term planning now that  
5 the Internet Master Plan is not real. So I look  
6 forward to that. So I will pass it off to Irene.  
7 Thank you.

8 COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. And I want to thank  
9 everyone for your testimony. And now we will turn to  
10 the public testimony. Unless any Councilmembers have  
11 any more questions. No.

12 That thank you again, thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, all.

14 COUNSEL: And to accommodate every witness who  
15 registered to testify today, we kindly ask to limit  
16 your testimony to three minutes. And our first  
17 panelist will be Marco DiGirolomo, and I apologize if  
18 I mispronounced the last name. He will be testifying  
19 via zoom, and then we'll turn to all witnesses who  
20 are here with us in person. Thank you.

21 MR. DIGIROLOMO: Thank you. Good morning. Thank  
22 you Chair Gutiérrez and the Committee on Technology  
23 for holding this important meeting today. My name is  
24 Marco DiGirolomo, and I am the Director of In-Person  
25 Experiences with Older Adults Technology Services, or

2 OATS from AARP. OATS is an award-winning social  
3 impact organization that offers technology programs,  
4 community training and strategic engagements to shape  
5 the future of aging. OATS is also the creator of  
6 Senior Planet, a national program that helps older  
7 adults, aged 60 and over, thrive in the digital world  
8 and use technology to improve their lives in five  
9 areas of impact which are social engagement,  
10 financial security, civic participation, health, and  
11 creativity. OATS flagship Senior Planet Center  
12 opened in Manhattan in 2013. And in the past decade  
13 has provided older adult-- older New Yorkers with a  
14 welcoming space to learn and use technology. Our  
15 center has a robust computer lab and open seating  
16 style working space and cutting-edge technology  
17 readily available that older adults can touch and  
18 experience for themselves.

19 OATS has historically and currently receives  
20 funding from the New York City Department For The  
21 Aging to operate our Senior Planet Center, as well as  
22 provide our programs in OACs across the five  
23 boroughs. As the oversight city agency for older  
24 adults, adult services, DFDA plays a crucial role

2 sitting at the intersection of older adults and city  
3 services.

4 I'm here today to speak in support of passing  
5 Intro 665 legislation to establish and implement an  
6 online digital literacy program to serve older  
7 adults. Despite our growing reliance on technology,  
8 22 million older Americans remain on the wrong side  
9 of the digital divide. At OATS we're on a mission to  
10 change that by working to empower older adults with  
11 the skills needed to harness the power of today's  
12 technology. Being online not only connects you to  
13 the world, it has the ability to connect older adults  
14 with answers to questions, solutions to needs, and  
15 even tools that can help them save money through  
16 price comparisons and online banking.

17 And a recent report on our organization that our  
18 organization released with the Humana Foundation  
19 found strong evidence that technology interventions  
20 can play a significant role in driving behavioral  
21 social change for older adults, helping them combat  
22 social isolation, loneliness, and depression, all  
23 while improving the quality of their life. In a  
24 world where interactions are increasingly taking  
25 place online, giving older adults the tools to use

2 modern technology could greatly improve their lives,  
3 giving them access to not just important resources  
4 like public health information, but to the social  
5 communities that they depend on as well.

6 New York City is known for the strength and  
7 resilience of its diverse communities that includes  
8 our vibrant community of older adults who deserve to  
9 thrive and benefit from today's innovative  
10 technologies. Passing Intro 665 would significantly  
11 help combat the digital divide among New York's older  
12 adults, by providing seniors the skills and knowledge  
13 to actively participate in our digital economy and to  
14 connect with the ones they love. This bill would  
15 pave an exciting and necessary way forward for New  
16 York's older adult community and in turn the city as  
17 a whole. Thank you for this opportunity.

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much.

19 COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your testimony  
20 and we move to our next panelist. We will proceed  
21 with witnesses who are here with us in person. And  
22 our first panelists are Christian González Rivera,  
23 and Brianna Paden-Williams. You may start when  
24 you're ready.

2 MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: Good morning, everyone.  
3 Good morning Chair and good morning Councilmembers.  
4 My name is Christian González Rivera. And I'm the  
5 Director of Strategic Policy Initiatives at the  
6 Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging at Hunter College.  
7 So we're Research and Policy Center that's based in  
8 Hunter College that focuses on older adults.

9 So the Brookdale center supports Intro 665. So  
10 thank you, Councilmember Gutiérrez for introducing  
11 it. I'm also in your district, by the way, it's  
12 where I live.

13 So anyway, um, so in 2021, we published a study  
14 that detailed the demographics of older New Yorkers  
15 without access to the internet, and also summarized  
16 the academic research on internet adoption that shows  
17 that older adults learn and adopt technology  
18 differently than younger people, and recommended,  
19 among other things, the establishment of a digital  
20 literacy program for older adults. So we're happy to  
21 see you put this together.

22 So I'd like to offer a few of our research  
23 findings on how to structure a digital literacy  
24 program for older adults so that it's effective for  
25 those who are hardest to reach, according to the

2 demographic analysis that we did. So meaningful  
3 access to technology, you know, has five components.  
4 The first two are access to a device and access to an  
5 adequate digital connection, which of course, are for  
6 everyone. But for older adults in particular, that's  
7 not enough. I mean, it's-- you also need the  
8 education to know why the internet is useful, also  
9 the training to know how to use the internet, and  
10 then also the ongoing tech support, you know, in case  
11 something goes wrong.

12       And so then our review of literature shows that  
13 for older adults, also, how technology is useful is  
14 more important than just how to use it. So  
15 basically, you have to know what-- what is this  
16 really for? Why am I going through the effort to  
17 learn about this? Before you even jump into learning  
18 how to use it? And of course, this-- this is sort of  
19 a logical question. I mean, imagine an 85 year old  
20 who says, "Well, I've been living all my life without  
21 using it, why should I start now?" You know? So  
22 what this really means is that an effective digital  
23 technology program really starts with, you know, not  
24 by telling a participant, this is how you turn this  
25 thing on, but instead by saying, "What are your

2 needs?" And then teaching them you know, why-- how  
3 the Internet might be helpful for getting whatever  
4 that need is met.

5       So Furthermore, our review of the literature  
6 shows that older adults learn best from their peers,  
7 as opposed to sort of in a formal classroom setting.  
8 So we recommend that kind of peer-to-peer learning  
9 approach for these programs. So that means, you  
10 know, structuring a program so that you have older  
11 adults with more experience in using technology, of  
12 which there are many, teaching people who have less  
13 experience in using technology.

14       And the fact is that some of the people who are  
15 hardest to reach are those with lower levels of  
16 formal education. So access to the internet at home,  
17 according to the-- to the work that we did is most  
18 correlated with three things, I mean, first age,  
19 second level of formal education, and third income.  
20 So, and in that order, as well. So in majorities of  
21 older New Yorkers [BELL RINGS] -- almost done sorry -  
22 - majorities of older New Yorkers in their-- people  
23 in their 60s across all income and education levels  
24 are connected already to the internet, whereas, as  
25 you get older-- as you get into older cohorts, there

2 are fewer people who are-- who are already connected.  
3 And likewise, I mean, people who have a bachelor's  
4 degree of an higher of any age are much more likely  
5 to be connected than those with less education.

