

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Start: 3:40 PM

Recess: 3:56 PM

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room,
14th Floor

B E F O R E: Hon. Diana Ayala, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Cabán
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Chi A. Ossé
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams

Other Council Members Attending: Sanchez

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a prerecorded test for
3 The Committee on General Welfare. Today's date is May
4 25, 2023, and it is being recorded by Daniel.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Okay, quite please. Good
6 evening, and welcome to the New York City Council
7 hybrid hearing on The Committee on General Welfare.
8 At this time, please place all electronic devices to
9 vibrate or silent mode.

10 Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

12 Uh, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to
13 today's hearing. My name is Diana Ayala, and I am
14 the Deputy Speaker of the New York City Council and
15 the Chair of the General Welfare Committee.

16 Today our committee will be voting on four bills.
17 These bills address the City's rental assistance
18 voucher, uh, program, CityFHEPS. CityFHEPS is an
19 invaluable resource that has the potential to support
20 individuals and families move out into apartments,
21 thereby reducing, uh, rising lengths of stay at the
22 shelter system and increasing vacancy rates. It would
23 also prevent eviction for those at risk of
24 homelessness.

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2 Due to barriers to access, many people
3 experiencing homelessness are unable to secure a
4 CityFHEPS voucher. The bills that we are voting on
5 today will go a long way in reducing those barriers.
6 They present one key solution to the City's growing
7 homelessness crisis.

8 The first two bills, Introduction 893-A and
9 Introduction 894-A, sponsored by Council Member
10 Pierina Sanchez, would remove certain criteria that
11 The Department of Social Services currently uses to
12 determine whether a household is eligible for
13 CityFHEPS.

14 The next bill, Introduction 229, sponsored by
15 Council Member Tiffany Cabán, would prohibit DSS from
16 deducting a utility allowance from the maximum amount
17 of a CityFHEPS voucher.

18 Both Council Member Sanchez and Council Member
19 Cabán will elaborate further on their respective
20 bills.

21 Finally, my bill, Introduction 878-A would
22 eliminate the requirement that individuals and
23 families spend 90 days in the shelter system before
24 they are eligible to apply for CityFHEPS. This
25 Giuliani era relic has put unnecessary burdens on

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2 those who are seeking permanent housing. It has also
3 exacerbated the existing strains on our shelter
4 system by preventing individuals and families from
5 moving out and becoming stably housed as early as
6 they can. The rule is arduous, it is about time that
7 we eliminate it.

8 I want to thank the advocates and individuals
9 with lived experience who have helped inform and
10 helped us shape this legislation.

11 At this time, I would like to acknowledge my
12 colleagues who are here today: Council Member Cabán,
13 Council Member Hudson, Council Member Lee, Council
14 Member Ossé, Council Member Restler, and obviously
15 Council Member Sanchez.

16 I would also like to thank the committee staff
17 who worked tirelessly to prepare this hearing, and
18 worked very hard to finalize these bills, Aminta
19 Kilawan, Senior Legislative Counsel; David Romero,
20 Legislative Counsel; Julia Haramis, Principal Finance
21 Analyst; and Rose Martinez, Assistant Deputy
22 Director, and finally, my staff, Elsie Encarnacion,
23 Chief of Staff.

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2 I would now like to turn it over to Council
3 Member Sanchez and Council Member Cabán for remarks
4 on their legislation.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Deputy
6 Speaker, and good afternoon to my colleagues. I am
7 here to urge my colleagues to join in supporting this
8 package of legislation today. In particular, I am
9 proud to be the cosponsor of two of these bills.

10 And just to set the context, for my district one
11 in ten households in my Community Board Five faced
12 eviction last year. That translated to a child
13 staying in a shelter in Queens and commuting 90
14 minutes or two hours to the Bronx. That translates
15 to broken social bonds and support networks that that
16 parent had in raising that child -- gone. And it
17 translates to increased stress at the household level
18 that becomes community wide anxiety manifesting
19 itself in hunger and poor health outcomes and even
20 violence. And this is what we are all collectively
21 trying to fight to correct. As if it were not enough
22 to have these preexisting conditions in our city,
23 where so many residents are suffering, there is even
24 more pressure today to improve the efficiency of our
25 existing systems and to provide relief. And that is

1 why this week ,you know, our council is taking bold
2 legislative action to address the homelessness crisis
3 and alleviate pressure on the shelter system. The
4 time is now to relief program requirements that
5 essentially require homelessness as a precondition.
6 You have to be evicted. You have to go to housing
7 court, you have to go into the shelter, and *then* you
8 can be eligible for a voucher in most cases. We need
9 to eliminate that requirement. That is costing the
10 City more in terms of how much we are paying for
11 right to counsel, how much we are paying in the
12 shelter system, and then how much we are paying in a
13 more expensive voucher on the other side, because the
14 units that they find are more expensive than the ones
15 that they were leaving before the eviction. But, not
16 only are those fiscal impacts real, but also the
17 stress that that family faces, the instability and
18 the destabilization for those children and those
19 families that face eviction.
20

21 So, let's keep folks out of the shelter system by
22 supporting this legislation. And, then; furthermore,
23 ,you know, just in strong support of Council Member
24 Ayala's bill, let's move folks faster through this
25 system, so that we can become more efficient.

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2 Collectively these efforts will prevent new shelter
3 entrance and enable faster transitions out of shelter
4 creating space while saving on costs in emergency
5 shelters.