6 So what this all points to is that right now, a  
7 lot of digital literacy programs are very classroom-  
8 based. So you sit there, you're going to learn  
9 Photoshop, you're going to learn this, you're going  
10 to learn that. But the fact is, I mean, it's like  
11 for this population that we're talking about, it's  
12 much better just sit down and say, "Okay, what do you  
13 need?" and then start from there.

14 So we recommend that to the extent that money is  
15 going to be put into this, to do those peer-to-peer  
16 programs, in addition to the great classes that for  
17 instance, OATS is already putting together, because  
18 certainly you can start with a peer focus and then  
19 move on to you know, further education through--  
20 through class based. So thank you for the  
21 opportunity to testify.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah, that's great  
23 feedback. Thank you so much. Thank you for sharing  
24 that.

2 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: Hi, I'm Brianna Paden-  
3 Williams, the Communications and Policy Associate at  
4 LiveOn, New York, and thank you for the opportunity  
5 to testify today. LiveOn New York's members include  
6 more than 110 nonprofit organizations that provide  
7 core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive  
8 in their community as we all age. For almost three  
9 years LiveOn New York's members, and the entire aging  
10 sector network, have found new ways to provide  
11 critical services to older New Yorkers in the face of  
12 unprecedented demand and a public health crisis. And  
13 technology has been the core to make this work  
14 possible, as a couple of years ago, overnight, Older  
15 Adult Centers had to go virtual, and phone calls  
16 really became a main mode of communication with  
17 clients.

18 And this work is critical as social isolation is  
19 now understood to be a significant health risk and  
20 predictor of morbidity-- morbidity, excuse me. To  
21 put it simply, the ability to remain connected has  
22 undoubtedly saved lives, and today, many older adults  
23 can't afford to purchase technologies such as tablets  
24 and computers, and even if the devices are given to  
25 them as Christian has mentioned, it's difficult or

2 almost impossible to afford monthly internet access.  
3 And furthermore, the pandemic has really exacerbated  
4 the digital divide, and has brought increased  
5 awareness to its existence, and really highlighted  
6 the effects of not combating this problem of this  
7 issue.

8       And to address that LiveOn York is proud to offer  
9 the following recommendations: And firstly, we  
10 invite the city to utilize our aging policy agenda,  
11 "Aging is Everyone's Business" that LiveOn New York  
12 worked in partnership with the Hunter College  
13 Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, which is a policy  
14 agenda that provides policy solutions, including  
15 technology solutions to make New York a better place  
16 to age.

17       And secondly, long-term solutions: The City  
18 should look to broaden and fun collaboration with  
19 older adults centers and organizations such as  
20 Planet-- Senior Planet, excuse me, which provides an  
21 offers hotline and courses to broaden tech access  
22 among older adults. And like we've mentioned, it's  
23 important to keep in mind that of older adults who  
24 have internet access, nearly half require access--  
25 require assistance, excuse me, to use internet or to

2 set up their devices and many are reliant on family  
3 for this support.

4       Secondly, we ask the City to increase investments  
5 in the technology infrastructure at Older Adults  
6 Centers and community-based organizations. And we  
7 know older adult centers have utilized technology to  
8 keep tens of thousands of older adults safe and  
9 connected during the pandemic. And so it's critical  
10 that centers have the strong technology  
11 infrastructure to further enable centers and other  
12 DFDA programs as well to connect with older adults  
13 through virtual programming and beyond.

14       Additionally, we ask for additional funding to  
15 expand DFDA's virtual programming and accessibility,  
16 and this includes through an online database devices  
17 and connectivity, as well as further recommendations  
18 found in our aging agenda to deputize and fund local  
19 adult centers and other organizations to act as  
20 information hubs in the event of a disaster, and also  
21 to make free [BELL RINGS] public support available to  
22 older New Yorkers. And lastly, we applaud Technology  
23 Chair Gutiérrez for introducing legislation aimed at  
24 promoting access to technology, and we thank  
25 Councilmember Gutiérrez as well as the co sponsors.

2 And so we offer the feedback for Intro 665, which  
3 is to require the Department of Technology, in  
4 collaboration with the Department for Aging, to just  
5 to establish and implement an online digital program.  
6 And so while this bill is-- is a step forward to  
7 address technology access for older adults, we really  
8 encourage the City to work in collaboration with  
9 community based organizations that already have  
10 existing programs and support in place for older New  
11 Yorkers.

12 And lastly, we also ask the city to assess the  
13 necessary funding that would be required to provide  
14 the support as well.

15 And lastly, we also support Intro Bill 664. More  
16 information can be found in our written testimony.  
17 And thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you all so much for  
19 sticking around to testify. I have a question  
20 actually, for both of you, Brianna, and Christian,  
21 and then Marco online.

22 Obviously, I'm so grateful for the work that you  
23 are doing, for this advocacy that you're doing. It's  
24 very personal, and it's very relevant for every New  
25 Yorker. If we are all lucky enough to age, we will

2 all need the support that we are very much advocating  
3 for.

4       So the sense that I got from the administration  
5 regarding the digital literacy program was these  
6 things are already happening. Right? They already  
7 exist. We're not the experts. But in your work and  
8 in in your research, do you all think that there is a  
9 benefit to be had from having a much more  
10 comprehensive digital literacy plan? And do you  
11 think that there's a benefit to having an agency like  
12 OTI be a relevant partner in maybe accountability  
13 measures or infrastructure? Do you think that there  
14 is an asset that they provide in that larger  
15 conversation? And anybody can-- can answer that?

16       MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: Okay, sure. Um, yes,  
17 absolutely. I mean, it's like, there's the benefits  
18 of that partnership. I mean, as the-- the  
19 representatives from OTI said, OTI might be a good  
20 partner to provide funding, provide structure,  
21 provide metrics, et cetera. I mean, it's like a--  
22 maybe not directly administer the programs,  
23 especially because-- you know, especially when we're  
24 talking about immigrants, and other people in  
25 community who might be needing this-- this help,

2 they're much more likely to go to a trusted  
3 organization, a nonprofit organization that's local  
4 to them that they know about. And if those programs  
5 exist in those-- in those community organizations,  
6 they're much more likely to connect versus to go to a  
7 government office, et cetera, I mean, to-- to learn  
8 that.

9       So of course, Older Adult Centers are one such  
10 place, you know, that is-- exists in many-- in many  
11 communities. There was also the idea of opening up  
12 some public schools to do this work. Again, I mean,  
13 it's-- if that's done in collaboration with-- with  
14 local nonprofits. So again, yes, they can definitely  
15 be a partner in coordination, in pushing money out to  
16 communities, but the important part is that the face  
17 of any of this program has to be at the community  
18 level.

19       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It has to be the  
20 nonprofits that are doing this work.

21       MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: Right.

22       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And do you all, as folks,  
23 especially OATS, doing this work, in such a great  
24 way, do you think you have everything you need to  
25

2 connect with every single aging adult that needs this  
3 service?

4 MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: That we have everything we  
5 need? Well, I mean, I think-- I think you're-- would  
6 be the person state that one. [laughs]

7 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I need you to say it on  
8 the record. I know what the answer is. Why do you  
9 say on the record, because I think there's a little  
10 bit of pushback on like, what more we need. So yes.

11 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: I mean, echoing much of what  
12 Christian has said, in that community-based  
13 organizations like Older Adult Centers are really a  
14 trusted source for older adults in the community.  
15 And we've really seen that throughout the past two to  
16 three years throughout the pandemic with keeping  
17 older adults connected. But also recognizing, like  
18 you've mentioned, that, you know, access to-- as well  
19 as access to technology is kind of like a three-prong  
20 issue of having access to the devices, having access  
21 to the support, as well as the internet broadband,  
22 but really just recognizing that we really have a  
23 strong infrastructure in place through our community-  
24 based organizations that provide much of those  
25 services and programs. And so we really welcome the

2 collaboration, but also really recognizing much of  
3 that infrastructure exists of addressing technology  
4 access for older adults.

5 MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: Yeah. And also, I wanted  
6 to add as well that OATS is a great resource in this  
7 case, as well. I mean, it's as-- as we mentioned  
8 before, I mean, where even if we're taking the  
9 example of this sort of peer-to-peer model, you can  
10 still have organizations like OATS, I mean, it's  
11 like-- that already know how to train people to be  
12 trainers, who could be an excellent partner in this  
13 case, as well.

14 And again, I mean, it's like-- what are needed  
15 are the resources to bring together a lot of  
16 resources that already exist. I mean, it's like--  
17 you already have older adults who have technology  
18 experience, maybe they're retired professionals, who  
19 wouldn't-- maybe wouldn't mind a stipend. I mean,  
20 it's like-- to be, you know, working a few hours  
21 helping other older adults access technology. So of  
22 course, that requires some funding. You already have  
23 the spaces and older adult centers, and there's the  
24 desire to do it, except not all staff, I mean, it's  
25 like-- are trained in being able to be trainers. The

2 resources are there is just about, again, putting the  
3 funding behind it and making a program that people  
4 recognize.

5 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: Putting more funding behind  
6 it.

7 MR. GONZÁLEZ RIVERA: Yeah. Sorry. Yeah,  
8 exactly. Funding the resource that already exists.

9 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And Marco-- and so-- much  
10 of your testimony, you pointed out to it, and I thank  
11 you all for providing the survey regarding the work  
12 that you all were doing in NYCHA. It was really  
13 important to understand.

14 You know, I think-- I think once you see the  
15 data, you understand that it's just not-- it's not  
16 just enough to provide connectivity and the device  
17 really. It will just be useless if we're not really  
18 engaging with these folks. So I want to thank OATS,  
19 and Marco, I also just want to say Councilmember  
20 Palladino wants to connect with you after the hearing  
21 just to make sure that we have that contact  
22 information.

23 Um, that's it for me on the questions front. Do  
24 you have any questions?

2 COUNCILMEMBER PALLADINO: I do not have any  
3 questions, but I have to tell you, as a senior, I am  
4 really impressed by what's going on. I just need to  
5 see more implementation of what's going on. Coming  
6 from a district that does not have NYCHA, I do need--  
7 my seniors need their connections. And just because  
8 they're 70 or 75 years old or older -- I'm so  
9 impressed by some 90 year olds I've met, they put  
10 some of us to shame -- they are sponges. They want  
11 to learn. And I just got done talking to the  
12 Chairwoman here that when they go to their senior  
13 centers, they go for breakfast, they go-- they go  
14 every day for social interaction. But they don't  
15 want to sit there and glue little dots of things onto  
16 paper. They are bright. They absorb like a sponge.  
17 They want to be part of this world that were existing  
18 in today. But they need the accessibility in their  
19 senior centers in order to do that.

20 You brought up a very good point about those that  
21 already have the knowledge. Volunteering their time  
22 is vital. Funding is going to become bare bones, and  
23 we would be kidding ourselves to think that much more  
24 funding is going to be thrown into a lot of these  
25 programs that we desperately need to keep.

2       So as Chairwoman also said, we need to tap into  
3 other avenues, and not just rely on New York City to  
4 fund these programs. Next year, fiscal year 24, I  
5 think we're going to see some very, very serious  
6 cuts. But programs such as these must find other  
7 avenues, and we must-- as City Council people, we owe  
8 it to our districts to seek it out with your help.  
9 And let's figure this out. Because we do need it,  
10 the seniors need it, and I'm very impressed by what I  
11 heard here today. So thank you very much.

12       But-- and I'll also say one other thing: About  
13 finding the use, for example: Food shopping. A lot  
14 of people need their groceries delivered. I am an  
15 Amazon food shopper, because I don't have the time to  
16 go to a grocery store anymore. So you have a lot--  
17 so you define a need, teach them how to use it.

18       That was very interesting what you said, and I  
19 think a lot of them want to learn all of this, and  
20 also connect with family members, but usefulness.  
21 Shopping is huge. A lot of them cannot get out in  
22 the cold weather. This is great. What you said was  
23 awesome. So I want to say thank you again. Thank  
24 you very much.

25       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Councilmember.

2 And just to clarify, I think that our budget  
3 should be prioritizing these programs. This is where  
4 our city budget should be going to. Next up?

5 COUNSEL: Thank you again for your testimony, and  
6 we are going to proceed with our next witnesses who  
7 are here with us in person, and then we'll resume  
8 with our witnesses who are here remotely. And our  
9 next witnesses are Michael Cohen and Jessica Ramos.

10 One second, we're just going to turn your-- can  
11 you turn your mic on? Just pressing it, make sure  
12 it's red. Oh, never mind. Thank you. I just want  
13 to make sure that we can hear you. Thank you.

14 MR. COHEN: Good morning. It is important for  
15 students to provided the technology resources they  
16 need to be successful in school and for a digital  
17 literacy program to be established to benefit older  
18 adults.

19 Students need technology resources to complete  
20 their assignments, and to have access to software  
21 tools that help them with their classes. Having  
22 technology in schools increases the number of  
23 different subjects that students can learn, enables  
24 different ways of learning to be well accommodated.  
25 Technology classes for older adults provide an

2 opportunity for them to learn how to use computers,  
3 and helps them to acquire more in-demand job skills.