6 So, with that, I want to thank you, Deputy
7 Speaker, and I want to thank the Speaker of The City
8 Council for moving these bills today and tomorrow.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council Member
10 Cabán?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you. I want to echo
12 the sentiments of gratitude to, uhm, the Speaker,
13 Deputy Speaker, and Council Member Sanchez. This
14 package is incredibly important. I said it earlier
15 this morning, but this is... Our council
16 collectively, living by a set of values, particularly
17 operating under framework where we are recognizing
18 that housing is a human right and not just any
19 housing, but dignified, safe, stable, long-term
20 housing, that we are doing whatever we can to make
21 sure that the experience of homelessness is a brief
22 as possible, as rare as possible, uh, and that we are
23 getting people into long term homes. And as the
24 sponsor of 229, which addresses the utility cost
25 problem or the problem with that rule, this is going

1 to go a long way in helping out, because we know that
2 the rule as it has stood has prolonged the search for
3 housing. I have heard from person after person that
4 it makes it harder for them and their families to
5 find housing by reducing the amount of rental support
6 available to them. And the reduced rental support
7 implies that voucher holders must pay a higher share
8 of housing costs -- often higher than 40 percent of
9 their income, which then disqualifies their chosen
10 apartments from receiving the support entirely,
11 forcing them back into shelters. And additionally,
12 given that apartments for voucher holders are already
13 limited due to many landlords' reluctance to accept
14 the vouchers, often manifested as a legal source of
15 income discrimination. This rule further shrinks the
16 housing supply effectively prolonging shelter stays
17 and compounding the homelessness crisis. So making
18 this change by passing Intro 229, is going to make a
19 world of difference. And ,you know, in addition to
20 that, we have found that the prior rule was
21 economically destabilizing and inefficient, uh, as
22 well as it needlessly added complexity to the
23 process. Again, we have heard testimony after
24 testimony of individuals and families who are seeking

1 housing using a CityFHEPS voucher that are already
2 strained either by living in the shelter system, or
3 by juggling multiple competing priorities like work,
4 apartment hunting, school, childcare, and negotiating
5 really difficult administrative machinery.
6

7 So, I am just really excited that this entire
8 package is being heard together, and I want to urge
9 my colleagues to support them all. And thank you all
10 in advance.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, and I want to
12 acknowledge that we have been joined by Council
13 Member Williams as well.

14 With that, I would now like to turn it over to
15 the clerk to do the roll call for this vote.

16 COMMITTEE CLERK: Good afternoon, William Martin,
17 Committee Clerk roll call vote for The Committee on
18 General Welfare. All Items are coupled.

19 Chair Ayala?

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I vote aye.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Cabán?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Aye

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Hudson?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Aye on all. And, thanks to
25 my colleagues for putting these bills forward. And

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2 thanks to the Speaker and all of the staff for
3 bringing them to a vote.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

5 Council Member Lee?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Aye

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Ossé?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I proudly vote aye.

9 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Restler?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Permission to explain my
11 vote?

12 I want to thank the Speaker for her leadership.
13 I want to thank, uh, Council Member Sanchez for her
14 great bills.

15 I want to thank Council Member Cabán for her
16 tenacious advocacy to get Intro 229 included in this
17 package, which will make a huge difference in
18 reducing the utility costs for people with vouchers.

19 I especially want to thank Chair Ayala who really
20 pushed this package, and demanded it, and knew that
21 it was the right thing to do. And I know that this
22 has not been easy. And I have admired you for a very
23 long time, but especially today, because this is
24 going to make a huge difference in people's lives.

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2 And I just, on the merits of... I think the
3 arguments that are being made around the negative
4 impacts on capacity in the shelter system, you know,
5 that this going to send ,you know, unanticipated
6 people into our shelter system, it is worth
7 recognizing that only 24 percent of families, when
8 they arrive at the one shelter intake location in the
9 Bronx, are actually admitted to shelter on their
10 first time of applying; and that 30 percent of
11 families apply four times or more to enter our family
12 shelter system.

13 So, we have very rigid entry and admissions
14 criteria for entering into our shelter system for
15 families. We should be doing everything we can to
16 prevent those people from having to enter shelters.
17 And when they do enter shelter, we should be giving
18 them all the tools that they possibly can utilize to
19 get out of the shelter system and into permanent
20 housing. This package of bills will do exactly that.
21 This will drive down homelessness in New York City.
22 And I am deeply proud to vote for it. So, thank you.

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Williams?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Permission to explain my
25 vote?

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Permission granted.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. One, I want
4 to thank all of the sponsors of this bill. Uhm, I am
5 voting yes on the bill. But, I still remain very
6 concerned about the implementation and the process of
7 this administration. We have heard countless
8 hearings about the backlog. We continue to have
9 countless hearings on vacancies and inability for the
10 administration to carry out existing work. And, so,
11 like I said, I am voting yes on all of the bills, but
12 I still remain concerned about the implementation and
13 the feasibility of this happening -- What it is? --
14 taking effect 180 days after it becomes law. Thank
15 you.

16 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 7 in the
17 affirmative, 0 in the negative, and 0 abstentions,
18 all items have been adopted by the Committee.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, and with that, we
20 are... We are waiting to keep it open? We are going
21 to keep the vote open for Council Member Stevens.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Continuation on roll call,
23 Committee on General Welfare, Council Member Stevens?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Permission to explain my
25 vote?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Permission granted.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Although I am very excited about these bills, and I think that we are moving in the right direction, I just want to make sure that we continue to work together to ensure that the process works smoothly. As a provider for over 20 years and working in nonprofits, understanding that we often create laws, but we don't provide the systems to ensure that the people who need it most get the services. So, my hope is that, as those bills pass, and it is done, we can then work on processes to ensure that the people who most need them get them, thank you. And, with that, I vote aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

Final vote now, Committee on General Welfare, all items are adopted with 8 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, and with that, this vote is concluded.

[GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

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 May 31, 2023