4       If the technology classes have more computers for  
5 the students to use, then they can have an easier  
6 time learning how to use a computer, and they will  
7 have more personal hands on learning experience. If  
8 schools, college, and technology learning programs  
9 have more computers for students to learn on, then  
10 students can get better grades, and be more prepared  
11 for career success.

12       Schools, colleges and technology learning  
13 programs have a deficit in the amount of technology  
14 resources they have relative to the number of  
15 enrolled students that need them. According to USA  
16 Today, 5 million laptops have gone missing from New  
17 York City public schools. I once had to wait six  
18 weeks to be assigned a word processor in school and  
19 eight weeks for a laptop when the word processor was  
20 not a good solution for me to take notes in class  
21 when the word processor did not sufficiently fill my  
22 note-taking needs.

23       College students need access to computers that  
24 have the correct software installed on them in order  
25 to complete their homework assignments and group

2 projects for their courses. They also require access  
3 portable devices such as GPS receivers that they can  
4 use to collect data for science classes, which are in  
5 good working water.

6 Technology learning programs need computers that  
7 can connect to the internet, and are powerful enough  
8 to support applications with many types, such as  
9 Office productivity, and media editing, so that  
10 students can learn about different types of computer  
11 related skills.

12 If students had more technology resources  
13 available for them to use, they would have an easier  
14 time following along in their classes. Having more  
15 technology resources in schools, colleges, and  
16 technology learning programs also increases the  
17 amount of learning that students can do using online  
18 resources after their classes to help them to better  
19 understand the material they were taught in class.

20 High school and college students need access to  
21 websites that provide access to activities specified  
22 in their workbooks to be performed on a computer,  
23 such as [inaudible] and quizzes that are relevant to  
24 the topics they have recently learned about in class.

2       They can also benefit from watching video or  
3 audio programs that are relevant to the classes they  
4 are taking in order to increase your interest in  
5 learning the material.

6       Students in technology learning programs can use  
7 computers to practice using software on their own to  
8 complete [BELL RINGS] sample assignments. There are  
9 also websites that allow users to learn how to use  
10 computer software and other aspects of technology at  
11 their own pace. Using a greater amount of technology  
12 resources, students will have the chance to enhance  
13 their own learning of the material and obtain better  
14 grades in their classes.

15       Surplus technology resources from New York City  
16 government agencies can provide students with  
17 inexpensive technology resources to aid in their  
18 learning. Computers and other electronic devices  
19 that agencies are not using in their day-to-day  
20 operations can be put to good use to enrich the lives  
21 of others in order to help them become more educated  
22 and knowledgeable about an expanded number of  
23 subjects.

24       Federal and surplus New York City government  
25 technology resources remain unused while they could

2 be better used somewhere else, and donating them will  
3 be an easy way for those resources to be  
4 redistributed to places throughout the city. Surplus  
5 computers will also provide schools, college, and  
6 technology training program a greater supply of  
7 electronics to choose from when supplying students  
8 with what they need. All of the surplus equipment  
9 will operate well enough to replace any non-working  
10 equipment that the students are currently using to  
11 learn, and create more opportunities for remote  
12 learning take place over the internet.

13       Having greater supply of inexpensive technology  
14 available for use by students will help schools,  
15 college, and technology learning programs to provide  
16 for more encouraging places to learn. Surplus  
17 technology resources should only be redistributed for  
18 educational purposes, and only to public or nonprofit  
19 organizations. Organizations that do not provide  
20 educational services do not provide a visual benefit  
21 to the public for the use of donated computers,  
22 because they will not be used to support learning.  
23 If donated equipment is not used for learning, it  
24 will likely be used for other purposes or designated  
25 as a public computer to be used by everyone.

2       The surplus computers and other electronics must  
3 have to software pre-installed as required by any  
4 organizations that request the equipment. All  
5 donated computers should be given to be used in the  
6 area of the requesting organizations where there is  
7 the greatest need for them. Computers should also be  
8 given with information about how they are to be used  
9 in other organizations.

10       CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Michael. Did  
11 you have the testimony that you wanted to-- for me to  
12 read as well? You can give it to them, if it's okay,  
13 but thank you so much for your testimony.

14       Thank you. Jessica?

15       MS. RAMOS CUTTONE: Hello, and thank you for the  
16 opportunity to testify today. My name is Jessica  
17 Ramos Cuttone and I am the Director of Workforce  
18 Services for Greenwich House. I'll wait.

19       COUNSEL: I apologize. Go ahead. Sorry,  
20 Jessica.

21       MS. RAMOS CUTTONE: It's okay. So I'm the  
22 Director of Workforce Services for Greenwich House.  
23 Specifically, I am charged with implementing  
24 programming for older adults to either build their  
25 skills or attain work. We just opened a brand new

2 5000 square foot space in Greenwich Village in order  
3 to carry out this programming.

4 Greenwich house was founded 120 years ago and we  
5 have been committed to addressing the needs of New  
6 Yorkers of all ages through arts, education, health,  
7 and older adult services.

8 We applaud the Committee for seeking  
9 opportunities to address digital literacy and access  
10 to technology especially for older adults. In  
11 October with support from the Department for the  
12 Aging as well as Amazon and Crown Castle and other  
13 private foundations, Greenwich house opened the  
14 Lifelong Skills and Opportunity Center, in part to  
15 address these issues in our community.

16 Expanded support from the City would go a long  
17 way towards addressing the great need for digital  
18 literacy support among older adults. A Pew study  
19 showed that 41% of older adults do not use the  
20 internet, 23% Do not use cell phones, and over 75%  
21 say they require help when learning how to use new  
22 technology.

23 In our programs, we see a full spectrum of  
24 digital literacy challenges among our participants.  
25 We hear stories about people whose safety could be

2 compromised if they were to fall or need help because  
3 they live alone and do not have access to a cell  
4 phone, or their mental health is impacted due to  
5 isolation and lack of connectivity.

6 Others simply want to be able to support  
7 themselves and reenter the workforce. For example,  
8 one of our older adults had a successful consulting  
9 career but she lost many customers during the  
10 pandemic, and her technology skills are outdated.  
11 She's eager to work, but has found the world of  
12 online job listings and applications to be  
13 frustrating. Despite her years of experience, she's  
14 having a hard time landing interviews.

15 Finally, older adults often miss out on  
16 opportunities for digital connection at a time when  
17 technology has been all but ubiquitous for other age  
18 groups. Many lack the skills to use social media to  
19 connect with family and friends or to even share  
20 photos. In our first Introduction to Computers  
21 Course, which was taught by a volunteer older adult,  
22 we quickly filled up the room and had to turn people  
23 away. Some participants did not even know how to  
24 turn on the PC when the class began.

2 Through our Lifelong Skills and Opportunity  
3 Center, we see a strong desire among older adults to  
4 learn these skills in a safe environment with their  
5 peers. We offer classes on everything from Zoom 101  
6 to launching an online business, and we are planning  
7 upcoming courses like voice technology, contactless  
8 payments [BELL RINGS] and wearable technology.

9 We urge the city to consider expanding funding  
10 for resources to ensure older adult residents have  
11 the access to technology resources they need and  
12 want. The support we've received from DFDA has been  
13 very impactful, but we also had to secure generous  
14 funding from Amazon for the lab and the computers,  
15 and we only have 14 at this point, which is a  
16 critical tool for older adults. Right now we rely on  
17 volunteers to run the lab. Staffing would be crucial  
18 for them to receive one-on-one support.

19 Again Grinch house applauds the City Council for  
20 working to address digital literacy and access to  
21 technology. Thank you again for your time.

22 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you Jessica and  
23 thank you for-- for your work and sharing that that  
24 data with us. I think it's really important that--  
25 you know, I wish the admin was here to hear it, but I

2 think it's really important because it's--  
3 connectivity is like the previous panel mentioned,  
4 it's not enough to just say we have the internet and  
5 it's-- it's in the ether, but you need the device,  
6 you need the connectivity, you need the training, and  
7 I especially loved the stories that you shared about  
8 how it's being relayed peer to peer. I think that  
9 that's also a really key piece. So basically, the  
10 goal is that we keep fighting to ensure that this  
11 work continues, but also expands and evolves with the  
12 with the evolving needs of our senior population. So  
13 thank you both for-- for testifying today.

14 COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. And now,  
15 we'll turn to our witnesses who are here remotely.  
16 And our first witness is Clayton Banks from Silicon  
17 Harlem.

18 MR. BANKS: Thank you very much. And I will try  
19 to be as brief as I can be, and that's not normal for  
20 me. But good to see you, all of you as specially  
21 Gutiérrez and Holden, for doing this. This committee  
22 is the most important Committee in New York City.

23 I just wanted to comment on the Big Apple  
24 Connect. Questions that I would hope that the  
25 Committee will talk to OTI about, one of them being:

2 why are they bundling broadband with TV? I'd love to  
3 know what the point of that is. If the issue is that  
4 we want to make sure everybody gets internet, and we  
5 want people to be more digitally educated and things  
6 of that nature, what does TV have to do with that?  
7 So that's a question I would love for this committee  
8 to ask.

9 Why is there no competition? I would love to  
10 know the answer to that question. Because of the Big  
11 Apple Connect, it looks a little bit of collusion in  
12 that there's only two providers, and they get to  
13 provide it with no competition.

14 Why did they need the subsidy when the federal  
15 government gives you \$30 per month per household?  
16 I'm curious why we want to put our money up for  
17 something that the federal government's already  
18 doing. So I'd love to know-- I mean, I love the idea  
19 of making sure everybody gets the internet but what  
20 happens when, which was a good question, if somebody  
21 decides they want to quit the program, for example?  
22 Does that ISP continue to get money from the city? T

23 You know, these are questions that I think have  
24 to be addressed. I also would like to suggest that  
25 this committee take on some future thinking, one of

2 them being cybersecurity. It is a critical, critical  
3 component of our-- of our city. So many more things  
4 and devices are being connected in our city that is  
5 ultimate vulnerability. We saw it with the airlines  
6 yesterday. This is happening everywhere, but  
7 particularly in New York, and this committee on it  
8 put that high on the list, and putting the feet to  
9 the fire of OTI and everybody else that is in this  
10 space. This is critical.

11 But I am very concerned about how we're-- if  
12 we're going to call ourselves a greatest city in the  
13 world, we've got to get everybody connected. And I  
14 think it also allows for a better economic  
15 opportunities to those eleven companies that were  
16 talked about, a lot of them being MWBE, including me,  
17 Silicon Harlem. And we are the ones that are hiring  
18 people. We are the ones that are training people.  
19 It's built into what we do with seniors. I do  
20 seniors every year. And so I just think that the  
21 Council should really help this-- OTI folks to know  
22 how much more it is when it comes to a 10-year, a 20-  
23 year, a 30-year plan, not a three-year plan. That  
24 doesn't make any sense to me.

2 So thank you very much. I look forward to having  
3 these conversations moving forward. [BELL RINGS]

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much, Mr.  
5 Banks. It's good seeing you and I absolutely agree.  
6 We need a 30-year plan and a three-minute plan.  
7 Thank you so much for testifying.

8 COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr. Banks. And our next  
9 witness is Dr. Meisha Porter from the Bronx Community  
10 Foundation.

11 DR. PORTER:

12 Good morning, and thank you all for having me.  
13 My name is Dr. Meisha Porter and I'm the President  
14 and CEO of the Bronx Community Foundation.

15 On behalf of the Foundation, we are grateful for  
16 the opportunity to testify with the New York City  
17 Council today regarding the need for greater access  
18 to technology and digital literacy services across  
19 the city. Thank you to Chairperson Jennifer  
20 Gutiérrez and all members of the Committee for  
21 calling this hearing today, facilitating this  
22 important discussion.

23 Founded in 2017, The Bronx Community Foundation  
24 is the first and only Community Foundation in the  
25 Bronx solely dedicated to delivering resources across

2 the borough. The foundation works to eradicate  
3 inequity and build lasting sustainable futures for  
4 Bronxites. Central to this mission is our commitment  
5 to advancing racial equity and ensuring all  
6 Bronxites, regardless of their background, have  
7 access to the same opportunities. Closing the  
8 digital divide plays a critical role in achieving  
9 this mission.

10 The last time I addressed you was as the New York  
11 City Schools Chancellor. You know that education is  
12 always at the forefront of my mind, which is why it  
13 is important to talk about digital disparities within  
14 our education system. According to a State Education  
15 Department survey conducted in 2020, between 11 and  
16 13% of New York City students in each borough lack  
17 access to adequate internet during the pandemic when  
18 we moved to remote learning. We are now seeing  
19 reports about learning loss during this period with  
20 sweeping declines in math and reading skills for  
21 elementary age students. Students across our city  
22 saw their educational progress slow simply because  
23 they lacked access to reliable high-speed internet  
24 access.

2 As this one impact from the pandemic demonstrates  
3 accessing technology and digital literacy is not just  
4 a privilege. It is an essential right to providing  
5 quality education and equity throughout our lives  
6 from education to health care to employment. Yet far  
7 too many New Yorkers do not have high-speed-- the  
8 high-speed internet they need. According to 2020  
9 census data, 28% of all New Yorkers lacked high speed  
10 internet access, with 18% not having access at all.  
11 Internet access is even more limited for black,  
12 Hispanic, low income, and senior households with over  
13 a third of black or Hispanic New Yorkers lacking  
14 access, and nearly half of low income and senior  
15 household without a broadband connection.

16 Digital disparities are especially prevalent in  
17 my home borough of the Bronx, where 38% of our  
18 households are without a broadband subscription, the  
19 highest percentage across all five boroughs. In some  
20 neighborhoods like Melrose and Mott Haven, 45% of  
21 households do not have reliable internet.

22 Broadband subscription costs place a financial  
23 burden on low income families who might need to spend  
24 as much as 10% of their monthly income on these  
25 services. Between housing costs, food, and health

1 care digital services may not be the immediate  
2 priority we need to do better. The answer is to find  
3 alternative ways to provide internet access to the  
4 public and private sectors. The Bronx Community  
5 Foundation has been working [BELL RINGS] to build new  
6 and support existing initiative to solve the city's  
7 digital equity challenges. In 2021 the foundation  
8 gathered over 30 organizations to form the Bronx  
9 Digital Equity Coalition, a first of its kind  
10 initiative in New York City.

11  
12 The mission of the Coalition is to address the  
13 digital inequity in our community and to bring about  
14 real change and growth through grants, volunteers,  
15 donations, and hard work. The Coalition has provided  
16 digital resources and services to residents during  
17 the height of the pandemic. Together we delivered  
18 laptops and other hardware funding for digital  
19 services and other resources to Bronxites in need.

20 The Coalition has continued this groundbreaking  
21 work after the height of the pandemic. This summer,  
22 we successfully launched the Bronx Gigabit Center at  
23 the Andrew Friedman Home, a community space with  
24 high-speed internet, technology programming, and  
25 small business resource development. Powered by New

2 York's LinkNYC public Wi Fi network, the center  
3 provides access to devices, workstations, and the  
4 internet. The Center also provides digital literacy  
5 training and other services to Bronx addresses.

6 This is just one example of the ways in which  
7 community led actions help to address this critical  
8 issue, but community groups cannot do it alone. And  
9 we must also rely on legislation and city support to  
10 aid in this work.

11 The legislation proposed by the Council today is  
12 a step in the right direction. Legislation 0664,  
13 which calls for donating surplus city-owned computers  
14 and software not only helps bridge the digital  
15 divide, but it also is an environmentally sound way  
16 to repurpose resources. Given that their current  
17 requirement is to discard this equipment, the city  
18 should consider that so many New Yorkers could  
19 benefit from using it. As a former New York City  
20 Department of Education employee, having to simply  
21 discard equipment to the Councilmembers' earlier  
22 comments, when equipment could be useful to so many  
23 families and community based organizations, was  
24 always difficult to do. Yet that's what's currently  
25 required.

2 A recent report from MPB cited that there are  
3 over \$650 billion worth of unused technology in US  
4 homes, with the average New Yorker sitting on \$2,500  
5 of unused technology. When considering the amounts  
6 of households without it, these numbers are  
7 staggering. The Council should pass this legislation  
8 and ensure unused computers can go to those who need  
9 them most.

10 Additionally, the City should encourage other  
11 businesses to do the same. The Bronx Community  
12 Foundation has been a leader in partnering with  
13 corporations and businesses to provide surplus  
14 servers, laptops, and computers directly to those  
15 most in need, which includes schools in low income  
16 areas, students and families, and centers to support  
17 older adults. Through these partnerships, the  
18 foundation is providing vital resources to our  
19 community, and to help close the digital divide.

20 Additionally, legislation 0665 would establish a  
21 digital literacy program for older adults. This is  
22 key to advancing digital equity. Our seniors are  
23 most likely to lack reliable internet in their homes,  
24 with 45% lacking a broadband connection. Older  
25 Adults face a big gap when it comes to digital

2 literacy, which limits their ability to access vital  
3 city services, connect with friends and families, and  
4 even learn about voting information. During the  
5 pandemic, when our older adults were the most  
6 vulnerable population, digital literacy and access to  
7 online healthcare information could have saved lives.  
8 The digital divide excludes older adults from too  
9 many activities of daily life, we must provide them  
10 with the training and confidence to be a part of the  
11 digital world.

12       Aside from passing these two pieces of  
13 legislation, the city can and must do more to connect  
14 all members of our community. For starters, creating  
15 a municipal public network, as done in Chattanooga,  
16 Tennessee, can provide high speed coverage and  
17 service to all New Yorkers, while also netting  
18 financial returns. In its most recent and strategic  
19 plan, the Office of Technology and Innovation  
20 outlined several specific initiatives to build a more  
21 connected city, such as creating a widespread portal  
22 to access city services and benefits and launching  
23 NYC innovation hubs and underserved communities.

24       I'm hopeful these plans will come to life this  
25 coming year, but since the City can only do its best

2 work by continuing to partner and work together with  
3 community groups like the ones we've heard from  
4 today. And the Bronx Digital Equity Coalition is a  
5 testament to the real change that is possible when we  
6 prioritize Community Voices.

7 Thank you again for allowing me to testify this  
8 morning. And I look forward to continuing to work  
9 with the Councilmembers on this important issue.

10 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much, Dr.  
11 Porter. It's so good to see you. And thank you for  
12 being here to support my legislation, especially.

13 COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your testimony.  
14 And now we're going to take a very short two minute  
15 break.

16 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Bathroom break.

17 COUNSEL: And we will resume with the rest of the  
18 witnesses on Zoom. Thank you.

19 [3.5 minutes silence]

20 COUNSEL: Thank you everyone, we are resuming our  
21 hearing, and our next panelist is Elaine Roberts.

22 MS. ROBERTS: Hello. Good afternoon, everyone.  
23 Good afternoon especially Chair Gutiérrez,  
24 Councilmembers and staff. I'm Elaine Roberts,  
25 Director for ESL Programs for Catholic Charities

2 Community Services. Thank you for the opportunity to  
3 testify before you today, and thank you for bringing  
4 attention to this critical issue.

5 Digital literacy is a vital life skill for all  
6 New Yorkers, especially the adult literacy learners  
7 that we serve, a group that includes many older  
8 adults. Catholic Charities works in communities  
9 across New York City. We are grounded in the belief  
10 in the dignity of each person, and in the commitment  
11 to build a just and compassionate society, especially  
12 for the most vulnerable.

13 Right now with funding from the city, we're  
14 operating a Navigation Center in Midtown to support  
15 asylum seekers arriving from the southern border, and  
16 as part of the city's Ukrainian response team, we're  
17 supporting families arriving from Ukraine.

18 Our-- for the past 10 years, Catholic Charities  
19 has offered ESL and digital literacy programming for  
20 adult learners. We also work very closely with other  
21 adult literacy programs throughout the city as a  
22 member of the New York City Coalition for Adult  
23 Literacy, NYCCAL. NYCCAL is a group of adult  
24 literacy teachers, managers, students, allies from  
25 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, library

2 programs-- sorry-- and we all work together to  
3 advocate for high quality, comprehensive and  
4 accessible educational services for adults.

5       Learners in our programs are some of the 2.2  
6 million adults who lack basic literacy, numeracy,  
7 English language proficiency, and/or a high school  
8 diploma. Many of these same learners also lack  
9 digital literacy skills. These skills help learners  
10 use technology to search for, create, share  
11 information, communicate with others, and it requires  
12 the technical skills and also the ability to think  
13 about the processes.

14       Adults with these skills can participate in their  
15 communities more easily. They're better informed,  
16 they can talk with work with others, including family  
17 and friends, more easily, and very importantly they  
18 are more aware of how to keep their personal  
19 information safe.

20       Although digital literacy has been a part of our  
21 programming since before the pandemic, it became much  
22 more important in the past three years. As we  
23 continue to recover from COVID, programs around the  
24 city have begun to work more intentionally on  
25 promoting digital inclusion. So ensuring everyone

2 has access to the resources and the activities that  
3 they need to use technology, and also digital equity,  
4 which is creating the condition for all members in  
5 the community to fully participate and to access the  
6 services [BELL RINGS]

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You can--

9 MS. ROBERS: We applaud the support for digital  
10 literacy from the City Council. As part of the  
11 city's recovery plan. The Council made critical  
12 investments in adult literacy education these past  
13 two years, and that has directly supported digital  
14 literacy instruction. This City Council Adult  
15 Literacy Pilot Project, supported Catholic Charities  
16 and 18 other community-based organizations that  
17 collectively received 2.5 million in additional  
18 funding to provide support for students inside and  
19 outside the classrooms. And that additional funding  
20 led directly, in almost all cases, to digital  
21 literacy programming. 84% of the programs  
22 participated in that pilot use that additional  
23 funding to improve digital literacy instruction and  
24 to integrate better digital literacy skills into our  
25 work. Several of the programs developed curricula

2 and supported their students outside the classroom by  
3 helping them access online banking and telehealth.

4 In our own digital literacy program at Catholic  
5 Charities, we create a safe space where students can  
6 improve their technology skills, and most  
7 importantly, feel more confident about using these  
8 skills in their daily lives. So for many of our  
9 students, that includes connecting with family  
10 members in other countries.

11 Some of the topics we teach: Zoom, email, Google  
12 Drive, and digital security. And to further bridge  
13 the digital divide, we established a digital lending  
14 library of data-enabled tablets.

15 Students in our program have shared comments.  
16 Some of them, they feel-- sorry, "We like the  
17 confidence we have now and we have lost our fear of  
18 technology," and other students shared, "Thank you  
19 for taking the time to teach us things so we can  
20 compete in today's world." And finally, we had  
21 another student who was working as a home health  
22 attendant who shared, "Now I can look up information  
23 that I need for my use and also for my patients in my  
24 work."

2 As we continue to use digital skills for more  
3 aspects of our daily lives and work, the city must  
4 ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the  
5 digital skills that they need to be active, engaged,  
6 and productive members of their communities. We must  
7 commit to the idea of digital inclusion and create  
8 intentional programming that welcomes all, and works  
9 to correct the historical, institutional, and  
10 structural barriers to access and use technology.

11 This work is being done across the country. The  
12 Federal Infrastructure and Investment In Jobs Act and  
13 the Digital Equity Act passed in 2021 explicitly  
14 mentioned the importance of digital inclusion and  
15 digital equity. We applaud the Council's ongoing  
16 support for digital equity for all and the new  
17 proposal to provide digital literacy programs for  
18 older adults, that Intro 665. We in the adult  
19 literacy community are well-positioned to be reliable  
20 and trusted partners in this work.

21 Our programs are-- already serve communities  
22 throughout the city that are in great need of digital  
23 literacy skills, including low income individuals,  
24 people of color, people with a low level of literacy,  
25 and aging communities. Our programs are based

2 throughout the five boroughs. And we are trusted  
3 partners for residents in these neighborhoods.  
4 Investing in digital literacy, especially for adults,  
5 results in social, economic, and health benefits for  
6 individuals and for the city. And New Yorkers with  
7 digital skills can better navigate health care,  
8 support their children and their grandchildren in  
9 education, advocate for their own rights, and  
10 participate more fully in democracy. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Elaine.

12 COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your testimony.  
13 We'll continue with our next witnesses. And we  
14 kindly ask to accommodate everyone to limit your  
15 testimony to three minutes.

16 And our next witness is Kay Rudeman. I'm sorry  
17 if I mispronounced the last name.

18 MS. RUDEMAN: Good afternoon Chair Gutiérrez, and  
19 members of the Committee on Technology. My name is  
20 Kitty Rudeman, and I'm a volunteer with AARP New  
21 York. I'm here on behalf of AARP New York's 750,000  
22 New York City members to voice support the Intro 664  
23 and Intro 665, which will ensure that older New  
24 Yorkers have access to the technology that will  
25 support them in living independent, safe, healthy,

2 and happy lives. Access to technology can be a  
3 lifeline, opening connections to online banking,  
4 healthcare, ordering groceries, and to education and  
5 job opportunities, and keeping us connected to family  
6 and friends.

7       Unfortunately, too many older adults do not have  
8 access to all the tools they need to be digitally  
9 connected. It's a persistent problem AARP New York  
10 has raised. During the pandemic internet, Internet  
11 access became critical for us all, but especially us  
12 older adults. It allows us to connect with family  
13 and friends to reduce social isolation. It also  
14 became key to seeing doctors when such visits  
15 couldn't happen in person. Intro 664, which would  
16 provide individuals and organizations with computer  
17 equipment and software, is the first step to access  
18 particularly for low income people who cannot afford  
19 such technology. Intro 665, which would establish  
20 and implement an online digital literacy program, is  
21 the second step in ensuring older adults can navigate  
22 the digital world easily and safely.

23       Studies have found that participation in a  
24 technology learning program is associated with older  
25 adults reporting better health and less depression

2 and more Loneliness. But to be most effective,  
3 digital literacy programs should be taught by  
4 experts, and we hope that any programs will be led by  
5 experts in the field.

6 The final step in providing technological access  
7 to older adults is providing reliable broadband and  
8 high speed internet-- internet access. Without it,  
9 all the equipment and instruction in the world is  
10 useless. AARP New York has long advocated for  
11 broadband access for all, and we hope to see movement  
12 on that front soon. According to a study by the  
13 Older Adults Technology Services, OATS, an affiliate  
14 of AARP, 22 million US seniors lack broadband  
15 internet access at home. OATS estimates that only  
16 61% of New York State residents over 65 subscribe to  
17 high-speed internet at home, compared to 78% of  
18 younger New Yorkers. By this measure, New York State  
19 ranked 35th in the nation for ensuring digital  
20 equity. The legislation that has been proposed would  
21 open the door to technology-- [BELL RINGS]

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 MS. RUDEMAN: --for many older New Yorkers. But  
24 still we must go further to provide broadband access

2 that would open an entire world for low-income older  
3 New Yorkers who are currently left out. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

5 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.  
6 Our next witness is Tiffany Rogers.

7 MS. ROGERS: Afternoon Councilmembers. My name  
8 is Tiffany Rogers. I am a Program Manager at Encore  
9 Community Services, a nonprofit organization serving  
10 older adults on Manhattan's West Side. Our flagship  
11 physical older adult centers are located in the  
12 theater district. However, I am specifically  
13 responsible for overseeing our remote online  
14 programming.

15 Like many other nonprofits during the pandemic,  
16 we shipped our suite of classes and programming  
17 online. As we prepare to ship in person operations,  
18 we found that a collection of older adults were not  
19 ready to come back. For some, this was due to COVID  
20 risk. For others their Health Net reached a point  
21 that made it difficult to attend in-person programs,  
22 and some just found it easier to fit an online  
23 program into their routine.

24 Additionally, we found that with online  
25 programming, we were able to include homebound, older

2 adults who have previously been missing access to  
3 education, fitness, and community connection.

4 As our physical center was reopening and getting  
5 back into full swing, we understood that we still  
6 needed to meet the need of connecting virtually.  
7 That's why in June 2022, we launched Encore  
8 Unlimited, our virtual senior center.

9 We now offer a wide range of online meetings and  
10 classes each week, including art therapy class that  
11 utilizes simple art objects to work through feelings  
12 of depression, grief, loss, and more.

13 In addition, we offer classes like yoga, Zumba,  
14 share exercises, cooking workshops, and health  
15 lectures relevant to older adults.

16 Over the past several months, we have gained a  
17 steady number of regular members and plan to continue  
18 this model indefinitely.

19 Our experience with online programming is why  
20 encore Community Services is supportive of the  
21 Council's efforts to increase digital literacy for  
22 older adults. We see everyday the power and  
23 potential of Zoom tools to prevent social isolation.

24 While of course there are some elements of in  
25 person engagement that can't be replicated online,

2 the reality is that many older adults cannot make it  
3 to in-person events. They might be experiencing  
4 mobility or cognitive challenges that make leaving  
5 the house difficult and/or unsafe. For those  
6 fortunate enough to have family caregivers willing to  
7 accompany them to in-person programs are still  
8 plagued being at the mercy of the caregiver schedule  
9 and other responsibilities.

10 Virtual senior centers and related programming  
11 can reduce barriers and fill the gaps with social  
12 engagement for many. I hear every day from members  
13 who find so much value in their online experiences.  
14 One member who frequently comes to art therapy class  
15 was asked about her plans this past holiday and told  
16 the group that art class was her plan for the  
17 holiday. It was her main interaction and the thing  
18 that she had been looking forward to. Though there  
19 are many there are so many stories like this, the  
20 benefits are not just anecdotal. Research and the  
21 pandemic clearly shows that social connections are  
22 imperative to sustaining physical and mental health  
23 as we age. But there are barriers to making this  
24 model work.

2 Older adults may not be immediately familiar with  
3 the tools many of us use in the workplace like Zoom.  
4 They are able to learn but it might take longer or a  
5 few tries, and they may need someone to patiently  
6 walk them through it. [BELL RINGS]

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 MS. ROGERS: Financially they may not have access  
9 to the [inaudible] they need at home, or access to  
10 the internet. We have also found that just offering  
11 online programming is not enough. I do significant  
12 outreach to find prospective Encore Unlimited  
13 members, and then we support those members with phone  
14 and mail communications. In addition to sending e-  
15 mails, our teams make phone calls to check in with  
16 members and see how they're doing. If any of our  
17 classes require supplies outside of the Zoom  
18 application, we mail members what they need and  
19 follow up to ensure that-- that they have received  
20 them.

21 It requires a robust effort to make this model  
22 work, but it's immensely work when you hear and see  
23 the impact it has on someone's quality of life. On  
24 behalf of Encore Community Services, I encourage the  
25 Committee to move forward any and all efforts to

2 improve digital literacy and reduce barriers to  
3 online connection for older adults. Thank you,  
4 Councilmembers for your time today.

5 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: : Thank you so much,  
6 Tiffany.

7 COUNSEL: Thank you so much. And our next  
8 witness is Christina Chiolo.

9 MS. CHIOLO: Hi, yes, good afternoon, Chairperson  
10 Gutiérrez and members of the Committee on Technology.  
11 My name is Christina Chiolo. I'm the Executive  
12 Director of PowerMyLearning's New York City region.  
13 Our organization is a nonprofit organization that is  
14 now nationwide, but was founded in 1999 right here in  
15 New York City. PowerMyLearning's mission is to  
16 advance educational equity by activating the power of  
17 collaboration between teachers, students, and  
18 families. We do this by first approaching family  
19 engagement as a triangle of learning relationships in  
20 which students, teachers, and families achieve  
21 educational success by working as a team. Secondly,  
22 by using technology as a connecting force, in which  
23 students, teachers, and families are pulled closer  
24 together and closer together by technology which  
25 removes barriers while encouraging face-to-face

2 interactions. And thirdly, by activating the  
3 emotional power of learning with someone who really  
4 knows you, and this is when students, teachers, and  
5 families learn with each other through personal and  
6 real life experiences.

7 As an organization that started and spent many  
8 years providing computer equipment to students and  
9 their families, we're in full support of Intro 664  
10 That would require DCIS to donate surplus city owned  
11 computers, computer software and computer equipment  
12 to public and private institutions for secular  
13 educational use and to not-for-profit institutions  
14 for use by individuals with disabilities, senior  
15 citizens or low-income individuals. This legislation  
16 would help bridge the digital divide that still  
17 exists using valuable resources.

18 Today PowerMyLearning partners with elementary  
19 and middle schools and under-resourced communities  
20 across the city to provide professional development  
21 for teachers, family engagement services, and our  
22 digital learning tool Family Playlists. Family  
23 Playlists are hands-on weekly extension math  
24 activities that are assigned by teachers and  
25 completed by students alongside their families.

2 These leverage technology and were designed with  
3 equity in mind, so they're delivered via text message  
4 in over 100 languages. They include videos in  
5 English and Spanish, use materials commonly found at  
6 home, and are aligned with the district's math  
7 curriculum. Our programs improve student learning  
8 outcomes while also strengthening social emotional  
9 learning skills.

10 We commend Chairperson Gutiérrez and the entire  
11 committee for bringing forward legislation that  
12 addresses the digital divide across diverse  
13 communities in New York City, and look forward to  
14 continuing to work with the Council and the  
15 Department of Education schools throughout the city.  
16 Thank you very much. I appreciate your time and  
17 attention.

18 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much.

19 COUNSEL: Thank you our next and final witness is  
20 Linda Brill[ph].

21 Okay, I've just been informed that Miss Brill is  
22 no longer available. And I want to say if we missed  
23 anyone who has registered to testify today and has  
24 yet have been called, please use the Zoom hand  
25

2 function and we'll call on you in the order you  
3 raised your hand.

4 I see no one on Zoom, so we'll conclude our  
5 testimony and adjourn the hearing

6 [GAVEL]

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date 01/20/2023